

Urban and Community Forestry in Pennsylvania



Opportunities for Volunteers

A successful volunteer project can be the first step in gaining citizen support needed to establish a comprehensive community forest program. With proper supervision and training, volunteers can benefit the community while having fun working with others on worthy causes. These efforts promote both personal and community pride. Volunteers and volunteer projects help legislators become aware of the need for and benefits of quality trees and green spaces.

Volunteer Activities

Volunteers in a community forest program provide many services, including the following:

- Planting trees along streets and in parks and school grounds and helping to restore riparian and other green areas.
- Maintaining community trees by cultivating, simple pruning, watering, removing guy wires and stakes, and mulching.
- Forming shade tree commissions to develop master plans, write or revise ordinances, conduct tree inventories, help develop tree planting lists for communities,

recommend removal of hazardous trees, sponsor workshops, and champion community forestry programs.

- Helping to promote the acquisition and preservation of parks and open spaces.
- Participating in fund-raising projects, such as garage sales, raffles, auctions, craft shows, and bake sales. These are fun and help volunteers become acquainted with each other and members of the community.
- Helping to develop, publicize, and promote special community events, such as Arbor Day, Earth Day, and other green celebrations.
- Developing and maintaining trails and forming patrol and advocacy groups to make riparian areas, green ways, and open space areas more accessible and attractive. Organizing cleanups of litter and debris.
- Communicating with government agencies and local residents to build and maintain support.



Recruitment

Before recruiting volunteers, prepare a written proposal of volunteer projects, including as many specifics as possible. If you cannot describe the project in detail, you are not ready to recruit volunteers. Recruitment should occur only when the project is fully planned, the need for volunteers is fully understood, and the required equipment and materials are identified and obtainable.

Recruitment methods include placing information and a phone number in a newsletter or newspaper, using press releases, and distributing brochures and flyers. However, the best way to recruit volunteers is through personal contact—making phone calls and attending meetings to explain the project and ask for assistance from individuals and organizations.

Training and Supervision

With adequate training and supervision, volunteers can complete important tasks that benefit both the community and the volunteer. Training should focus on specific skills as well as the goals and objectives of the project and the sponsoring group. Volunteers should know how to meet the demands of each task and understand why they are doing what they are doing.

Instruction should be provided by professionals as well as by qualified volunteers. They should stress the importance of high-quality work, create an awareness of safety, and give volunteers confidence in their abilities, using the same principles and courtesies that are used in supervising professional staff. People enjoy being recognized in a positive manner, and positive recognition is one of the best tools to use in supervising volunteers. Supervisors should be especially diplomatic when criticizing volunteers, since they receive no payment for their work. However, those that are disruptive should be reprimanded and excluded from projects if necessary.

Recognition

Recognition is one way to reward volunteers for their time and efforts and to reinforce positive feelings about a project or organization. Recognition can range from applause at a meeting for a job well done to formal awards and certificates. One of the best ways to provide recognition is to engage volunteers in challenging, meaningful work and let them assume increasing responsibility. When volunteers are given the opportunity to attend workshops and conventions, help plan and conduct new programs, and serve as instructors and mentors, they gain both status and recognition.



Beginning a Volunteer Project

Projects should provide occasions for volunteers to socialize, help the community and environment, take part in physical activities, learn, and make personal contacts. To ensure a successful project, consider the following guidelines:

- Define the scope of a project, why volunteers are needed, what volunteers are expected to accomplish, and how many are needed. Be sure that volunteers will be able to complete the amount and type of work planned. Estimate how long the project will take and whether too much is being asked of volunteer help. Break larger jobs into a number of half-day or shorter efforts.
- Develop a strategy for volunteer training and supervision. Identify leaders who can help with project planning and design and with training and supervising the volunteers.
- Contact public officials and affected citizens and ask for their assistance and participation. Inform businesses and corporations and invite them to sponsor, contribute, and participate. File required permits or obtain permission from appropriate agencies or organizations.
- Make sure programs are well organized so that volunteers' time is not wasted. Positive results should be achieved whenever volunteers donate their time.
- Make meetings and projects fun by combining them with social events, food, and music.
- Welcome all people and all abilities and invite family participation, including children and seniors.
- Be sure to contact the media.
- Identify and acquire needed equipment and materials (trees, shovels, backhoe, etc.).



Suggestions for a Successful Community Tree Planting

Organizing for action

- ask cooperative extension or the bureau of forestry for assistance
- meet with municipal officials to discuss the project
- distribute flyers and publicize the project
- find a room and hold the first meeting
- define the project, needs, and means of support
- appoint or elect a treasurer and other leaders if necessary
- approach local attorneys, architects, and others for pro bono assistance

Locating resources

- decide how many volunteers are needed
- approach local businesses for support and participation
- invite other community groups to participate if your own group is not large enough
- try to borrow or rent needed equipment from local contractors, volunteer fire departments, municipalities, labor unions, or rental firms
- contact nurseries for tree bids
- contact universities and colleges for technical and other assistance

Raising funds

- ask municipal or other government agencies for assistance
- use door-to-door canvassing to sell T-shirts and raffle tickets
- organize special events, such as car washes and barbecues
- approach corporations, banks, and businesses for support
- seek grants and endowments
- explore nonprofit status (for larger projects or groups)

Planning and design

- seek professional assistance from community foresters and landscape architects
- meet all safety concerns and comply with all municipal codes
- reduce maintenance costs by planting the right tree in the right place
- submit the plan to municipal or other staff for approval

Planting trees

- provide professional training and supervision
- arrange for sidewalk cuts and holes to be dug before the day of planting
- cover planting holes with boards or traffic barriers
- order trees, stakes, and other materials early
- have trees, equipment, and materials ready and organized for volunteers
- have water available and water young trees after planting and during hot periods
- publicize the planting day well in advance
- arrange for food, drink, and music
- arrange for traffic control and volunteer safety

Caring for trees

- water newly planted trees twice a week in hot weather
- prune young trees (with professional guidance)
- consider and provide for long-term maintenance

The Pennsylvania Urban and Community Forestry Program is a cooperative effort of the state Department of Environmental Resources (DER) Bureau of Forestry and Penn State with leadership provided by the Pennsylvania Urban and Community Forestry Council.

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