

THESIS

INVESTIGATING VOLUNTEER RETENTION AT A SMALL, MUNICIPAL PUBLIC  
GARDEN

Submitted by

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## ABSTRACT

### INVESTIGATING VOLUNTEER RETENTION AT A SMALL, MUNICIPAL PUBLIC GARDEN

Volunteers are essential to the success of nonprofit organizations. Botanical gardens and arboreta utilize volunteers for guest services, public programs, grounds maintenance, field trips, and tours. Like other nonprofit organizations, botanical gardens face volunteer retention problems. Much psychological research has been conducted on volunteer behaviors, including factors that influence volunteer motivation, retention, and recruitment in adult 4-H volunteers leading youth educational programs. However, there is a deficiency in research focused on factors influencing volunteer retention in botanical gardens. Therefore, this mixed-methods study aims to fill that void by collecting and analyzing data gained through mailed questionnaires, field observations, and personal interviews. Triangulating these data sets revealed people are motivated to volunteer at a small, municipal public garden because they want to feel useful, enjoy learning, enjoy socializing, and want to belong to a community. Volunteers are motivated to keep coming back because they continue to learn, develop new friendships, feel a sense of accomplishment, and enjoy working with plants and people. Understanding what drives volunteers' actions provides a framework for improving the volunteer coordination program at the a small, municipal public garden.

*Keywords:* volunteerism, motivation, botanical garden, mixed-methods research

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Overview.....	1
Statement of the Research Problem.....	1
Research Questions.....	2
Significance of the Study.....	2
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE.....	3
Literature Research Strategy.....	3
Conceptual Framework.....	3
Volunteerism.....	4
Volunteer Turnover.....	4
Social Exchange Theory.....	6
Motivation.....	7
Volunteer Expectations.....	9
Recognition.....	10
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY.....	11
Site.....	11
Sample.....	12
My Role.....	12
Permission.....	13
Protocols.....	13
Data Collection Process.....	16
Analysis Plan.....	16
Timeline.....	17
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS.....	18
Purpose of the Study.....	18
Questions of the Study.....	18
Survey Questionnaires.....	18
Reasons for Becoming a Small, Municipal Public Garden’s Volunteer.....	18
Why People Continue Volunteering at a Small, Municipal Public Garden.....	24
Why People Stopped Volunteering at a Small, Municipal Public Garden.....	31
How People Felt After a Day of Volunteering at a Small, Municipal Public Garden.....	37
Support Needed for Small, Municipal Public Garden’s Volunteers.....	38
Importance of the Volunteer Program at a Small, Municipal Public Garden.....	38
Observations.....	39
Time Investment.....	39
Body Language.....	40
Consistent Focus.....	41
Verbal Participation.....	42
Volunteer Confidence.....	42
Volunteer Attitude.....	43

Behavioral Engagement.....	44
Cognitive Engagement.....	45
Relational Engagement.....	46
Overall Engagement.....	47
Relationships Between Observational Categories and Overall Volunteer Engagement .....	48
Personal Interviews.....	49
Reasons for Becoming a Small, Municipal Public Garden’s Volunteer.....	49
Purpose.....	49
Belong to a Community.....	50
Contribute to the Community .....	51
Learn about Plants.....	51
Volunteers Expect to Gain by Contributing to a Small, Municipal Public Garden .....	52
Sense of Accomplishment.....	52
Social Relationships.....	53
Volunteers Describe Their Experience .....	54
Time Well Spent .....	54
Break Time Facilitates Social Interactions .....	54
Recognition Influences Volunteer Retention.....	55
Personal Recognition .....	55
Public Recognition.....	56
Recognition Opportunities.....	56
Why People Stopped Volunteering at a Small, Municipal Public Garden .....	57
Organizational Changes.....	58
Personnel Changes .....	59
Negative Staff Interactions .....	61
Personal Responsibility Changes.....	61
Competition from Other Organizations .....	62
Physical Limitations.....	62
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....	64
Discussion.....	64
Limitations.....	67
Recommendations.....	67
Future Research .....	69
Conclusions.....	69
REFERENCES .....	71
Appendix A: Concept Map.....	76
Appendix B: Literature Review Strategy.....	77
Appendix C: Letter of Consent.....	79
Appendix D: Survey Pre-card.....	80
Appendix E: Survey Cover Letter.....	81
Appendix F: Survey Instrument.....	82
Appendix G: Follow Up Postcard.....	88
Appendix H: Research Consent Form .....	89
Appendix I: Observation Instrument .....	92
Appendix J: Personal Interview Question Form.....	94
Appendix K: Survey Extended Responses .....	96

## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

### **Overview**

Volunteering is one of the most common activities in the United States (McCurley & Lynch, 2006). Nonprofit organizations are often the benefactors of volunteer efforts. In 2013, 62.6 million volunteers worked, contributing nearly \$175 billion across the United States (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2012). United States botanical gardens and arboreta unite volunteers and staff to carry out classes, public programs, tours, events, and landscape maintenance. Currently, botanical gardens face budget cuts and high operation costs, so incorporating volunteers is essential to keeping costs down (Cnaan & Goldberg-Glen, 1991).

### **Statement of the Research Problem**

A small, municipal public garden in the mountain west, relies heavily on volunteers to accomplish the many horticultural tasks needed to maintain nine-acres of themed gardens. The staff to volunteer ratio of 1:29 emphasizes the importance of maintaining a strong volunteer program (Cheyenne Botanic Gardens, 2013). Unfortunately, this small, municipal public garden, like other nonprofit organizations, battles a high volunteer turnover rate (Garner & Garner, 2011). Volunteer retention rates were 61 percent between 2012-2014 in this area. (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2012). The intense training, technical skills, and time invested by staff make volunteer retention especially important (Wymer & Starnes, 2001). Not to mention high volunteer turnover rates can negatively impact an organization's ability to meet customer expectations (Razzak, 2001). The problem is the staff at a small, municipal public garden does not know the factors that influence volunteers to join or resign.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the underlying motivations for volunteers to start working in botanical gardens?
2. What do volunteers expect to gain by contributing to a botanical garden?
3. How would volunteers describe their experiences?
4. How does recognition influence volunteer retention?
5. What are the underlying factors that lead to volunteer turnover?

### **Significance of the Study**

Therefore, the purpose of this mixed-methods study was to discover what motivates volunteers to work at a small, municipal public garden. By understanding what motivates volunteers to start, staff can utilize those reasons to improve volunteer retention. The variables influencing volunteer turnover include volunteer motivation, expectations, experiences, and recognition (Appendix A). There is a need to identify the underlying factors influencing volunteer recruitment and retention. By surveying past and present volunteers, making field observations, and conducting one-on-one interviews, I identified the underlying thoughts and motivations that influence their actions. Understanding how volunteers describe their motivations and experiences is useful for recruiting and retaining volunteers in small, municipal public gardens.

## CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

### Literature Research Strategy

I searched for peer reviewed journal articles related to key terms related to volunteer management and coordination, volunteers in botanical gardens, and volunteer motivation. I looked for topics that address volunteer experiences, expectations, motivations, and recognition in academic journals including but not limited to: *Journal of Extension*, *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, *Hort. Technology*, *Volunteer*, *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, and *Journal of Applied Psychology*. I also looked at the most current Bureau of Labor Statistics report to gain insight into the economic value of volunteers in Wyoming as well as the national average regarding the volunteer turnover rate (See Appendix B).

### Conceptual Framework

There is little research concerning volunteer management practices in public gardens, so many botanical gardens are left forming their own interpretations of volunteer management (Jutilla & Meyer, 2005, p.682). Meanwhile, a high volunteer turnover rate continues to plague public gardens and negatively impact the guests' experiences (Razzak, 2001). Not only do botanical gardens lose volunteers to turnover, but also to competition from other nonprofit organizations. Many opportunities exist for volunteers to join other organizations. In fact, 19 percent of volunteers contribute to two different organizations simultaneously (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). Since a strong volunteer work base is essential to a botanical garden's longevity, volunteer coordinators need to understand how to recruit and retain volunteers.

## **Volunteerism**

Volunteerism is any activity provided freely to benefit another person, group, or cause (Wilson, 2000). According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2014), 62.6 million people volunteered across the U.S. in 2013. Approximately 71 percent of volunteers contributed to a single organization. Collectively nonprofit organizations, on average, attract 70 percent of the volunteer population (McCurley & Lynch, 2006). Religious organizations manage the largest portion of the volunteer pie with 33 percent, but youth service/education and community service organizations follow closely behind with 25 and 14 percent respectively (BLS, 2014). Retirees contribute the most number of volunteer hours. In 2013, volunteers 65 and older contributed almost double the number of annual hours of 25 to 34 year-olds. Many nonprofit organizations rely on volunteers to provide fundamental services (Clary, Snyder, & Ridge, 1992). This explains why 41 percent of all volunteers say someone in the organization recruited them (BLS, 2014). A volunteer's time in 2013 was estimated at \$22.55 an hour. Approximately 25 percent of the adult population volunteered in 2012, contributing nearly 7.9 billion hours. Volunteers collectively saved their organizations \$175 billion in 2012. So the emphasis volunteer coordinators place on preventing volunteer turnover comes as no surprise (Independent Sector, 2014).

## **Volunteer Turnover**

According to Nelson, Pratt, Carpenter, and Walter (1995), volunteer coordination is really about people management. So one can identify some similarities between employee and volunteer turnover. Smith, Kendal, and Hulin (1969) indicate job dissatisfaction leads to employee turnover. Kanungo (1979) also notes individuals will alienate themselves from their work, when the job fails to meet their personal needs. This explains how a lack of job

involvement can predict turnover. Some researchers, however, point to organizational commitment as an indicator of an employee's intention to quit (Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979). One study by Allen and Mueller (2013) identifies volunteer and employee burnout as an indicator for turnover. Maslach and Schaufeli (1993) describe burnout as the stress resulting from intense work and demanding work relationships. Data was collected from 151 volunteers working in an animal shelter in the United States. Volunteers responded to questions related to burnout, role ambiguity, voice (perspective), and intention to quit. For example, "the organization I volunteer at gives me a chance to express my concerns" (p.145). Responses ranged from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5), based on Likert-type scale questions. The study indicates employees and volunteers drained from emotional, physical, and/or mental exhaustion experience burnout. The study also describes the importance volunteers place on their voices being heard, which reinforces the need for qualitative studies (Maslach & Schaufeli, 1993).

Similar studies have been conducted on factors that influence adult 4-H volunteer leaders to quit in Deschutes County, Oregon (White & Arnold, 2003). Surveys were mailed to 160 resigned volunteers, asking them to identify their reasons for quitting. Fifty-one returned surveys revealed adult volunteers left because of time constraints or their relationship with the extension agent. More recently, Rachael Payne (2011) conducted research at West Virginia University assessing factors influencing recruitment and retention practices for 4-H volunteer leaders in Lincoln County, Virginia. Surveys were mailed to 128 active and inactive volunteers within the past 10 years. The survey incorporated Likert-type scale, multiple choice, and open-ended questions. Forty-two returned surveys indicated adult 4-H leaders are motivated to volunteer because they enjoy helping people, enjoy mentoring youth, and want to improve their community. These adult

volunteers listed helping people, teaching the youth of Lincoln County, learning new skills, and feeling needed as reasons for their continued effort. The top reasons volunteers resigned include: their children were no longer involved in 4-H, time commitment requirements, burnout, poor communication, and excessive paperwork (Payne, 2011). This research study provides great insight into factors influencing volunteer recruitment and retention. However, different organizational requirements, expectations, and geographical locations will influence its volunteers' responses.

### **Social Exchange Theory**

“The social exchange theory suggests that people contribute to the degree that they perceive they are being rewarded. When an imbalance between contributions and rewards is perceived, an individual is likely to move toward a greater equilibrium” (Sergent & Sedlacek, 1990, p. 256). This implies that people consider their relationships with others in economic terms. They compare the sum of accrued costs versus perceived benefits (West & Turner, 2000). According to Roloff (1981), costs are anything that one negatively values and rewards are positively valued objects or feelings that one intrinsically desires. The social exchange theory suggests turnover likely occurs when one's work related costs outweigh the work related benefits.

Corrigan (2001) tested this theory by surveying 177 active volunteers in West Virginia, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. Corrigan attained his participants from volunteer organizations that work with churches, hospitals, schools, and at-risk youth. Individuals completed a survey explaining how their perceived rewards compared to accrued costs. Findings from this study indicate that volunteers describe rewards as “making friends”, “personal satisfaction”, and “helping others.” The most commonly described costs are “none”, “transportation expenses”, and “time” (p.28). When asked if costs ever outweighed perceived rewards, would they continue volunteering?

Thirty-seven participants indicated they would not continue volunteering and 35 did not respond. However, a majority of the participants, 105, claimed they would continue volunteering even if costs exceeded benefits. Corrigan concludes they believe contributing to the organization's mission is more important than any accrued costs. But some 35 participants did not respond, which forces one to question whether volunteers consciously choose to not compare costs to benefits (Corrigan 2001).

Haynes and Trexler (2003) also tested this theory at a university-affiliated public garden. They coordinated multiple focus group interviews lasting 90 minutes with approximately 10 volunteers in each group. Questions assessed volunteer motivation, training, experience, and recognition. For example, "what attracted you to volunteer at the garden?" "How does the garden recognize your contribution?" (p.553) Volunteers revealed their costs to be labor, time, and material investments. Volunteer benefits included developing skills, connecting with others, and contributing to a cause. This economic approach suggests volunteer retention can be predicted by comparing perceived costs and benefits. My mixed-methods approach will use the social exchange theory to evaluate how the relationship between perceived benefits and accrued costs might influence turnover.

### **Motivation**

Volunteer administration models describe motivation as a key component (Culp & Schwarz, 1999). According to Atkinson and Birch (1978), volunteer motivation is influenced by affiliation, achievement, and power. More recently, psychological researchers developed a tool called the Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI) to measure factors influencing motivation. It is the most widely used scale to assess volunteer motivation (Clary et al., 1998). The inventory system considers the wants, needs, plans, and intentions of volunteers by measuring six

motivation functions. The first function involves how volunteers display altruistic concerns for others. The second function describes the value volunteers place on demonstrating their skills and abilities. The third function involves social interactions; how volunteers value their relationships with others. The fourth function is focused on any career-related benefits attained from volunteering. The fifth function engages ego protection; how one may volunteer to forget his or her personal problems. The final function of volunteering is related to self-esteem; it recognizes the value a volunteer places on being needed (Clary et al., 1998).

Steven Reiss (2000) established a new theory related to human motivation. His motivational assessment examined the identity of individuals and the motivations that influenced their actions. Reiss' theory included 16 intrinsic desires that define identity, guide behavior, and inspire action. The 16 basic desires include: power, curiosity, acceptance, independence, order, saving, honor, idealism, social contact, family, status, vengeance, romance, eating, physical exercise, and tranquility. The Reiss Motivation Profile is a test used to measure an individual's response to the 16 basic desires. Reiss was focused on identifying how pursuing intrinsic desires influenced motivation, as well as what desires promote meaningful lives. Therefore, it is important to understand what motivates volunteers and how those motivations influence their actions (Reiss, 2000). Reiss (2009) conducted a follow up study in 2009 using the Reiss Motivation Profile test to identify a correlation between intrinsic motivation and individual action. Six factor studies using 2,032 junior and senior high school students illustrated how motivational factors influence actions. This study highlights the importance of understanding what motivates volunteers. However, Davis (2000) concludes what influences volunteer recruitment and retention in one organization may not work for all organizations.

According to Holland (1963), generalizing motivations from one organization to another is misleading because individuals in different organizations have different perspectives (p. 256). “The possibility that volunteers in different organizations are very different types of people has implications for volunteer recruitment and retention” (Sergent & Sedlacek, 1990, p. 256). Moreover, Vetter, Hall, and Schmidt (2009) explain factors that drive volunteer recruitment and retention in the baby boomer generation are different from factors that influence Generation X. Holland (1963), suggests using the person-environment fit theory to describe why people choose environments that reflect their skills, attitudes, and values. By understanding the factors that influence volunteer motivation at a small, municipal public garden organizational and recruitment efforts can be made to attract volunteers with the same values. After all, motivation and volunteer expectations play an important role in volunteer administration (Murk & Stephan, 1991).

### **Volunteer Expectations**

Henderson (1985) indicates, “The days of altruism may be over” (p.32). The volunteer mindset has shifted from altruism to egocentrism. Now, volunteers are seeking experiences to fulfill their needs of personal satisfaction and growth. Hinck and Brandell (2000) describe these needs as acquiring knowledge, personal affection, a gain in perceived social status, and overall feelings of positivity. It is clear psychologists understand human needs. However, volunteer expectations are largely unique to the volunteer. Therefore, it is important for an organization to conduct site-specific research to understand its volunteers’ expectations.

The Minnesota Landscape Arboretum, coordinated research to encourage its volunteers to be self-advocates to ensure their expectations were met. Jutila and Meyer (2005) used a decision case study called Sam’s Dilemma to illustrate the importance of a positive volunteer experience.

Wymer and Starnes (2001) describe learning opportunities and growth as positive experiences for volunteers. Training, attention, and professional development all provide positive experiences for volunteers and keep them from feeling alone in their work (Skoglund, 2003). Feeling alone, stress, poor communication, and demanding workloads create negative experiences that can lead to turnover (Nesbitt, Ross, Sunderland, & Shelp, 1996).

### **Recognition**

Psychological scientists identify resource seeking as an important indicator of interpersonal behavior (Foa & Foa, 2012). Therefore, volunteer recognition is a key component to retaining volunteers (Davis, 2000). Volunteers need to feel their efforts and work are appreciated. Clark and Wilson (1961) identify material, solidarity, and purposive as three categories that outline the benefits of volunteering. Material benefits include gift receiving. Solidarity includes the recognition one receives from group affiliation. Purposive includes the feeling of helping an organization succeed. The acquisition of knowledge, skills, and experience incentivize volunteering in public gardens. Haynes and Trexler (2003) also confirms the value volunteers place on material, solidarity, and purposive benefits in a study they carried out that evaluated the needs of volunteers at Iowa State University's Reiman Gardens.

Recognition, like motivation, depends on the perspective of the subjects (Clark & Wilson 1961). Therefore, a qualitative study would best represent the volunteer perspective and reasoning for contributing to a small, municipal public garden. The variables outlined above, motivation, expectation, experience, and recognition, represent the suggested factors that influence volunteer retention. Ultimately, understanding the volunteer perspective would improve recruitment techniques and reduce turnover rate. This would enrich the volunteer coordination program for current and future volunteers.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

A small, municipal public garden in the Mountain West Region relies on volunteers to maintain its reputation as a beautiful, educational, and family-friendly public garden. However, like many nonprofit organizations, it faces a high rate of volunteer turnover. The problem is the staff does not know the factors that influence volunteers to join or leave. As such, my mixed-methods research filled this void by identifying the underlying factors influencing volunteer recruitment and retention by answering these research questions: What are the underlying motivations for volunteers to start working in a botanical garden? What do volunteers expect to gain by contributing to a botanical garden? How are a volunteer's skillset utilized? How would volunteers describe their experiences? How does recognition influence volunteer retention? These research questions, the literature review, my course and program content, and my botanical garden background helped inform my work for this project including the process of developing a survey, designing an observational engagement instrument, and identifying relevant interview questions.

### Site

The research taking place regards volunteerism at a small, municipal public garden. This small public garden in the Mountain West Region consists of ten acres of themed gardens. It operates as a division of parks and recreation, with the help of a nonprofit foundation board. It is managed by eight staff members and maintained by approximately 124 volunteers. Various demographics describe the volunteer population. The addition of a children's garden increased the number of youth volunteers ranging in ages between 12 and 17. However, the core group of volunteers is retired professionals between the ages of 55 and 70. Many of these volunteers

contribute between three to five hours a week. There are also adults in physical and behavioral rehabilitation groups that volunteer several hours a month. The smallest groups of volunteers are from local garden organizations who contribute several hours a year.

### **Sample**

The target population was 124 combined, past and present, volunteers who contributed to a small, municipal public garden between January 1, 2010 and January 1, 2016. Volunteers worked in horticulture, guest services, or education divisions. The study employed a triangulation method to understand how volunteers' motivations, expectations, experiences, and recognition influence their retention. Therefore, surveys were mailed, field observations were made, and nine volunteers were interviewed. Volunteers had the option to participate in any one, two, or all three aspects of the research study. Volunteers were also informed that choosing to not participate in the study would not influence their relationship with the small, municipal public garden, its staff, or other volunteers.

### **My Role**

My role was to coordinate and carry out the research taking place. First, I mailed surveys, then recorded observations regarding volunteer engagement, and finally conducted one-on-one interviews. Since I had dual roles as a research facilitator and staff member, I tried to make my presence as inconspicuous as possible. I did not want a volunteer's thoughts, feelings, or interactions regarding me to interfere with their responses. Therefore surveys were conducted and returned through the mail. Field observations were conducted discretely, and interviewees elected to participate.

## **Permission**

In order to conduct research, I gained permission from the director of the public garden. I sent a permission letter asking for their approval before proceeding (Appendix C). I also gained consent from the volunteers who participated in the survey, the one-on-one interview, and the field observations. Before conducting any research on human participants, I gained Colorado State University Institutional Review Board certification and approval. This ensured appropriate measures were taken to safeguard participants from being exposed to any more than minimal risk (Colorado State University, Research Integrity & Compliance Review, 2015). I attained IRB certification through the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative website by passing all learning modules.

## **Protocols**

I built a self-administered questionnaire to assess the volunteer perspective based on a similar survey regarding volunteer retention in 4-H adult leaders (Payne, 2011). Three leading questions were asked including: I became a volunteer because..., I believe people continue volunteering because..., and I believe people quit volunteering because... The respondents circled the letters that most closely align with their answer. I used Likert-scale type questions from 1-5 to code participant answers, where strongly disagree (SD) was 1, disagree (D) was 2, neither agree nor disagree (N) was 3, agree (A) was 4, and strongly agree (SA) was 5. I followed the protocol suggested by Dillman, Smyth, and Christian (2009) for mailed survey assessments. I made three mailing attempts to gather data from past and present volunteers. First, I sent out a survey pre-card (Appendix D) letting the participants know about the upcoming survey. A cover letter (Appendix E), a self-administered survey questionnaire (Appendix F), and a self-addressed, postage paid return envelope were mailed to participants on May 14, 2015. I sent a follow up

postcard (Appendix G) on May 21, 2015 to provide a friendly reminder. They had until June 1, 2015 to return the questionnaires. Surveys returned after June 1 were marked as late. However, these were still included in the final analysis.

An individual's level of engagement is related to their level of motivation (Reeve, Jang, Jeon, & Barch. 2004). So the second aspect of my research study involved making field observations regarding levels of volunteer engagement. Therefore, I gained volunteer consent with my research consent form (Appendix H). I built an observational instrument checklist to assess volunteer engagement (Appendix I). I used Ishak and Amjah's (2015) study on student engagement in the classroom and Stallings (1991) as the basis for my volunteer engagement checklist. I made field observations (time investment, body language, consistent focus, verbal participation, volunteer confidence, volunteer attitude, behavioral engagement, cognitive engagement, relational engagement, and overall engagement) of volunteers while they worked. After they left for the day, I discretely filled out the observation instrument at my desk. Volunteers did not know the days they were being observed to reduce the response bias. They knew from the research consent form that they would be observed twice in their next four volunteering opportunities. Volunteers that consented to the observations were compensated with a \$5 gift card to Taco John's after the observation.

The third aspect of the research study was conducting one-on-one interviews to better understand the perspective of past and present volunteers. Volunteers had the opportunity to indicate through the survey questionnaire their desire to participate in the interview. Corbin and Morse (2003) explain research participants often volunteer because they want to share their opinions, voice their concerns, and speak to a considerate listener. It should be noted research participants were made aware that choosing to not participate in the research study would not

impact their relationship with the small, municipal public garden, its staff, or other volunteers. This helped to mitigate any feelings of coercion a volunteer might feel. From the volunteers that elected to participate in the interviews, I employed a purposeful sampling approach (Creswell, 2011). Approximately, three new volunteers (started between January 1, 2014 and March 1, 2015), two inactive volunteers (had not volunteered in the last 6 months), and four presently active volunteers were personally interviewed. My goal was to gain the perspective of nine volunteers through a semi-structured personal interview.

Personal interviews are widely used in qualitative studies because they help the researcher to understand social issues (Fontana & Frey, 1994). A semi-structured interview means asking predetermined questions related to their volunteering perspective and allowing other questions to emerge through dialogue (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). To reduce any perceived interviewer-interviewee power imbalance, interviews occurred at a location where the research participants felt most comfortable (Parnis, Mont, & Gombay, 2005). This included homes, private location in the garden, and the break room after everyone had left for the day. Additionally, establishing trust and building rapport were necessary to encourage participants to share their personal thoughts (Booth & Booth, 1994). I helped establish rapport by openly discussing the format and purpose of the research study. I built trust by communicating that individual identifiers would not be reported in the results of the study (Clarke, 2006). However, I did use a digital recorder to preserve the authenticity of the participants' words, after I had them sign an informed consent form. Additionally, I made short hand notes as research participants shared their thoughts with me. It took approximately 60 minutes to cover all interview questions (Appendix J). Volunteers that participated in the interviews were compensated with a \$5 Starbucks gift card after the interviews.

## **Data Collection Process**

Data was collected through self-administered surveys, field observations, and digitally recorded interviews. The surveys and observations included both open-ended and Likert-type scale questions, so data could be assessed quantitatively as well as qualitatively. Personal interviews generated qualitative data. As such, I transcribed all qualitative data related to volunteer responses into a Microsoft word document. Collecting survey responses, personal interview transcripts, and field observations allowed me to interpret the volunteer perspective.

## **Analysis Plan**

I incorporated contextualized analysis to establish overarching themes from personal interviews (Gibson & Brown, 2009). Transcribing, coding, categorizing, and organizing the responses and observations of volunteers related to factors influencing volunteer retention provided meaning to my qualitative data. Analyzing this data set helped explain the nature of volunteerism at a small, municipal public garden through the social exchange theory.

I carried out my field observations. Then I conducted nine one-on-one interviews. After collecting all of this data, I used “transcript-based analyses” (Onwuegbuzie, Dickinson, Leech, & Zoran, 2009, p. 5). First, I transcribed the interview data and observations into a Microsoft Word document. Then I read through each transcription in its entirety, to get a sense of the volunteer’s overall perspective. Specifically, I examined how a volunteer’s experience influences his or her actions. I coded these responses looking for reoccurring themes (Saldaña, 2009). I suspected potential codes related to my variables: motivation, expectation, experience, and recognition. Since these are all a-priori, I also identified and tracked other codes from the participants as the study progressed. I evaluated the codes, checking to see where they differentiated, intersected, and overlapped (Creswell, 2011). I also ran a Chi-square test using Statistical Package for the

Social Sciences version 19.0 (SPSS) to identify potential relationships between the volunteer engagement categories and overall level of engagement (Kremelberg, 2010).

In order to provide validity to my qualitative data, I also collected quantitative data through the self-administered surveys and the observational checklists. Data collected was entered into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and evaluated using SPSS. This helped me identify measures of central tendencies including mean, median, and mode as well as score spreads like standard deviation. Together these statistical measures provided quantitative depth to my investigative research study.

### **Timeline**

This study was submitted to the Institutional Review Board at Colorado State University in March 2015. The proposal was approved, and I gained IRB certification in May 2015. I sent out surveys on May 14. On May 21, all participants received a friendly reminder. Participants had until June 1 to return the surveys. I made field observation throughout June and July. I used the volunteer engagement checklist, as was approved by the IRB. Personal interviews were held in August. I recorded interviews with a digital recorder, in addition to written notes, using the semi-structured question format. All interviews occurred in a private space where volunteers felt most comfortable. Data transcription and coding immediately followed the conclusion of field observations and interview data collection. Analysis of the data was carried out in November 2015. The formal write-up was finished in February 2016. By March 2016, I finished writing my research findings and submitted them for approval to my committee members at Colorado State University.

## **CHAPTER 4: RESULTS**

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to discover the motivational factors that drive volunteers to work at this small, municipal public garden, the reasons people continue to volunteer, the influence of recognition on the volunteer experience, and the underlying factors that lead to volunteer turnover. Understanding the value volunteers place on their experience provided insight into how to improve recruitment and retention practices.

### **Questions of the Study**

The following questions provided direction for this investigative study:

1. What are the motivations for volunteers to start working in a botanical garden?
2. What do volunteers expect to gain by contributing to a botanical garden?
3. How would volunteers describe their experience?
4. How does recognition influence volunteer retention?
5. What are the underlying factors that lead to volunteer turnover?

### **Survey Questionnaires**

The mailed questionnaires were sent to 124 past and present volunteers. Seven surveys were returned to sender due to an outdated address. Sixty-eight of the surveys were returned having answered the questions. However, six of these returned surveys were unusable because participants had skipped more than a third of the survey or only answered questions favorably or not at all. Therefore, the number of usable survey questionnaires was 62, making the response rate 53.0%. Quantitative data was rounded to one decimal place (Bluman, 2014).

## **Reasons for Becoming a Small, Municipal Public Garden's Volunteer**

The first part of the questionnaire was aimed at identifying and quantifying the reasons research participants decided to become a volunteer. Respondents indicated their level of agreement with 16 statements based on a five-point Likert scale where answers ranged from 1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree. Of the 62 respondents, 24 (38.7%) strongly agreed with the statement that I became a volunteer because “I wanted to benefit my community,” while 30 (48.4%) respondents agreed. Seven respondents (11.3%) neither agreed nor disagreed and one strongly disagreed with the statement. None of the respondents indicated a disagreement with the statement, “I wanted to work with plants,” however seven (11.3%) respondents neither agreed nor disagreed. Twenty-nine (46.8%) strongly agreed and 26 (41.9%) agreed with the statement. The statement, “I wanted to feel like I was helping people” received 29 (46.8%) strongly agree responses and 28 (45.2%) agree responses. Yet, 16 (25.8%) respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with that statement. The statement, “I wanted to meet other volunteers” received 10 (16.1%) strongly agree and 25 (40.3%) agree responses. Twenty-two (35.5%) neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. Four (6.5%) respondents disagreed and one respondent (1.6%) strongly disagreed with wanting “to meet other volunteers” as a factor for becoming a volunteer (see Table 1).

The statement, “I wanted the recognition associated with being a volunteer,” received a wide range of responses. Only 2 (3.2%) respondents strongly agreed and 8 (12.9%) agreed with the statement. Twenty-eight (45.2%) neither agreed nor disagreed. More than a third of respondents disagreed in some form with the statement, with 18 (29.0%) disagreeing and six (9.7%) strongly disagreeing with the statement. One of the more favorable reasons respondents gave for volunteering relates to “wanting to learn new skills.” Twenty-three (37.1%) respondents strongly

agreed and 27 (43.5%) agreed with the statement. Only 10 (16.1%) took the middle stance by neither agreeing nor disagreeing. Two (3.2%) respondents indicated “to learn new skills” was not a factor in deciding to volunteer by disagreeing. Responses to the statement, “my friend was involved,” followed a bell-shaped curve where two (3.2%) strongly agreed, 12 (19.4%) agreed, and 31 (50.0%) neither agreed nor disagreed. Eleven (17.7%) disagreed and six (9.7%) strongly disagreed with the statement a “friend was involved” as a reason for volunteering (see Table 1).

Most respondents indicated “receiving status in my community” was not a reason they become a volunteer. One (1.6%) respondent strongly agreed and one (1.6%) respondent agreed with the statement. Fifty percent of the respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. Seventeen (27.4%) disagreed and 12 (19.4%) strongly disagreed with the statement, I became a volunteer “to receive status in my community.” However, a majority of respondents indicated that “deriving satisfaction from working with others” is a principal reason they became a volunteer with 15 (24.2%) strongly agreeing and 38 (61.3%) agreeing. Eight (12.9%) respondents took the middle stance and one (1.6%) respondent indicated they disagreed with the statement. Volunteering because one “derives satisfaction from working with my hands” also had overwhelming support indicated by 19 (30.6%) strongly agreeing and 34 (54.8%) agreeing. Eight (12.9%) respondents neither agreed nor disagreed and one (1.6%) strongly disagreed with the statement. Responses indicating people became a volunteer because “I was asked” also followed a bell shaped curve. Three (4.8%) strongly agreed, 10 (16.1%) agreed, 30 (48.4%) neither agreed nor disagreed, 14 (22.6%) disagreed, and five (8.1%) strongly disagreed with this statement. Most respondents also indicated “gaining skills which might lead to employment” was not a factor that motivated them to volunteer. Only four (6.5%) agreed and 24 (38.7%) neither

agreed nor disagreed. Twenty (32.3%) disagreed and 14 (22.6%) strongly disagreed with the statement, I became a volunteer “to gain skills which might lead to employment” (see Table 1).

When asked if “the public garden has a reputation for training” influenced them to become a volunteer, two (3.2%) respondents strongly agreed, 11 (17.7%) respondents agreed, 40 (64.5%) respondents neither agreed nor disagreed, eight (12.9%) respondents disagreed, and one (1.6%) respondent strongly disagreed with the statement. Volunteers were also asked about acquiring community service hours for different reasons. When asked if “needing hours for Master Gardener certification” influenced them to become a volunteer, seven (11.3%) strongly agreed, 10 (16.1%) agreed, and 22 (35.5%) neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. Thirteen (21.0%) disagreed and 10 (16.1%) strongly disagreed. No volunteer indicated “needing hours for a school scholarship” as a reason they became a volunteer. In fact, 17 (27.4%) strongly disagreed, 16 (25.8%) disagreed, and 29 (46.8%) neither agreed nor disagreed. Similarly, most respondents disagreed with the statement, I became a volunteer because I “needed hours for court appointed community service.” Twenty-one (33.9%) respondents strongly disagreed, 14 (22.6%) disagreed, and 25 (40.3%) neither agreed nor disagreed. It is interesting to note that two out of the 62 responses (3.2%) did agree with the statement that they became a volunteer for “court appointed community service” (see Table 1).

Table 1  
*Reasons Why Participants Became a Small, Municipal Public Garden’s Volunteer*

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neither Agree Nor Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
To benefit my community	1	1.6	0	0.0	7	11.3	30	48.4	24	38.7
To work with plants	0	0.0	0	0.0	7	11.3	26	41.9	29	46.8
To feel like I was helping people	0	0.0	0	0.0	16	25.8	28	45.2	18	29.0
To meet other volunteers	1	1.6	4	6.5	22	35.5	25	40.3	10	16.1

Table 1 (continued)

*Reasons Why Participants Became a Small, Municipal Public Garden's Volunteer*

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neither Agree Nor Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
To learn new skills	0	0	2	3.2	10	16.1	27	43.5	23	37.1
To receive status in the community	12	19.4	17	27.4	31	50.0	1	1.6	1	1.6
Derive satisfaction from working with others	0	0.0	1	1.6	8	12.9	38	61.3	15	24.2
Derive satisfaction from working with my hands	1	1.6	0	0.0	8	12.9	34	54.8	19	30.6
I was asked	5	8.1	14	22.6	30	48.4	10	16.1	3	4.8
To gain skills which might lead to employment	14	22.6	20	32.3	24	38.7	4	6.5	0	0.0
The (garden) has a reputation for training	1	1.6	8	12.9	40	64.5	11	17.7	2	3.2
Needed hours for Master Gardener certification	10	16.1	13	21.0	22	35.5	10	16.1	7	11.3
Needed hours for a school scholarship	17	27.4	16	25.8	29	46.8	0	0.0	0	0.0
Needed hours for court appointed community service	21	33.9	14	22.6	25	40.3	2	3.2	0	0.0

*Note.* # = number of responses; % = percent of the sample population

Means and standard deviations were used to describe the relative strength of the responses to the 16 statements related to the reasons why participants became a small, municipal public garden's volunteer. "To benefit my community" had a mean of 4.2 and standard deviation of 0.8. "To work with plants" had a mean of 4.4 and a standard deviation of 0.7. The mean for "to feel like I was helping people" had a mean of 4.0 and a standard deviation of 0.8. "To meet other volunteers" had a mean of 3.6 and a standard deviation of 0.9. "To learn new skill" had a mean of 4.2 and a standard deviation of 0.8. The mean 4.1 and standard deviation 0.7 corresponded to

“derive satisfaction from working with others.” “Derive satisfaction from working with my hands” had a mean of 4.1 and a standard deviation of 0.8. “The (garden) has a reputation for training” had a mean of 3.1 and a standard deviation of 0.7 (see Table 2).

All the other means dipped below three. This included “gain recognition for volunteering” with a standard deviation of .9, “my friend was involved” with a standard deviation of 0.9, “to receive status in the community” with standard deviation of 0.9, and “I was asked” which had a standard deviation of 1.0. “To gain skills which might lead to employment” had a standard deviation of 0.9, “Needed hours for Master Gardener certification had a standard deviation of 1.2, “needed hours for a school scholarship” had a standard deviation of 0.9, and “needed hours for court appointed community service” had a standard deviation of 0.9 (See Table 2).

Table 2  
*Reasons for Becoming a Small, Municipal Public Garden’s Volunteer*  
*(Average Scores)*

	Min	Max	Mode	Mean	SD
To work with plants	3	5	4	4.4	0.7
To benefit my community	1	5	4	4.2	0.8
To learn new skills	2	5	4	4.2	0.8
Derive satisfaction from working with my hands	1	5	4	4.1	0.8
Derive satisfaction from working with others	2	5	4	4.1	0.7
To feel like I was helping people	3	5	4	4.0	0.8
To meet other volunteers	1	5	4	3.6	0.9
The (garden) has a reputation for training	1	5	3	3.1	0.7
My friend was involved	1	5	3	2.9	0.9
I was asked	1	5	3	2.8	1.0
Needed hours for Master Gardener certification	1	5	3	2.8	1.2
Gain recognition for volunteering	1	5	3	2.7	0.9

Table 2 (continued)

*Reasons for Becoming a Small, Municipal Public Garden's Volunteer  
(Average Scores)*

	Min	Max	Mode	Mean	SD
To receive status in the community	5	1	3	2.4	0.9
To gain skills which might lead to employment	1	5	2	2.3	0.9
Needed hours for a school scholarship	1	3	2	2.2	0.9
Needed hours for court appointed community service	1	4	2	2.1	0.9

*Note.* SD = standard deviation

**Why People Continue Volunteering at a Small, Municipal Public Garden**

Respondents indicated their level of agreement with 24 statements based on a five-point Likert scale where answers ranged from 1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree. When asked about the reasons others continue volunteering, the statement “to feel needed by others” had support from three (4.8%) respondents who strongly agreed and 26 (41.9%) respondents who agreed. Twenty-five (40.3%) respondents neither agreed nor disagreed, six (9.7%) disagreed, one (1.6%) disagreed, and one (1.6%) had no response to the statement. The statement “the community encourages volunteerism” had strong support from the respondents with 35 (56.5%) agreeing and nine (14.5%) strongly agreeing. Only 18 (29.0%) respondents answered neither agree nor disagree to the statement. Similarly, the statement “acquiring new skills”, received positive support from 43 (69.4%) respondents who agreed and 8 (12.9%) strongly agreed. Eleven (17.7%) responded neither agree nor disagree. Many respondents think others continue volunteering “to feel appreciated by the community” as indicated by 43 (69.4%) respondents who agreed and seven (11.3%) who strongly agreed. Only eight (12.9%) responded neither agree nor disagree to the statement. However, two respondents (3.2%) disagreed with the statement. “To feel appreciated by other volunteers” was strongly agreed upon by nine (14.5%) and agreed upon by 42 (67.7%). However, nine (14.5%) respondents neither agreed nor disagreed, one

(1.6%) respondent disagreed, and one (1.6%) did not respond to the statement. “To feel appreciated by staff” was agreed upon by nearly 90% of the respondents. Eighteen (29.0%) strongly agreed, 37 (59.7%) agreed, and five (8.1%) respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. Still, one (1.6%) respondent disagreed and one (1.6%) did not respond to the statement (see Table 3).

Many participants think others “enjoy volunteering in their spare time” as strongly agreed upon by 16 (25.8%) and agreed upon by 41 (66.1%). Five (8.1%) respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. No one disagreed with the statements “enjoy volunteering in their spare time”, “enjoy taking on responsibility”, and “enjoy helping people.” In fact, “enjoy taking on responsibility” was agreed upon by 41 (66.1%) and strongly agreed upon by six (9.7%). Only 15 (24.2%) respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. “Enjoy helping people” was strongly agreed upon by 12 (19.4%) and agreed upon by (67.7%). Eight (12.9%) respondents indicated they neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. Many research participants responded differently to the statement, “like the recognition associated with being a volunteer.” Three (4.8%) respondents strongly agreed and 26 (41.9%) respondents agreed. Still, 25 (40.3%) respondents neither agreed nor disagreed, seven (11.3%) disagreed, and only one (1.6%) respondent strongly disagreed. The statement, I believe people continuing volunteering at because “their friends are involved” was strongly agreed upon by three (4.8%) and agreed upon by 36 (58.1%). Twenty-two (35.5%) neither agreed nor disagreed and one (1.6%) disagreed. “To continue gaining experience” was strongly agreed upon by 10 (16.1%), agreed upon by 37 (59.7%), and neither agreed nor disagreed upon by 15 (24.2%) (see Table 3).

In regards to the reasons participants think others continue volunteering the statement, “to receive status in the community,” was strongly agreed upon by two (3.2%) respondents and

strongly agreed upon by 17 (27.4%) respondents. Thirty-three (53.2%) neither agreed nor disagreed, nine (14.5%) disagreed, and one (1.6%) strongly disagreed with the statement. The statement, “derive satisfaction from working with plants” was strongly agreed upon by 18 (29.0%) respondents and agreed upon by 38 (61.3%) respondents. Only six (9.7%) respondents neither agreed nor disagreed and no one disagreed with the statement. Twenty-three (37.1%) agreed and four (6.5%) strongly agreed that a reason people continue volunteering at the a small, municipal public garden is “they were asked to continue volunteering.” However, 31 (50.0%) respondents neither agreed nor disagreed and four (6.5%) disagreed with this statement. Of the 62 respondents, 37 (59.7%) agreed and four (6.5%) strongly agreed that “to continue meeting new volunteers” was a main reason for people to continue volunteering. However, 20 (32.3%) neither agreed nor disagreed and only one (1.6%) disagreed with this reason (see Table 3).

Some respondents think others “can’t say no when asked” as noted by three (4.8%) respondents who strongly agreed and nine (14.5%) respondents who agreed. But a majority, 33 (53.2%), respondents, neither agreed nor disagreed, 16 (25.8%) respondents disagreed, and one (1.6%) strongly disagreed with this as a main reason for continued volunteering. “To continue gaining skills which might lead to employment” was only agreed upon by seven (11.3%) respondents. Forty-one (66.1%) respondents neither agreed nor disagreed, 11 (17.7%) disagreed, and three (4.8%) strongly disagreed with the statement. Relationships with staff, however, appear to be a main reason why participants think others continue volunteering. The statement, “they value the positive relationships with staff,” was strongly agreed upon by 15 (24.2%) respondents and agreed upon by 39 (62.9%) respondents. Seven (11.3%) respondents neither agreed nor disagreed and only one (1.6%) respondent disagreed with this as a possible reason. “They embrace self-improvement opportunities” was agreed upon by 39 (62.9%) and strongly agreed

upon by three (4.8%). Nineteen (30.6%) neither agreed nor disagreed, and one (1.6%) respondent disagreed with this as a possible reason for continued volunteering (See Table 3).

Most respondents (more than 60%) agreed that socializing and belonging to a community are reasons people continue volunteering at a small, municipal public garden. The statement, “they enjoy break time snacks and socializing,” was agreed upon by 51.6% (32) respondents and strongly agreed upon by 11.3% (7) respondents. Nineteen (30.6%) respondents neither agreed nor disagreed, three (4.8%) respondents disagreed, and only one (1.6%) strongly disagreed with this as a possible reason volunteers continue. Receiving even stronger support was the reason “to belong to a community-minded organization,” whereby 67.7% (42) respondents agreed and 25.8% (16) strongly agreed, while only 6.5% (4) neither agreed nor disagreed. “They value a personal thank you from staff” was strongly agreed upon by 13 (21.0%) and agreed upon by 43 (69.4%). Five (8.1%) respondents neither agreed nor disagreed and only one (1.6%) strongly disagreed. When asked about reasons others continue volunteering, “receiving holiday gifts in December” was neither agreed nor disagreed upon by 31 (50.0%) respondents, agreed upon by 20 (32.3%) respondents, and strongly agreed upon by four (6.5%) respondents. Still, five (8.1%) respondents disagreed and two (3.2%) strongly disagreed with this as a possible reason (see Table 3).

Table 3

*Why People Continue Volunteering at a Small, Municipal Public Garden*

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neither Agree Nor Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
To feel needed by others	1	1.6	6	9.7	25	40.0	26	41.9	3	4.8
The community encourages volunteerism	0	0.0	0	0.0	18	29.0	35	56.5	9	14.5
Acquiring new skills	0	0.0	0	0.0	11	17.7	43	69.4	8	12.9
To feel appreciated by the community	0	0.0	2	3.2	8	12.9	43	69.4	7	11.3
To feel appreciated by other volunteers	0	0.0	1	1.6	9	14.5	42	67.7	9	14.5
To feel appreciated by staff	0	0.0	1	1.6	5	8.1	37	59.7	18	29.0
Enjoy volunteering in their spare time	0	0.0	0	0.0	5	8.1	41	66.1	16	25.8
Enjoy taking on responsibility	0	0.0	0	0.0	15	24.2	41	66.1	6	9.7
Enjoy helping people	0	0.0	0	0.0	8	12.9	42	67.7	12	19.4
Like the recognition associated with being a volunteer	1	1.6	7	11.3	25	40.3	26	41.9	3	4.8
Friends are involved	0	0.0	1	1.6	22	35.5	36	58.1	3	4.8
To continue gaining experience	0	0.0	0	0.0	15	24.2	37	59.7	10	16.1
To receive status in the community	1	1.6	9	14.5	33	53.2	17	27.4	2	3.2
Derive satisfaction from working with plants	0	0.0	0	0.0	6	9.7	38	61.3	18	29.0
They were asked to continue volunteering	0	0.0	4	6.5	31	50.0	23	37.1	4	6.5
To continue meeting new volunteers	0	0.0	1	1.6	20	32.3	37	59.7	4	6.5
They can't say no when asked	1	1.6	16	25.8	33	53.2	9	14.5	3	4.8

Table 3 (continued)

*Why People Continue Volunteering at a Small, Municipal Public Garden*

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neither Agree Nor Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
To continue gaining skills which might lead to employment	3	4.8	11	17.7	41	66.1	7	11.3	0	0.0
They value the positive relationships formed with staff	0	0.0	1	1.6	7	11.3	39	62.9	15	24.2
They embrace self-improvement opportunities	0	0.0	1	1.6	19	30.6	39	62.9	3	4.8
They enjoy "break time" snacks and socializing	1	1.6	3	4.8	19	30.6	32	51.6	7	11.3
To belong to a community-minded organization	0	0.0	0	0.0	4	6.5	42	67.7	16	25.8
They value a personal thank you from staff	1	1.6	0	0.0	5	8.1	43	69.4	13	21.0
To continue receiving holiday gifts in December	2	3.2	5	8.1	31	50.0	20	32.3	4	6.5

*Note.* # = number of responses; % = percent of the sample population

Means and standard deviations were used to describe the relative strength of the responses to the 24 statements related to reasons why participants think others continue volunteering at a small, municipal public garden. “derive satisfaction from working with plants” had a mean of 4.2 and standard deviation of 0.6. “To belong to a community-minded organization” also had a mean of 4.2, but its standard deviation was 0.5. The mean for “to feel appreciated by staff” was 4.2 with a standard deviation of .7. “Enjoy volunteering in their spare time” had a mean of 4.2 and a standard deviation of 0.6. “They value the positive relationships formed with staff” had a mean of 4.1 and a standard deviation of 0.7. Similarly, “they value a personal thank you from staff” had a mean of 4.1 and a standard deviation of 0.7. “Enjoy helping people” had a mean of 4.1 and a standard deviation of 0.6 (see Table 4).

With means ranging between 3.9 and 4.0 and standard deviation between 0.6 and 0.7, the descending order of reasons is “to feel appreciated by other volunteers,” “acquiring new skills,” “to continue gaining experience,” “to feel appreciated by the community,” “the community encourages volunteerism,” and “enjoy taking on responsibility.” Dipping below the 3.9 mean limit, “to continue meeting new volunteers” had a mean of 3.7 and standard deviation of 0.6. “They embrace self-improvement opportunities” had a mean of 3.7 and a standard deviation of 0.6. “Friends are involved” had a mean of 3.7 and a standard deviation of 0.6, while “they enjoy break time snacks and socializing” had a mean of 3.7 and a standard deviation of 0.8. Means below 3.5 listed in descending order include: “they were asked to continue volunteering,” (SD=0.7) “to feel needed by others,” (SD=0.8) “like the recognition associated with being a volunteer,” (SD=0.8) “to continue receiving holiday gifts in December,” (SD=0.8) “to receive status in the community,” (SD=0.8) “they can’t say now when asked,” (SD=0.8) and “to continue gaining skills which might lead to employment” (SD=0.7) (see Table 4).

Table 4  
*Why People Continue Volunteering at a Small, Municipal Public Garden*  
*(Average Scores)*

	Min	Max	Mode	Mean	SD
Derive satisfaction from working with plants	3	5	4	4.2	0.6
To belong to a community-minded organization	3	5	4	4.2	0.5
To feel appreciated by staff	2	5	4	4.2	0.7
Enjoy volunteering in their spare time	3	5	4	4.2	0.6
They value the positive relationships formed with staff	3	5	4	4.1	0.7
They value a personal thank you from staff	1	5	4	4.1	0.7
Enjoy helping people	3	5	4	4.1	0.6
To feel appreciated by other volunteers	2	5	4	4.0	0.6
Acquiring new skills	3	5	4	4.0	0.6

Table 4 (continued)

*Why People Continue Volunteering at a Small, Municipal Public Garden  
(Average Scores)*

	Min	Max	Mode	Mean	SD
To continue gaining experience	3	5	4	4.0	0.6
To feel appreciated by the community	2	5	4	3.9	0.6
The community encourages volunteerism	2	5	4	3.9	0.7
Enjoy taking on responsibility	3	5	4	3.9	0.6
To continue meeting new volunteers	2	5	4	3.7	0.6
They embrace self-improvement opportunities	3	5	4	3.7	0.6
Friends are involved	2	5	4	3.7	0.6
They enjoy "break time" snacks and socializing	1	5	4	3.7	0.8
They were asked to continue volunteering	2	5	3	3.4	0.7
To feel needed by others	1	5	3	3.4	0.8
Like the recognition associated with being a volunteer	1	5	4	3.4	0.8
To continue receiving holiday gifts in December	1	5	3	3.3	0.8
To receive status in the community	1	5	3	3.2	0.8
They can't say no when asked	1	5	3	3.0	0.8
To continue gaining skills which might lead to employment	1	4	3	2.8	0.7

*Note.* SD = standard deviation

**Why People Stopped Volunteering at a Small, Municipal Public Garden**

Respondents indicated their level of agreement with 21 statements based on a five-point Likert scale where answers ranged from 1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree. When asked about the reasons others quit volunteering at this small, municipal public garden, the reason “time commitment required” had support from 35 (56.5%) respondents who agreed and three (4.8%) respondents who strongly agreed. Seventeen (27.4%) respondents neither agreed nor

disagreed and seven (11.3%) respondents disagreed with this as a possible reason. When asked if “conflicts with staff” is a possible reason for volunteers quitting, 38.7% (24) disagreed, 3.2% (2) strongly disagreed, and 48.4% (30) indicated they neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. Five (8.1%) respondents agreed, and one (1.6%) strongly agreed. Possible reason “conflicts with volunteers” was disagreed upon by 22 (35.5%) respondents, strongly disagreed upon by one (1.6%) respondent, and neither agreed nor disagreed upon by 32 (51.6%) respondents. However, seven (11.3%) respondents agreed that “conflicts with volunteers” could be a reason people quit. “Burnout” is a possible reason volunteers quit as agreed upon by 22 (35.5%) respondents and strongly agreed upon by one (1.6%) respondent. Twenty-nine (46.8%) respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with the reason and 10 (16.1%) disagreed (see Table 5).

In response to the reason, “too much responsibility” 30 (48.4%) respondents disagreed, 28 (45.2%) respondents neither agreed nor disagreed, and four (6.5%) agreed with the reason. “Lack of recognition” received disagreed responses from 28 (45.2%), strongly disagreed responses from four (6.5%), 27 (43.5%) neither agreed nor disagreed responses, and 3 (4.8%) agreed responses from the 62 returned surveys. Both reasons “other volunteer opportunities” and “cost involved” received the same responses. Twenty-six (41.9%) respondents agreed and two (3.2%) strongly agreed. Thirty-one (50.0%) respondents neither agreed nor disagreed and two (3.2%) respondents disagreed with these statements as possible reasons volunteers quit. Twenty-six (41.9%) disagreed, three (4.8%) strongly disagreed, 26 (41.9%) neither agreed nor disagreed, and seven (11.3%) agreed that “volunteer expectations” influence volunteer turnover. “Conflicts with visitors” was disagreed upon by 29 (46.8%), strongly disagreed upon by four (6.5%), neither agreed nor disagreed upon by 28 (45.2%), and strongly agreed upon by one (1.6%) (see Table 5).

“Lack of appreciation from staff” was mostly disagreed upon by the respondents as a possible reason volunteers resign. Twenty-eight (45.2%) disagreed and 13 (21.0%) strongly disagreed with the possible reason. Fifteen (24.2%) respondents neither agreed nor disagreed and six (9.7%) agreed with the statement. Twenty-six (41.9%) disagreed and eight (12.9%) strongly disagreed with “lack of appreciation from other volunteers” as a possible reason. Twenty-six (41.9%) neither agreed nor disagreed and two (3.2%) agreed with this statement. “Lack of appreciation from community” received 31 (50.0%) disagree responses and seven (11.3%) strongly disagree responses. Twenty-two (35.5%) neither agreed nor disagree and two (3.2%) agreed with this as a possible reason volunteers quit (see Table 5).

Twenty-six (41.9%) respondents disagreed, four (6.5%) respondents strongly disagreed, 27 (43.5%) respondents neither agreed nor disagreed, and five respondents (8.1%) agreed that “lack of training” is a reason volunteers quit. Eighteen (29.0%) disagreed, four (6.5%) strongly disagreed, and 30 (48.4%) neither agreed nor disagreed that “lack of communication” drives volunteers to quit. However, nine (14.5%) agreed and one (1.6%) strongly agreed that “lack of communication” is a reason volunteers leave this small municipal, public garden. “Lack of self-improvement opportunities” does not appear to be a big reason people leave. Fifty percent (31) neither agreed nor disagreed, 41.9% (26) disagreed, and 1.6% (1) strongly disagreed with the statement. A few, four (6.5%) respondents, did think “lack of self-improvement opportunities” caused some people to quit (see Table 5).

Of the 62 respondents, 20 (32.3%) disagreed, three (4.8%) strongly disagreed, and 29 (46.8%) neither agreed nor disagreed that “differences of opinion with staff” is a reason people stop volunteering. However, 14.5% (9) agreed and 1.6% (1) strongly agreed that “differences of opinion with staff” did cause some people to stop volunteering. “Differences of opinion with

volunteers” is a less influential reason. Twenty-five (40.3%) respondents disagreed, two (3.2%) respondents strongly disagreed, and 33 (53.2%) neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement. Only two (3.2%) respondents answered agree to “differences of opinion with volunteers” leading to a volunteer resignation. Most volunteers regarded the reason “inappropriate jokes” as a negligible with 22 (35.5%) who disagreed, six (9.7%) who strongly disagreed, and 33 (53.2%) who neither agreed nor disagreed with this reason. One (1.6%) respondent did indicate volunteers leave due to “inappropriate jokes.” Twenty-five (40.3%) disagreed, five (8.1%) strongly disagreed, and 25 (40.3%) neither agreed nor disagreed that “personality conflicts with staff” is a possible reason volunteers quit. Yet, six (9.7%) agreed and one (1.6%) strongly agreed with this same statement. “Personality conflicts with volunteers” had 25 (40.3%) respondents who disagreed, four (6.5%) respondents who strongly disagreed, 27 (43.5%) respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed, and six (9.7%) respondents who agreed with the statement (see Table 5).

Table 5  
*Why People Stopped Volunteering at a Small, Municipal Public Garden*

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neither Agree Nor Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
The time commitment required	0	0.0	7	11.3	17	27.4	35	56.5	3	4.8
Conflicts with staff	2	3.2	24	38.7	30	48.4	5	8.1	1	1.6
Conflicts with volunteers	1	1.6	22	35.5	32	51.6	7	11.3	0	0.0
Burnout	0	0.0	10	16.1	29	46.8	22	35.5	1	1.6
Too much responsibility	0	0.0	30	48.4	28	45.2	4	6.5	0	0.0
Lack of recognition	4	6.5	28	45.2	27	43.5	3	4.8	0	0.0

Table 5 (continued)

*Why People Stopped Volunteering at a Small, Municipal Public Garden*

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neither Agree Nor Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Other volunteer opportunities	0	0.0	2	3.2	31	50.0	26	41.9	2	3.2
Volunteer expectations	3	4.8	26	41.9	26	41.9	7	11.3	0	0.0
Conflicts with visitors	4	6.5	29	46.8	28	45.2	0	0.0	1	1.6
Lack of appreciation from staff	13	21.0	28	45.2	15	24.2	6	9.7	0	0.0
Lack of appreciation from other volunteers	8	12.9	26	41.9	26	41.9	2	3.2	0	0.0
Lack of appreciation from community	7	11.0	31	50.0	22	35.5	2	3.2	0	0.0
Lack of training	4	6.5	26	41.9	27	43.5	5	8.1	0	0.0
Lack of communication	4	6.5	18	29.0	30	48.4	9	14.5	1	1.6
Lack of self-improvement opportunities	1	1.6	26	41.9	31	50.0	4	6.5	0	0.0
Differences of opinion with staff	3	4.8	20	32.3	29	46.8	9	14.5	1	1.6
Differences of opinion with volunteers	2	3.2	25	40.3	33	53.2	2	3.2	0	0.0
Inappropriate jokes	6	9.7	22	35.5	33	53.2	0	0.0	1	1.6
Personality conflicts with staff	5	8.1	25	40.3	25	40.3	6	9.7	1	1.6
Personality conflicts with volunteers	4	6.5	25	40.3	27	43.5	6	9.7	0	0.0

*Note.* # = number of responses; % = percent of the sample population

Means and standard deviations were used to describe the relative strength of the responses to the 21 statements related reasons why participants think others stop volunteering at a small, municipal public garden. The highest mean of 3.6 belonged to “the time commitment required” which had a standard deviation of 0.8. “Other volunteer opportunities” had a mean of 3.5 and a

standard deviation of 0.6. “Burnout” had a mean of 3.2 and a standard deviation of 0.7. Dropping below a mean of 3.0, “lack of communication” came in with a mean of 2.8 and a standard deviation of 0.8. Also with a mean of 2.8, “differences of opinion with staff” had a standard deviation of 0.8. “Conflicts with other volunteers” had a mean of 2.7 and a standard deviation of 0.7, while “conflicts with staff” had a mean of 2.7 and a standard deviation of 0.8 (see Table 6).

“Lack of self-improvement opportunities” had mean of 2.6 and a standard deviation of 0.6. Similarly, “volunteer expectations” had a mean of 2.6 and a standard deviation of 0.8. “Too much responsibility” had a mean of 2.6 and a standard deviation of 0.6. Sharing a mean of 2.6, “differences of opinion with volunteers” had a standard deviation of 0.6, “personality conflicts with staff” had a standard deviation of 0.8, and “personality conflicts with volunteers” had a standard deviation of 0.8. “Lack of training” had a mean of 2.5 and a standard deviation of 0.7. Means below 2.5 listed in descending order include: “inappropriate jokes,” (SD=0.7) “lack of recognition,” (SD=0.7) “conflicts with visitors” (SD=0.7) “lack of appreciation from other volunteers,” (SD=0.8) “lack of appreciation from community,” (SD=0.7) “cost involved,” (SD=0.7) and “lack of appreciation from staff” (SD=0.9) (see Table 6).

Table 6  
*Why People Stopped Volunteering at a Small, Municipal Public Garden*  
*(Average Scores)*

	Min	Max	Mode	Mean	SD
The time commitment required	2	5	4	3.6	0.8
Other volunteer opportunities	2	5	3	3.5	0.6
Burnout	2	5	3	3.2	0.7
Lack of communication	1	5	3	2.8	0.8
Differences of opinion with staff	1	5	3	2.8	0.8
Conflicts with other volunteers	1	4	3	2.8	0.7

Table 6 (continued)  
*Why People Stopped Volunteering at a Small, Municipal Public Garden*  
*(Average Scores)*

	Min	Max	Mode	Mean	SD
Conflicts with staff	1	5	3	2.7	0.8
Lack of self-improvement opportunities	2	4	3	2.6	0.6
Differences of opinion with volunteers	1	4	3	2.6	0.6
Personality conflicts with staff	1	5	2	2.6	0.8
Personality conflicts with volunteers	1	4	3	2.6	0.8
Lack of training	1	4	3	2.5	0.7
Inappropriate jokes	1	5	3	2.5	0.7
Lack of recognition	1	4	2	2.5	0.7
Conflicts with visitors	1	5	2	2.4	0.7
Lack of appreciation from other volunteers	1	4	2	2.4	0.8
Lack of appreciation from community	1	4	2	2.3	0.7
Cost involved	1	4	2	2.3	0.7
Lack of appreciation from staff	1	5	2	2.2	0.9

*Note.* SD = standard deviation

### **How People Felt After a Day of Volunteering at a Small, Municipal Public Garden**

In the mailed survey, respondents were asked to address how they felt after a day of volunteering at a small, municipal public garden by checking all the boxes that applied to them. Of the 62 respondents, 46 (74.0%) indicated they felt “like I made a difference,” 42 (68.0%) felt “happy”, and, 42 (68.0%) felt “content.” Thirty-six respondents (58.0%) felt “fulfilled” and 22 (36.0%) felt “inspired” after volunteering. Only a few responses indicated a negative feeling after volunteering. One respondent (1.6%) indicated they felt “disappointed,” two (3.2%) felt frustrated, and one (1.6%) felt “I should have done something else” (see Figure 1). Extended responses to this question are included (Appendix K).

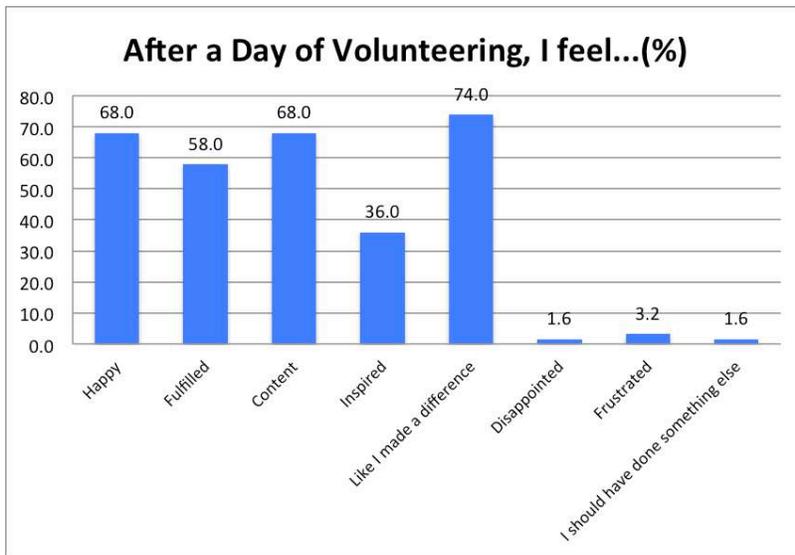


Figure 1: Participants indicated how they felt after a day of volunteering

### Support Needed for a Small, Municipal Public Garden’s Volunteers

Respondents were also asked to indicate the type of support that is needed for volunteers by checking all appropriate boxes. “New volunteer orientation” was indicated by 30 (48.0%) respondents. “Available ongoing training classes” was indicated by 24 (39.0%) respondents and 26 (42.0%) respondents indicated “awareness of volunteer resources and materials” is needed (see Table 7). Extended responses to this question are also included (Appendix K).

Table 7

*Support Needed for Small, Municipal Public Garden’s Volunteers*

	#	%
New Volunteer Orientation	30	48.0
Available ongoing training classes	24	39.0
Awareness of volunteer resources and materials	26	42.0

*Note.* # = number of responses; % = percent of the sample population

### Importance of the Volunteer Program at a Small, Municipal Public Garden

Respondents were asked to describe the level of importance they place on the volunteer program. “Highly important” was indicated by 55 (89.0%) respondents. “Important” was

indicated by four (6.5%) respondents. No respondents indicated the volunteer program was unimportant, however three (4.8%) participants did not respond (see Figure 2).

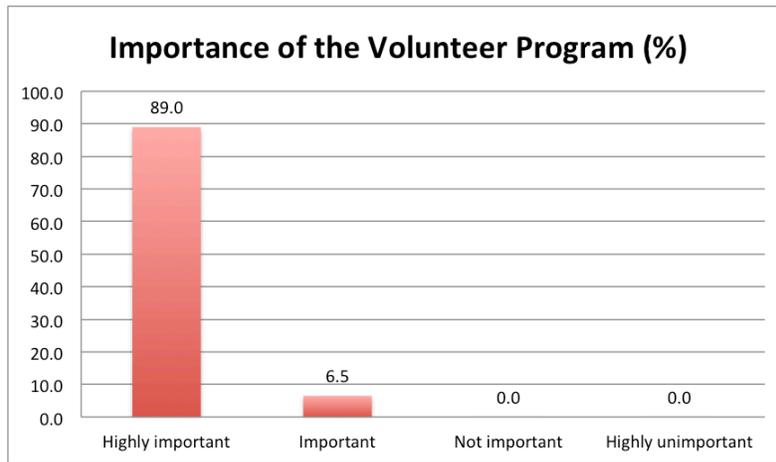


Figure 2: Participants indicate the value of a volunteer program

### Observations

Field observations were made between June and July 2015 at a small, municipal public garden. Thirty research participants were observed twice, and one research participant was observed once, making the total number of observations 61. Volunteer engagement was assessed on a scale of very low engagement (1) to very high engagement (5). The categories measuring engagement included time investment, body language, focus, verbal participation, confidence, attitude, behavioral engagement, cognitive engagement, relational engagement, and overall engagement.

### Time Investment

Time investment had values ranging between one and five, among the 61 observations. A value of one (very low engagement) was assigned when a “volunteer did not show up as regularly scheduled.” A value of two (low engagement) was assigned when a “volunteer disappeared toward the end of the shift and did not return.” “Volunteer showed up on time and left on time” received a value of three (medium engagement). A value of four (high engagement)

was received when a “volunteer worked longer than their regularly scheduled shift.” “Volunteer showed up early and stayed later” warranted a value of five (very high engagement) (see Table 9).

Table 9  
*Time Investment Data Regarding Volunteer Engagement*

Very Low (1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteer did not show up as regularly scheduled</li> </ul>
Low (2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteer arrived in time for break and left when other volunteers left (about half the amount of time most people volunteer)</li> <li>• Volunteer disappeared toward the end of the day and did not return</li> </ul>
Medium (3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteer showed up on time and left on time</li> </ul>
High (4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteers worked longer than their regularly scheduled shift</li> </ul>
Very High (5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteer returned later in the day to finish a maintenance project</li> <li>• Volunteer arrived 30 minutes early and left 30 minutes past his scheduled time stating, “I like helping out around here.”</li> <li>• Volunteer stayed an extra hour and a half to help staff finish planting perennials</li> <li>• Volunteer showed up to help with a field trip, even though they weren’t scheduled. They said they “love seeing the kids have so much fun.”</li> <li>• Volunteer showed up early and stayed late</li> </ul>

**Body Language**

Positive body language had values ranging from two (low engagement) to five (very high engagement). “Volunteer grumbled that staff doesn’t spend enough time maintaining a special plant collection” warranted a score of two (low engagement). “Volunteer appeared to be content in completing assigned tasks” received a score of three (medium engagement). “Volunteer was enthusiastic about working and socializing with fellow volunteers; she shared some life experiences and vacation stories while working” received a score of four (high engagement). “Volunteer laughed, smiled, and made jokes about planting flowers” received a score of five (very high engagement) (see Table 10).

Table 10  
*Body Language Data Regarding Volunteer Engagement*

Very Low (1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No observed behavior</li> </ul>
Low (2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Volunteer grumbled that staff doesn't spend enough time maintaining a special plant collection</li> </ul>
Medium (3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Volunteer appeared to be content in completing assigned tasks</li> </ul>
High (4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Volunteer was enthusiastic about working and socializing with a fellow volunteer; she shared some life experiences and vacation stories while working</li> </ul>
Very High (5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Volunteer smiled and chuckled, pleased that the broccoli he planted was ready to be harvested</li> <li>Volunteer laughed, smiled, and made jokes about planting flowers</li> </ul>

### **Consistent Focus**

Consistent focus had values ranging from two (low engagement) to five (very high engagement). “Volunteer wondered around the greenhouse talking with other volunteers; she did not appear to be completing an assigned task” received a score of two (low engagement). “Volunteer completed assigned task, but it took much longer than expected” received a score of three (medium engagement). A high engagement score of four was warranted when a “volunteer finished staking tomatoes in the hoop house even though it was raining.” A very high engagement score of five was allocated when a “volunteer worked and finished every assigned task as well as some unassigned tasks that he thought needed to be done” (see Table 11).

Table 11  
*Consistent Focus Data Regarding Volunteer Engagement*

Very Low (1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No observed behavior</li> </ul>
Low (2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Volunteer wandered around the greenhouse talking with other volunteers, they did not appear to be focused</li> </ul>
Medium (3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Volunteer completed assigned task, it took longer than expected</li> </ul>
High (4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Volunteer finished staking tomatoes in the hoop house even though it was raining</li> </ul>
Very High (5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Volunteer worked and finished every assigned task as well as some unassigned tasks that they thought needed to be done</li> </ul>

## Verbal Participation

Verbal participation values ranged between two (low engagement) and five (very high engagement). A score of two was received when a “volunteer ignored questions asked by a staff member because she was frustrated with that staff member.” A score of three was received when a “volunteer listened when others spoke and added to the conversation intermittently.” One volunteer commented, “It’s fun to talk to other gardeners.” This received a high engagement score of four. “Volunteer seemed to really enjoy meeting and working with other new volunteers” received a very high engagement score of five (see Table 12).

Table 12  
*Verbal Participation Data Regarding Volunteer Engagement*

Very Low (1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• No observed behavior</li></ul>
Low (2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Volunteer ignored questions asked by a staff member because they were frustrated with that staff member</li></ul>
Medium (3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Volunteer listened when others spoke and added to the conversation intermittently</li></ul>
High (4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Volunteer commented that a program designed to teach other volunteers horticulture skills would be beneficial; they said it would help enhance social interactions</li><li>• Volunteer commented “It’s fun to talk to other gardeners.”</li></ul>
Very High (5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Volunteer commented, “It’s really nice to have an adult conversation.”</li><li>• Volunteer seemed to really enjoy meeting and working with other new volunteers</li></ul>

## Volunteer Confidence

Volunteer confidence values ranged between two (low engagement) and five (very high engagement). “Volunteer stopped working when other volunteers weren’t around to guide her” received a score of two. A medium engagement score of three was received when a volunteer commented, “he could finally put his newly learned pruning skills to use today.” A high engagement score of four was received when a “volunteer eagerly started a project and accomplished tasks in the same area, even though they were not assigned.” “Volunteer

investigated home solutions to fix an insect problem on a special plant exhibit on her own time” received a very high engagement score of five (see Table 13).

Table 13  
*Volunteer Confidence Data Regarding Volunteer Engagement*

Very Low (1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No observed behavior</li> </ul>
Low (2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteer waited for 25 minutes in the break room because they didn't feel comfortable walking the grounds looking for the volunteer group</li> <li>• Volunteer stopped working when other volunteers weren't around to guide them</li> </ul>
Medium (3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteer comments that they could finally put their newly learned pruning skills to use today</li> </ul>
High (4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteer eagerly started a project and picked up tasks to do in the same area, even though they were not assigned</li> <li>• Volunteer planted herbaceous perennials with little coaching and a positive attitude</li> </ul>
Very High (5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteer came in to work on a special plant collection outside their normally scheduled time</li> <li>• Volunteer investigated home solutions to fix an insect problem on a special plant exhibit on their own time</li> </ul>

### **Volunteer Attitude**

Volunteer attitude values ranged between one (very low engagement) and five (very high engagement). A very low engagement score of one was received when a “volunteer negatively commented that they aren't as young as they used to be” and that “planting can be challenging.” A low engagement score of two was assigned when a “volunteer was irritated by poor signage in the greenhouse because it made answering visitor questions difficult.” “Volunteer completed requested assignment, but commented that they would be happier working on something else” received a medium engagement score. A high engagement score of four was received when a “volunteer invested time to cut up plant material for compost, even though they were tired and worn out.” A very high engagement score of five was received when a “volunteer was stung by a bee and continued to work” (see Table 14).

Table 14  
*Volunteer Attitude Data Regarding Volunteer Engagement*

Very Low (1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteer commented that they “aren’t as young as they used to be” and that “planting can be challenging.”</li> </ul>
Low (2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteer was irritated by poor signage in the greenhouse because it made answering visitor questions difficult</li> </ul>
Medium (3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteer completed requested assignment, but commented that they would be happier working on something else</li> </ul>
High (4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteer invested time to cut up plant material for compost, even though they were tired and worn out</li> </ul>
Very High (5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteer was stung by a bee and continued to volunteer</li> <li>• Volunteer was motivated to show up and help lead a field trip because, “I needed to get my kid fix.”</li> <li>• Volunteer commented, “I love volunteering at the (garden). Working with plants in the garden is so relaxing”</li> </ul>

### **Behavioral Engagement**

Behavioral engagement values ranged between two (low engagement) and five (very high engagement). A low engagement score of two was received by a “volunteer that commented they feel unappreciated when a staff member seems insincere when thanking them.” “Volunteer helped staff clean up after a field trip as requested” received a medium engagement score. “Volunteer seemed in a relaxed state of mind while socializing and working with plants” received a high engagement score. A very high engagement score of five was assigned when a volunteer exclaimed, “I like vegetable gardening” (see Table 15).

Table 15  
*Behavioral Engagement Data Regarding Volunteer Engagement*

Very Low (1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No observed behavior</li> </ul>
Low (2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteer did not appear to be motivated to finish the task while working independently, but when they were provided a co-worker, the task was finished more quickly</li> <li>• Volunteer commented that they felt unappreciated when a staff member seems insincere when thanking them</li> </ul>
Medium (3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteer helped staff clean up after a field trip as requested</li> </ul>
High (4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteer seemed in a relaxed state of mind while socializing and working with plants</li> </ul>
Very High (5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteer exclaims, “I like vegetable gardening.”</li> </ul>

## Cognitive Engagement

Cognitive engagement values range between one (very low engagement) and five (very high engagement). “Volunteer mentioned they felt cast aside because they weren’t included in the annual flower planting this year” received a very low engagement score. A low engagement score of two was received when a “volunteer seemed to be discouraged by new staff practices that made volunteering seem even more demanding.” A medium score of three was received when a “volunteer sat in the break room when they were done with their assignment, because they didn’t know what else to do.” “Volunteer commented that they would complete any assigned task, as long as it involves being outside with plants” received a high engagement score of four. A very high engagement score of five was assigned when a “volunteer expressed that they love learning a new gardening fact” (see Table 16).

Table 16  
*Cognitive Engagement Data Regarding Volunteer Engagement*

Very Low (1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteer mentioned they felt cast aside because they weren’t included in the annual flower planting this year; they wondered if they had done something wrong to not be asked to help</li> </ul>
Low (2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteer seemed to be discouraged by new staff practices that made volunteering seem even more demanding</li> </ul>
Medium (3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteer sat in the break room when they weren’t done with their assignment, because they didn’t know what else to do</li> </ul>
High (4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteer asked plant questions, “What is a Norway Spruce? How does it grow?”</li> <li>• Volunteer asked follow up questions regarding how much to prune</li> <li>• Volunteer commented that they would complete any assigned task, as long as it involved being outside with plants.</li> </ul>

Table 16 (Continued)

*Cognitive Engagement Data Regarding Volunteer Engagement*

Very High (5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteer expressed that they love learning a new gardening fact</li> <li>• Volunteer commented that, “It’s great to spend the day taking care of the Gardens because you feel like you’ve accomplished something.”</li> <li>• Volunteers brought in their own tools to help finish a Gardens’ project</li> <li>• Volunteer donated plastic pots to the (garden), which demonstrated they were thinking about the (garden) outside their regularly scheduled volunteer time</li> <li>• Volunteer was noticeably more engaged by having their opinion heard in assembling a new arbor</li> <li>• Volunteer asked weed management questions and expressed interest in specific perennials to plant in their home garden</li> <li>• Volunteer brought in their own supplies (pruners, soil, pots, and plants) to make a special plant exhibit look great</li> </ul>
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**Relational Engagement**

Relational engagement scores ranged between one (very low) and five (very high). A very low engagement score was assigned when a “volunteer didn’t seem comfortable working around others, as evidenced by their maintained distance of 30 to 40 yards from the volunteer group.” A score of two was received when a “volunteer commented staff doesn’t socialize as much these days.” “Volunteer appeared to be content working with others or independently” received a medium relational engagement score. “Volunteer brought in pictures and shared stories about their latest fishing trip” received a high engagement score of four. A very high engagement score was received when a volunteer stated, “I love coming here because I feel like I am helpful” (see Table 17).

Table 17

*Relational Engagement Data Regarding Volunteer Engagement*

Very Low (1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteer didn’t seem comfortable working around others, as evidenced by their maintained distance of 30 to 40 yards from the volunteer group</li> </ul>
Low (2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteer said, “Staff doesn’t socialize as much these days.”</li> </ul>
Medium (3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteer appeared to be content working with others or independently</li> </ul>

Table 17 (continued)  
*Relational Engagement Data Regarding Volunteer Engagement*

High (4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteer commented that they “enjoy the social interactions at break time.”</li> <li>• Volunteer laughed and shared personal stories while hand pulling weeds</li> <li>• Volunteer opened up about their personal experience with perennials and shared personal matters regarding their family’s health</li> <li>• Volunteer brought in pictures to share stories about their latest fishing trip</li> <li>• Volunteer shared stories regarding their troubles and concerns while working</li> </ul>
Very High (5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteer stated, “I love coming here because I feel like I am helpful.”</li> <li>• Volunteer group socialized and worked hard with and without a staff member present</li> <li>• A new volunteer seemed to enjoy planting flowers and engaging in conversation with other volunteers</li> </ul>

**Overall Engagement**

Overall engagement score ranged from one (very low) to five (very high). When a “volunteer commented that they feel unappreciated for the time they spend working because staff doesn’t seem sincere in thanking them for their time” a very low engagement score was assigned. A score of two (low engagement) was assigned when a volunteer commented that their knees hurt and getting to the garden from the parking lot is too difficult.” A medium engagement score was assigned when a “volunteer seemed to enjoy the benefit of gaining Master Gardener certification hours, but not necessarily the assigned garden task of weeding.” A high engagement score was assigned to a “volunteer engaged with the task after a little bit of coaching, an explanation, and minimal supervision.” A very high engagement score of five was assigned when a “volunteer enthusiastically asked plant questions to staff” (see Table 18).

Table 18

*Overall Level of Engagement Data Regarding Volunteer Engagement*

Very Low (1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteer commented that they feel unappreciated for the time they spend working because staff doesn't seem sincere in thanking them for their time</li> </ul>
Low (2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteer commented that their knees hurt and getting to the garden from the parking lot is too difficult</li> </ul>
Medium (3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteer seemed to enjoy the benefit of gaining Master Gardener certification hours, but not necessarily the assigned garden task of weeding</li> </ul>
High (4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteer brought in perennials to donate to the (garden)</li> <li>• Volunteer was engaged with the task after a little bit of coaching, an explanation, and minimal supervision</li> </ul>
Very High (5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteer enthusiastically asked plant questions to staff</li> <li>• Volunteer beamed when they showed a new visitor interesting plants around the greenhouse</li> <li>• Volunteer commented that they enjoy volunteering because they "find gardening relaxing and therapeutic."</li> </ul>

**Relationships Between Observational Categories and Overall Volunteer Engagement**

A chi-square test was used to compare the potential relationships existing between each category of engagement and a volunteer's overall level of engagement. Based on the mean score from the two observations of 31 participants, there was a statistically significant relationship, at the .001 probability level, between "relational engagement" and a volunteer's "overall level of engagement." There was also a statistically significant relationship, at the .01 probability level, between "cognitive engagement" and "overall level of engagement." The relationship between "behavioral engagement" and "overall level of engagement" was also statistically significant at the .05 probability level. The relationship between "overall level of engagement" and "consistent focus" was significant at the .05 probability level. Also, "Time investment" and "overall level of engagement" had a significant relationship at the .05 probability level (see Table 19).

Table 19

*Volunteer Engagement Observations*

Categories	#	Chi-Square	df	Sig (2-tailed)
Relational Engagement	31	53.906	16	.001
Cognitive Engagement	31	63.963	16	.002
Behavioral Engagement	31	42.440	16	.016
Consistent Focus	31	33.362	20	.031
Time Investment	31	43.908	30	.049
Verbal Participation	31	37.559	25	.051
Volunteer Attitude	31	44.261	35	.140
Body Language	31	37.579	30	.160
Volunteer Confidence	31	34.477	30	.260

*Note.* # = number of responses; df = degrees of freedom

### **Personal Interviews**

Nine semi-structured interviews were conducted to understand the perspectives of current and former volunteers at a small, municipal public garden. Themes derived from the interviews revealed the reasons people decide to become a volunteer, what volunteers expect to gain by contributing their time, how volunteers feel about their experience, the value volunteers place on recognition, and why people stopped volunteering at this small, municipal public garden.

#### **Reasons for Becoming a Small, Municipal Public Garden's Volunteer**

##### **Purpose.**

The decision to become a volunteer at a small, municipal public garden is based on logic and driven by a volunteer's personal motivations. The motivations people give for volunteering are as diverse as the people themselves. There is no one all encompassing reason people decide to become a volunteer. However, most of the participants agreed that "having a nice place to (volunteer) in" (participant 5) was important. For some, this means being around other people and for others, it means being outside surrounded by plants and flowers. Despite the many reasons people give for volunteering, there is one common reason on which all participants

agreed. “Having something to do” with extra personal time, influenced their decision to become a volunteer. One participant explained:

Well, I recently retired and I was afraid I would have too much time on my hands and what not. I don’t want to sit in front of the TV (all day). And so I thought I wanted to do something that I like and enjoy (Participant 119).

Another participant identified changing family dynamics that create more personal time:

I just couldn’t sit at home and do nothing. There’s not enough to do at the house when your children are gone. There’s not enough work to do at home. So I came here because this was a new development at that time (Participant 8).

### **Belong to a community.**

Many of the participants also mentioned community as a reason for becoming a. Two participants specifically stated they became a volunteer to “repay the community.” However, community seems to be a stronger motivator than participants realized. Five of the nine interviewees admitted they wanted to belong to a community. One participant freely states, “I wanted to be engaged in the community.” Another participant describes more circuitously their desire to be a part of a community, “When I was working, I was on a lot of different boards around town. So I thought I had fulfilled my give back to the community (duty). But I found when I retired that I wanted this.” Still one participant (72) reflectively explains:

Volunteering gives you a new routine and it gets you around other people. If you’re not around a lot of people, you can tend to become peculiar. And so volunteering... gives you the opportunity to give back and interact with people and brush up on social skills that may be starting to lax. If you’re not around a lot of people, you go weird. And no one wants to be weird like that.

Participants seem to be modestly aware of their motivational desire to belong. Volunteering seems to be a way for participants to satisfy this desire.

### **Contribute to the community.**

A few volunteers described “the nice feeling you get” when you are helping out the community. One interviewee explains volunteering even on a winter day “just to help the one person that comes in” is worth it. (Participant 72) Another participant (48) described their desire to benefit the community:

I was not able to contribute to the community when I was working. The job was too demanding. And so, I kind of looked forward to being able to give back a little to the community. So, it just seemed like a good place to do that because the (small, municipal public garden) is one of the nicest things in the community.

Only a few interviewees indicated they were motivated to volunteer because they wanted to benefit their community. This is likely a secondary reason people choose to volunteer as most participants admitted to having selfish reasons for volunteering.

### **Learn about plants.**

Four participants mentioned they decided to volunteer because they wanted to learn more about horticulture. Two had previously taken Master Gardener classes and were inspired to gain practical skills to accommodate their newly acquired classroom knowledge. Only one of these volunteers mentioned the need to acquire 40 community service hours, “I had to get my forty hours in. And there was ample opportunity to do that at the Botanic Gardens.” (Participant 48) I suspect, the desire to learn is stronger in adult volunteers than the desire to gain Master Gardener status. This explains why more volunteers mentioned learning than gaining community service hours as the reason they decided to become a volunteer. One participant succinctly described their interest in learning:

Well, we had (recently) moved here. So I figured all I could do is learn. I’ve always been interested in gardening. And it was so different here with this whole elevation and high plains thing. I knew that I needed to learn more. That was my motivation, simply an avenue to learn more about gardening.

Almost half the participants described the influence that learning has on their desire to continue volunteering. One participant explained, “That’s why I work here; because I don’t stop learning” (Participant 19). Another participant (48) described the inspiration they gained from knowledge acquired through volunteering, “I just learned so much. And I became very courageous about growing things from seed as a result of working there. So I decided to try all sorts of things because I saw them grown at the Botanic Gardens.” One participant best characterizes the importance of learning about plants through volunteering, “I almost always learn some little tid-bit. Or somebody will say something about a plant or a way of doing things. And, of course, I am a life-long learner, so I like that part.” Based on personal interviews, learning about plants is a principal motivator that influenced people to become a volunteer. It is also a reason people continue to volunteer at a small, municipal public garden.

### **Volunteers Expect to Gain by Contributing to a Small, Municipal Public Garden**

#### **Sense of accomplishment.**

Three of the nine interviewed participants acknowledged the role personal accomplishment had in fulfilling their volunteer expectations. Several participants described the value they place on feeling useful. The personal pride of working around plants fulfilled some volunteers’ expectations. One volunteer described their pride regarding annual flower planting, “Being able to go out and drive by and say, ‘See that plant there? I put that in the ground.’ That is exciting to me” (Participant 19). Another participant also discussed the importance of having finished a project:

I like seeing projects through. I like seeing how the work I’ve done has developed. It’s been really nice to go back and see the area that we’ve cleared is now growing veggies. It’s lovely to go back there. I was really happy to bring (my spouse) and show them that. And I’m saying, ‘This is what I did today.’ And it’s nice being a part of that. And also going back to the different areas we cut back. It’s nice to go back to an area and feel a little bit of ownership, especially to something that’s in the public. That, kind of, stays

with you long after you have stopped volunteering there. You can still feel like I was part of doing that or I helped manage this garden. You feel a bit of ownership to that. That's very rewarding.

The sense of accomplishment alluded to by participants fulfilled the expectations of some.

However, another theme stood out as major contributor regarding volunteer expectations.

### **Social relationships**

All nine of the interviewees acknowledged the importance of socializing to the volunteer experience. The relationships volunteers develop with staff and other volunteers are an unexpected, but important, aspect to their experience. One participant explained, "I think one of the best parts of volunteering is the opportunity to talk and mix with other people" (Participant 119). Another participant (6) explained the association with people and developed friendships keep them coming back. Another participant stated, "I developed close friendships with two staff members, and I think they are probably the two big reasons why I stayed" (Participant 8). One participant discussed establishing relationships while volunteering:

There are certain people that are on the staff and certain people that are volunteers that I just love coming back and interacting with. I love coming back and interacting with the staff. The staff is wonderful, as are most of the volunteers. And I fully enjoy them.  
(Participant 19)

According to one participant (6), "volunteering is a social benefit." It is interesting to discover that socializing is not necessarily a reason people start volunteering. However, it is likely a reason people continue to volunteer. When asked, "Do social interactions influence your desire to volunteer?" One participant said, "No, not in the beginning, but now that I know people and meet new people... the social interactions became more important and more enjoyable."

Socializing brings more value to the volunteer experience:

The chat while you are doing the work is really important. The two people I've been working with... We've been working away but we've talked about everything under the sun. And that's been really important as well. People come to volunteering for lots of

different reasons. Some people rely on volunteering as kind of substitute for therapy. They really want to come and offload their life (problems) because they are very lonely. They don't have anybody else in their life. And I think socializing during is huge.

Another interviewee had more to add on the subject of socializing and volunteering, "It's a good thing to get out of the house and meet new people, interact with people, interact with the public, interact with volunteers, and with the staff. There are some mornings that I ask myself, do I really have to go? And then I show up, and I love it. It's just a matter of getting there."

### **Volunteers Describe Their Experience**

#### **Time well spent.**

When asked to describe their volunteer experience, all participants agreed that it was very enjoyable, very satisfying, and they were glad it happened. Participants noted that the experience was positive because the staff is accessible. "If you have any questions you can usually run somebody down and get an answer" (Participant 48). Also participants noted they enjoyed learning new plant information. And many of the interviewees favorably commented about the peacefulness of working with plants in the greenhouse and gardens. Another participant acknowledged the staff's flexibility with scheduling volunteers as a positive factor regarding their experience. While there were many different reasons participants provided for enjoying their experience, everyone agreed on the significance of having a formal break time.

#### **Break time facilitates social interactions.**

The staff has strongly encouraged a break at 10:00 a.m. since the small, municipal public garden opened. When asked about the importance of break time, participants admitted enjoying snacks, drinks, sitting, and socializing. One participant explained, "No volunteer wants to work the whole time. It's fun to joke around and have a good time" (Participant 6). Another participant elaborated on the importance of break time:

It was nice to have a break. Sometimes when you are working outside, and it is really hot, it's nice to come in and get some water. It also gives you a chance to visit with other staff members you might not work with. It's nice to visit with other volunteers that work in different parts of the garden. So it's kind of a nice thing because it builds a little more teamwork for volunteers.

Encouraging break time is not just about facilitating social interactions and engagement though. One participant reminded me that break time is important to give volunteers a chance to catch their breath.

(Break time) is good for volunteers because a lot of the volunteer (workforce) is considerably older... I'm here to tell you that when you hit 60 and above, and you're working outside in the morning sun for three hours, that's hard work. And that age demographic doesn't like to say, 'I'm getting tired.' They just keep on plugging and plugging and plugging. And it gets hard. People just need to cool off and sit down and relax a little bit. (Participant 19)

Break time is described as a method to promote teambuilding, socializing, and camaraderie. However, it is not enough to overcome a negative volunteer experience. Some participants described their overall experience as divided between good and bad. One volunteer was emotionally torn when asked to describe their volunteering experience. "I've really, really enjoyed it. And up to this point, where I am reevaluating a little bit, I think it's been great" (Participant 100).

### **Recognition Influences Volunteer Retention**

Recognition plays a big role in the volunteer experience as indicated by a majority of the participants interviewed.

#### **Personal recognition.**

All of the participants described the high value they place on a personal thank you received from staff after a task was finished or at the end of their volunteering shift. The value of a personal thank you was described by participants as, "very important," "bigger than anything," "the best thing to hear," and "a big deal." One participant elaborated on the value of a personal

thank you, “I think you’re always motivated to keep doing a good job when someone thanks you for what you do” (Participant 72). While all of the participants identified the importance of a verbal thank you from staff, a few even indicated they felt appreciated by garden visitors. One participant (119) relayed a positive experience when someone passing through the gardens recognized their work by saying, “Thank you for all the work that you do.”

Interviewees indicated they highly value personal recognition. Three participants, however, cautioned that sounding insincere when thanking a volunteer can have the opposite effect. One participant explained they felt one staff member seemed insincere when saying thank you at the end of their shift. Another participant cautioned about overusing a personal thank you. “I know how that can be a platitude that you just spit out. So you have to be careful with it because if that is all you ever hear, it doesn’t go very far.” (Participant 100)

### **Public recognition.**

When asked if public recognition influences their desire to volunteer, the interviewees all agreed it is not a factor. Most indicated, public recognition was nice, but that it does not impact their volunteering experience or desire to continue. Some of the comments included: “I don’t need to be in the public scene,” “it’s not really a factor at all,” and “been there, done that, don’t care anymore.” Participants unanimously agreed, “I’m not (volunteering) for public recognition at all. It’s totally personal. I don’t expect it, and I don’t anticipate it.” It is interesting to note no one interviewed negatively described public recognition gestures.

### **Recognition opportunities.**

Although all participants agreed that public recognition does not influence their motivation level, it must to some degree impact their experience. When asked what additional ways volunteers could be recognized, a few ideas focused on adding value to the volunteers’ lives.

One participant suggested providing volunteers an opportunity to attend a question and answer session featuring horticulture experts. Surprisingly, most participants indicated they thought other volunteers would appreciate public recognition efforts. Most of the suggestions offered related to public recognition. Suggestions included: listing the names of volunteers in the seasonal newsletter, thanking volunteers in the local newspaper, handing out pins that commemorate years of service, and occasionally thanking volunteers on a radio garden show featuring the small, municipal public garden's staff. One participant indicated they thought every volunteer should receive a t-shirt. Two participants indicated they thought "someone that's been a long-time volunteer should get a brick (with their name printed on it) in the garden"

(Participant 6). Another participant added:

One of the things that I thought would always be kind of cool... If you worked for five years, it would be neat to have a brick out there with (your name) printed on it. (You could) start building a little path with your volunteers' names on it. Something like that would really be cool. I was trying to think of something here that would be inexpensive (and) permanent. (Participant 100)

Based on nine one-on-one interviews, public recognition did not make or break a volunteer's experience, however it can help commemorate volunteer efforts and help volunteers see their time is valued.

### **Why People Stopped Volunteering at a Small, Municipal Public Garden**

Interviewees were asked to weigh in on what factors they thought lead to volunteer turnover. A handful of reasons were offered including organizational changes, personnel changes, negative staff interactions, personal responsibility changes, competition from other organizations, and physical limitations.

### **Organizational changes.**

Volunteering has not always been a positive experience for everyone this small, municipal public garden. Some recent organizational changes in protocol and staff were identified as factors that detract from the volunteering experience. One participant described a recent change (within 12 months) to mandate volunteers to undergo police background checks before allowing volunteers to start as a “pretty big barrier” (Participant 72).

Well I guess the other weird thing, that I think, is stopping people from volunteering . . . Now you have to get fingerprinted to volunteer here. And I know the city has reasons for that, but I don't know if they are good enough reasons. If somebody wanted to volunteer at church, they wouldn't require police background checks and fingerprinting. (People) just want to help. But (background checks) is a pretty big barrier.

This was only brought up by one of the nine participants. So it is not as heavily weighted as other factors that may have taken away from the volunteering experience. A change in staff personnel was identified as a factor that leads to negative experiences for almost half of the participants. Two volunteers alluded to the fact that greenhouse tools like “buckets,” “brooms,” and “box cutters” were not as easily accessible. Both participants indicated they were annoyed by the inaccessibility of routine tools. When one volunteer found out the box cutters were moved from the break room to the basement, they explained, “They belong up here where they are handy. That is the type of thing that sometimes bothers me.” They attributed their frustration to a change in staff. “Things are not available on the floor the way they used to be. It's just a matter of personnel who run the show. They want it one way as opposed to the way it used to be, and I sometimes still have a hard time adjusting to that” (Participant 8). A second participant (100) indicated their frustration regarding tool location resulted from lack of communication:

Right now when I want a tool, I have to hunt for it...I think things have to be more accessible and for God's sake, let us know where you (moved) them. If you change things, that's ok. But tell us. Don't make use run around here like a bunch of idiots until we just don't care whether work gets done or not!

A few participants indicated they were irritated by the fewer social interactions that occurred after a change in staff personnel. One participant described their frustration with fewer breaks as feeling like, “There’s no camaraderie (because there is) no formal sit down or chit chat... I think a loss of socialization time reduces the joy that I associated with (volunteering)” (Participant 100). Three more participants mentioned they barely had the opportunity to get to know the summer interns, because the interns were not regularly at the morning break. This detracted from the enjoyment of their volunteer experience. Another participant also discussed the importance of sharing a break together. “There was a big turnover in staff, and it’s a lot younger than it was. I hate to say it but (younger staff) doesn’t appreciate how much somebody in their mid sixties and seventies needs a break. And you can’t say, ‘if you want a break, (take one)’. You have to make it mandatory” (Participant 19). One participant was outright angry about the changes to their volunteer routine. “I don’t like the new break room routine. It is very business-like . . . (there’s) no food, no snacks. I try to avoid angry hostile work environments” (Participant 6). Overall, many of the participants explained that break time doesn’t hold the same social connection it once did, and that this takes away from the whole volunteering experience.

### **Personnel changes.**

All nine participants acknowledged change as a factor that could lead to volunteer turnover. Participants observed that changes in staff lead to changes to the volunteer workforce. In regards to change, one participant remarked:

I think change is very hard for volunteers as well. I think you lose massive amounts of volunteers, in my experience, when change comes around. And it might not be a change that even affects them directly. But they hate change. They wanted to join this one organization. So I am sure the expansion of the Botanic Gardens will stop one or two volunteers from coming along, because they don’t like change. They thought the place was perfect the way it was. (Participant 43)

Participants recognize that other volunteers do not want things to change. So when a staff change occurs, that impacts them directly; the threat of turnover is severe. One participant (8) described the difficulty that comes with a change in staff personnel:

The most difficult thing for me was when a (longtime staff member left and a new member started). It was hard for me to adjust to (the new) way of doing things as opposed to the way (the longtime staff member) did things. I am not saying the (new) way was not right or that I didn't like it. It was just different, and it took me a while to adjust. And I am not fully adjusted yet. I still have some things that I just don't think are done right. And it's not my business. I am not running the show. I don't have to be here, so it's not something I would complain about to anybody.

Two participants added that staff transitions that involve changes in age demographic increase the threat of turnover even more:

There were a lot of changes with staff. And everybody (was) so used to the way the old staff did things. (Volunteers) don't like change... Things are different. Some people don't like different. And I think maybe that might be why some of them left. Everybody's personality is totally different from what it was. And they were very used to the old staff. It had been that way forever. And with the exception of (two staff members), it was a complete turnover. And that was hard for people. It's just not what it used to be. I've even heard a couple people say that (Participant 19).

The (previous staff members) were closer to my age. So there was a different sense of camaraderie. Sometimes I think there is a little age gap now for people my age. We are older, and sometimes I wonder if (younger staff members) value us as much as younger volunteers because we can't do as much (Participant 100).

Changes in staff are not the only personnel changes that lead to volunteer turnover. The loss of a volunteer is also a factor leading to volunteer turnover. Two participants discussed the close connections they shared with past volunteers. They alluded to the fact that the volunteer experience was not the same after a fellow volunteer left. Both participants openly discussed the empty feeling that existed after a volunteer passed away, left due to health reasons, or switched shifts. "I really miss (my friend), because they don't come in on Fridays anymore" (Participant 100).

### **Negative staff interactions.**

Two participants identified negative staff interactions as a potential reason for volunteer turnover. When a new staff member has a different personality than their predecessor, turmoil is possible. One participant admitted feeling “just as negative” about the change “as a lot of other people.” They elaborated, “You know, a new person comes in, and they have their own ideas about how they want things done, and what you’ve done for years has to change” (Participant 5). One participant communicated they were less motivated after a negative staff interaction. Participant 6 stated, “Staff saying I don’t care changed my whole attitude. It ruined the experience (for me)... It ruined my motivation, pissed me off, and made me not care as much as I used to.”

Another participant described their negative interaction as feeling caught in the middle of an “argument between staff.” Participant 100 explained, “It’s not good for your volunteers, on any day, to see or hear” another staff member “get stabbed in the back.” They elaborated, “Don’t bring your volunteers into the politics of the workplace,” as it makes the volunteering experience “very disheartening.” Another participant (5) described their negative encounter with a staff member in a more general sense, “Once in awhile you meet a person that’s not a pleasant person to be around; it discourages me a little bit.”

### **Personal responsibility changes.**

Volunteers are people with other interests, responsibilities, and commitments that require their attention too. Several participants discussed how personal responsibilities compete with the time they have available for volunteering. Participant examples include sudden emergencies, declining health of a family member, and interest in other worthy causes. One participant described why they thought some people stopped volunteering as, “I think it is just the time

element and having to deal with life situations.” Personal responsibilities and life changes can trump volunteer passion. Volunteer organizations have to compete with changing life circumstances like a new grandchild, family health, and income opportunities. Life changes are not the only factors challenging the time volunteers can contribute.

### **Competition from other organizations.**

Three participants mentioned volunteers have a “smorgasbord” of nonprofit organizations competing for their time. One participant explained they think other organizations, attracting volunteers to their project, are a potential factor leading to volunteer turnover. “It’s probably competition from other entities that need volunteers. There are just a lot out there. So you kind of have to rise to the top in terms of worthiness causes. The (small, municipal public garden) is competing against the hospital, hospice, and Boys & Girls Club. (These are) deserving and good organizations that need good volunteers” (Participant 48). A second participant (100) explained, volunteering can turn into a commitment:

Sometimes people don’t want to be tied to a specific commitment for a long period of time, because that becomes a job. But I think people just lose interest or move on, especially if there is nothing grabbing them and holding them there. The grass is greener on the other side of the fence. So I think you lose some just because they are trying different things. I think a lot of times people find something new and exciting (Participant 100).

Competition from other organizations is a factor leading to volunteer turnover. However, volunteer turnover is also influenced by one’s changing physical abilities.

### **Physical limitations.**

When asked what might lead to a person not coming back, one participant suggested that pain resulting from worn out bodies might be a factor. Participant 8 described “joint problems” and “getting worn out too soon” as physical struggles that detract from the joy of volunteering. A second participant described the frustration a volunteer might feel if their physical limitations

were not understood. Working with a group of volunteers that are at retirement age or older means some may have health problems. “(Some) really struggle to get down on their knees. And they are just too damn proud to say anything” (Participant 19). They also explained that it may be less embarrassing to stop volunteering than to speak up and admit that a task is too physically demanding. If this were the case, then a volunteer coordination program would need to focus on improving the lines of communication between staff and volunteers.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Discussion

Volunteers are motivated to contribute their personal time to the small, municipal public garden because they want to feel useful, enjoy learning, enjoy socializing, and want to belong to a community. This could be due to the fact that many volunteers are newly retired professionals looking to fill the void of no longer working full-time. My research findings support a similar study involving Cooperative Extension Service volunteers working in a 4-H setting in Lincoln County, Virginia. Payne (2011) indicates volunteers are internally motivated to help people. Similarly, volunteers at a small, municipal public garden are motivated by the idea of feeling useful. The notion that volunteers are seeking a sense of purpose was also identified by a study involving volunteers at Iowa State University's botanical garden (Haynes & Trexler, 2003). It is interesting to note that providing volunteers an avenue to fill their free time is not enough to retain volunteers.

Atmosphere plays a big part in how volunteers value their experience. Working with plants in a serene setting like a conservatory or in a garden creates a positive atmosphere. Working alongside enthusiastic staff members and other volunteers also promotes an enjoyable experience. It is clear the social interactions with staff and others influence a volunteer's desire to continue. Informal breaks involving snacks and socializing make for an enjoyable experience, but do not play a principal role in volunteer motivation. Considering the Reiss Motivation Profile, used to measure an individual's internal motivations, it seems social interactions and friendships address three basic human desires including acceptance, social contact, and status (Reiss, 2000).

Volunteer recognition is also not a major motivating factor. It is, however, a principal factor in the volunteering experience. Davis (2000) explains volunteer recognition influences volunteer retention. My study reinforces this statement because volunteers at a small, municipal public garden want to be recognized for their efforts. Virtually all interviewed volunteers indicated the personal touch of a verbal thank you is enough to keep them feeling valued. Most of the interviewed volunteers explained that public acts of recognition or ceremonial thank yous are a nice gesture, but not necessary. Returned surveys also indicated recognition is a nice benefit to volunteering.

It was interesting to discover that most interviewed volunteers indicated a personal thank you is more highly valued than public recognition. However, when asked about ways to improve volunteer recognition, all of the proposed ideas involved forms of public recognition! This gives one pause to consider if volunteers feel as modestly as they claim. Thanking volunteers publically through the newspaper, an email blast, organizational website, and announcing names on a weekly gardening radio show featuring the staff were all identified as possible avenues. Other public recognition ideas included providing every volunteer a t-shirt, buying decorative pins to commemorate years of service, and building a pathway with volunteers' names on a brick commemorating their work. Volunteers indicated they value personal recognition more than public recognition.

Research indicates volunteers are motivated to contribute their time because they want to feel useful, enjoy learning, enjoy socializing, and want to belong to a community. Their experience is enjoyable because they work in a positive atmosphere surrounded by beautiful plants and enthusiastic people. Furthermore, the experience is improved when volunteers are recognized for their work. This provokes the question, "Does the absence of these factors create volunteer

turnover?” Yes, but those are not the main reasons people give for resigning from their volunteer positions. Volunteer turnover occurs for a myriad of reasons. The most often listed reasons include too much of a time commitment, life changing circumstances (old age, ill family member, moving, new child, or new job), a change to the volunteers’ routine (new rules, organizational change, or staff change), negative staff interactions, competition from other organizations, and burnout. Maslach and Schaufeli (1993) depict burnout as sustained mental, emotional, and physical exhaustion leading to a decline in work. Their study also indicated that burnout is an influential factor in volunteer turnover. But, it is important to note that the volunteers have different thresholds for burnout and other stressful changes. So it can be difficult to predict whether burnout or another aforementioned reason will lead to volunteer turnover.

The social exchange theory offers a framework to predict volunteer actions. If people contribute to an organization to the point where they perceive they are being rewarded, then increasing rewards without increasing costs would theoretically improve volunteer retention. Haynes and Trexler (2003) used a similar cost-benefit analysis to evaluate volunteer retention at Iowa State University’s affiliated garden. Volunteer costs included time, materials, and money. Benefits included material gain, socialization, and feeling useful. My research also indicated volunteers either identified no costs with volunteering or very minimal costs (gas money and work clothes). Most volunteers, if they noticed a cost at all, indicated time was a cost to volunteering. Volunteers at a small, municipal public garden indicated the benefits include plant knowledge acquisition, feeling useful, contributing to the community, and socializing. Volunteers also indicated an orientation program, continuing education classes, more on-the-job training, stronger volunteer recognition efforts, and more social interaction opportunities would

add to the list of volunteer benefits. It stands to reason that implementing these benefits while maintain existing costs would tip the balance in favor of volunteer retention.

### **Limitations**

One limitation was the amount of time I had available to observe research participants. Identifying factors influencing volunteer retention at a small, municipal public garden helped explain the volunteer perspective. However, a small sample size is another limitation for this research study. Because participant responses were based on their unique volunteering experience at a small, municipal public garden generalizations to all small botanical garden institutions are not entirely applicable.

### **Recommendations**

Effective volunteer management involves an impartial assessment of how a nonprofit organization's offered benefits compare to its perceived costs. Knowing the motivational factors that influence volunteers to join and the reasons they give for leaving have implications for improving the volunteer coordination program at a small, municipal public garden. I would recommend the staff invest in a volunteer orientation program, which would reduce confusion about where tools are located and make new volunteers feel more a part of the organization. It would also be helpful to assign new volunteers a tenured volunteer mentor. This would help new volunteers acclimate sooner, and it would allow the tenured volunteer an opportunity to pass down institutional knowledge. This has the added benefit of allowing the tenured volunteer the opportunity to feel useful by sharing their knowledge. This is paramount when an organization has aging volunteers that still want to be useful but may have increasing physical limitations.

Volunteers want to feel appreciated for the time and effort they contribute. So recognition efforts need to be considered in expanding a volunteer program. Volunteers indicated public

recognition was secondary to a personal thank you, however all the recognition efforts are appreciated and desired. Investing money in a brick path that commemorates volunteer efforts similar to what botanical gardens do for donors would be appropriate. Also allowing volunteers the opportunity to see their name in print helps them feel appreciated. Recognition is an important benefit to volunteering. The social interactions that occur while volunteering, however, are a more highly valued benefit. I would recommend continuing a formal volunteer break time in which staff and volunteers come together to share snacks and stories. It would also be beneficial to offer continuing education opportunities for volunteers to come together to socialize and learn about gardening. Learning is a highly valued benefit of volunteering, so offering more learning opportunities would create meaning for volunteers. Increasing perceived benefits and maintaining perceived costs tips the scale in favor of volunteer retention.

Volunteer turnover is influenced by many factors outside of a nonprofit organization's control including: changes in a volunteer's life circumstances, declining physical abilities, and competition from other nonprofit organizations. This means more attention should be paid to reducing the influence of factors an organization can control like negative staff interactions, sudden organizational changes, and personnel changes. I would recommend implementing major changes slowly, which would help mitigate changes to a volunteer's experience. This suggests helping volunteers transition from their existing responsibilities to their new responsibilities when the new grand conservatory opens which will be paramount in retaining existing volunteers. Still, effort will need to be expended to recruit new volunteers to supplement the inevitable loss of some volunteers and meet the needs of the new building. The factors that motivate volunteers to contribute their time (working with plants, belonging to a community, feeling useful, and socializing) need to be highlighted when recruiting future volunteers.

## **Future Research**

This investigative study identified the underlying motivations that inspired volunteers to join a small, municipal public garden. It also identified the factors that lead to volunteer resignations. These factors served to provide a framework for improving the volunteer coordination program at a small, municipal public garden. However, botanical gardens across the country would benefit from more quantitative studies involving larger populations and random sampling. According to Creswell (2011), qualitative research provides “a detailed understanding of a central phenomenon” (p.16). It does not promote the extrapolation of results from one site to others. Therefore, I would suggest future quantitative studies focused on surveying volunteers in regional botanical gardens in the United States.

## **Conclusions**

Budget cuts and increasing operation costs limit the number of staff members a public garden can afford to pay. Instead, many botanical gardens are relying on unpaid volunteers to accomplishing much of the work needing to be done. To continue to manage a successful volunteer coordination program, public gardens need to examine how their perceived benefits compare to the volunteers personal costs. A cost-benefit imbalance regarding a volunteer’s experience leads to poor retention rates. So public gardens need to consciously consider how volunteer benefits can be increased. Based on surveys, observations, and one-on-one interviews at a small, municipal public garden, more weight to the benefit side could be added by promoting a sense of purpose, appealing to their life-long learning interest, encouraging social interactions, and reinforcing their place in their volunteering community. Furthermore, attention should be paid to maintaining a volunteer’s initial motivations. This means providing opportunities to work with plants, gain new gardening skills, and develop personal relationships. On the other hand,

the staff needs to increase benefits that improve the volunteer experience to offset retention factors beyond their control. Most important, staff needs to minimize the retention threats it can control by eliminating negative staff/volunteer interactions, being supportive of life changes, and offering opportunities to take time off from volunteering to reduce the threat of burnout. Other botanical gardens across the country would also benefit from adopting these volunteer coordination practices. Ultimately, focusing on the volunteers' internal motivations would enrich the volunteers' experience, improve the volunteer coordination program and enhance the small, municipal public garden's impact.

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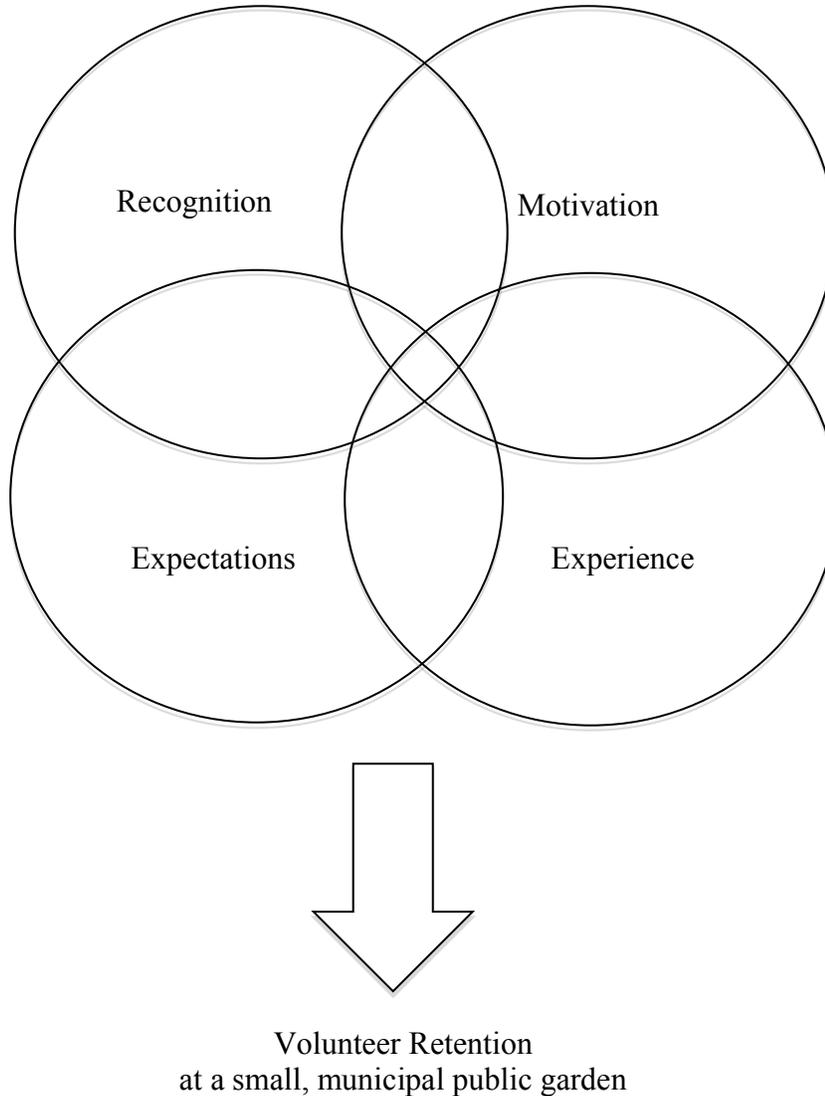
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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Concept Map

This concept map identifies the variables motivation, experience, expectations, and recognition as they relate to volunteer retention at a small, municipal public garden. The point at which all four circles come together represents a harmonious volunteer experience.



## Appendix B: Literature Review Strategy

The most instrumental citations are indicated here.

Citation	Summary	Category
Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2014). <i>Volunteering in the United States-2013</i> (BLS Publication No. USDL 14-0314). Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.	Information regarding volunteering for nonprofit organizations across the U.S.	Statistics
Cnaan, R.A. & Goldberg-Glen, R.S. (1991). Measuring motivation to volunteer in human services. <i>Journal of Applied Behavior Science.</i> , 27(3), 269-284.	Factors used to identify and describe volunteer motivation. It's helpful to understand how volunteers describe what motivates them.	Motivation
Garner, J.T., & Garner, L.T. (2011). Volunteering an opinion: Organizational voice and volunteer retention in nonprofit organizations. <i>Nonprofit and voluntary Sector Quarterly</i> , 40(5), 813-828.	Discusses how to recruit and retain volunteers in a nonprofit organization. Provides insight into what drives volunteer motivation	Volunteer management
Jutila, S.C., Meyer, M.H., & Hoover, E. (2005). Focus groups and staff surveys: Tools to assess the future direction of volunteer involvement. <i>HortTechnology</i> , 15(4), 880-885.	Helped me identify how my study could add to the body of knowledge regarding volunteers in botanical gardens. This study identified what leads to positive and negative experiences for volunteers in a botanical garden	Volunteer management in a botanical garden
Payne, R. (2011). <i>Factors influencing 4-H volunteer recruitment and retention in Lincoln County</i> (Unpublished master's thesis). West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV.	Helped provide a framework for building my research survey	Research methods

<p>Skoglund, A. (2003). Do not forget about your volunteers: A qualitative analysis of factors influencing volunteer turnover. <i>Health &amp; Social Work, 31(3)</i>, 217-220.</p>	<p>Provided an in-depth look at using qualitative methods to assess volunteer engagement. Also helped provide a general understanding of what engages volunteers</p>	<p>Volunteer engagement</p>
<p>Stallings, J., &amp; Freiberg, H. J. (1991). Observation for the improvement of teaching. In H. Waxman &amp; H. Walberg (Eds.), <i>Effective teaching: Current research</i> (pp. 107-133). Berkeley, CA: McCutchan Publishing Corporation.</p>	<p>Served as a resource for building my observational instrument for my mixed-methods study</p>	<p>Research methods</p>
<p>Vettern, R., Hall, T., &amp; Schmidt, M (2009). Understanding what rocks their world: Motivational factors of rural volunteers. <i>Journal of Extension, 47(6)</i>, 1-9. Retrieved from <a href="http://www.joe.org/joe/2009 december/pdf/JOE_v47_6a3.pdf">http://www.joe.org/joe/2009 december/pdf/JOE_v47_6a3.pdf</a></p>	<p>Identified possible themes for my mixed-methods study including: motivation, engagement, and adult volunteerism</p>	<p>Motivation and volunteer engagement</p>

**Appendix C: Letter of Consent**

March 17, 2015

Dear Shane Smith

My name is Tyler Mason, and I am researching volunteer interactions in public gardens. The following information is provided to help you understand the scope of this project. The purpose of the study is to identify the underlying factors that improve volunteer recruitment and retention. Surveys, focus group interviews, and field observations will be carried out to understand how a volunteer’s motivation, experience, expectations, and recognition influence their actions.

The information will be used to improve the volunteer coordination program at the Cheyenne Botanic Gardens for current and future volunteers. All research participants will sign letters of consent stating they understand the nature of the research study. Research participation is voluntary and any one can withdraw at any time without affecting their relationship with the Cheyenne Botanic Gardens. All data will be kept private and names will not be associated with the research findings in any way. There are no known risks associated with this study and research participants will be adequately protected. I can provide you with a copy of the research findings at your request.

The Cheyenne Botanic Gardens involvement with this research project includes: sharing volunteer names, addresses, and E-mail addresses since January 1, 2010, and allowing the researcher access to survey past and present volunteers, and observe volunteers as they work.

If you are willing to participate, would you please sign this consent form. You are signing it with full knowledge of the nature and purpose of the study. A copy of this form will be given to you to keep.

\_\_\_\_\_ Name

\_\_\_\_\_ Signature Date

Tyler Mason  
Co-Principal Investigator  
Graduate Student  
307-631-1494

Nancy Irlbeck, Ph.D.  
Principal Investigator  
Associate Dean of Academic Affairs  
970-491-6274

## Appendix D: Survey Pre-card

I am Tyler Mason, a horticulturist for the Cheyenne Botanic Gardens and a graduate student at Colorado State University studying Extension Education. In a few days you will receive a questionnaire in the mail on the experiences of volunteers and what motivates or demotivates them to work in a botanical garden. This research is being conducted as part of my CSU Master's degree requirements.

I am writing in advance because many people like to know ahead of time that they will be contacted. This study may help the Cheyenne Botanic Gardens improve the experience for current and future volunteers. Once you receive it, would you please take a few minutes of your time to complete the survey and return it via the stamped self-addressed envelope.

The Institutional Review Board at Colorado State University has approved this study. If you have any questions about your rights as research participants, you may contact the IRB by emailing [Ricro@mail.colostate.edu](mailto:Ricro@mail.colostate.edu) or by calling 970-491-1553.

Thank you for your time and consideration. It's only with the generous help of people like you that our research can be successful.

## Appendix E: Survey Cover Letter

May 14, 2015

Dear Cheyenne Botanic Gardens Past and Present Volunteers

Volunteers, like you, are an essential component to the Cheyenne Botanic Gardens. You help provide over 90 percent of the physical labor every year. Without the help of volunteers, the Gardens would struggle to fulfill its mission. I am writing to ask for your help in a research study that aims to improve the volunteer coordination program at the Cheyenne Botanic Gardens. I am recruiting past and present volunteers to participate in this research.

I am Tyler Mason, a horticulturist for the Cheyenne Botanic Gardens. I am also a graduate student at Colorado State University studying Extension Education. Under the direction of my advisor, Dr. Nancy Irlbeck, I am conducting research to identify the underlying factors that influence volunteer motivations. The results of this research study will be used to prepare a thesis to partially fulfill the requirements for a Master's of Agriculture Degree.

The survey includes 65 questions. It will take approximately 15 minutes to complete and you may skip any question you are not comfortable answering. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw your consent and stop participation at any time without penalty. At the end of the survey, you are asked if you would also be interested in participating in a one-on-one interview. Participation in this research is voluntary.

All of your information will be kept confidential; your name and data will be kept separately and will only be accessible to the research team. All survey responses will be identifiable to the researchers via a three-digit code linked to your name and contact information. Survey results will be reported in a summary format and individual responses will not be identifiable. There are no known risks or direct benefits to you associated with this research.

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Colorado State University has approved this study. Please let me know if you would like a summary of the results. If you have any questions about completing the survey or about the research study, you may contact me at [tyler.mason@colostate.edu](mailto:tyler.mason@colostate.edu); 307-631-1494. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research, please contact the CSU IRB at [Ricro@mail.colostate.edu](mailto:Ricro@mail.colostate.edu); 970-491-1553.

As a token of our appreciation, please enjoy a free \$1 class on us! We sincerely appreciate your time and effort in this study. Please return the completed survey in the enclosed postage-paid self addressed return envelope by **June 1, 2015**.

We thank you in advance for your consideration.

Tyler Mason  
Graduate Student

Nancy Irlbeck, Ph.D.  
Associate Dean of Academic Affairs

## **Appendix F: Survey Instrument**

Investigating Volunteer Retention at a Small, Municipal Public Garden

Tyler Mason  
Graduate Student  
Agricultural Extension Education  
College of Agricultural Sciences  
Colorado State University  
Fort Collins, CO

## Volunteer Retention

**Instructions:** Using the following scale, indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements. Indicate your opinion by circling the letters that best correspond to your response: SD – Strongly Disagree, D – Disagree, N – Neither Agree Nor Disagree, A – Agree, SA – Strongly Agree

<b>I became a Volunteer at the (small, municipal public garden) because...</b>	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I wanted to benefit my community	SD	D	N	A	SA
2. I wanted to work with plants	SD	D	N	A	SA
3. I wanted to feel like I was helping people	SD	D	N	A	SA
4. I wanted to wanted meet other volunteers	SD	D	N	A	SA
5. I wanted the recognition associated with being a volunteer	SD	D	N	A	SA
6. I wanted to learn new skills	SD	D	N	A	SA
7. My friend was involved	SD	D	N	A	SA
8. I would receive status in my community	SD	D	N	A	SA
9. I derive personal satisfaction from working with others	SD	D	N	A	SA
10. I derive satisfaction from working with my hands	SD	D	N	A	SA
11. I was asked	SD	D	N	A	SA
12. I wanted to gain skills which might lead to employment	SD	D	N	A	SA
13. The (garden) has a reputation for training	SD	D	N	A	SA
14. I needed service hours for a community minded organization like Master Gardener or Rotary	SD	D	N	A	SA
15. I needed volunteer hours for a school organization or a scholarship opportunity	SD	D	N	A	SA
16. I needed volunteer hours for court appointed community service	SD	D	N	A	SA

<b>I believe people continue volunteering at the (small, municipal public garden) because...</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neither</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>
17. They want to feel needed by others	SD	D	N	A	SA
18. The community encourages volunteerism	SD	D	N	A	SA
19. They like acquiring new skills	SD	D	N	A	SA
20. They feel appreciated by the community	SD	D	N	A	SA
21. They feel appreciated by other volunteers	SD	D	N	A	SA
22. They feel appreciated by staff	SD	D	N	A	SA
23. They enjoy volunteering in their spare time	SD	D	N	A	SA
24. They enjoy taking on responsibility	SD	D	N	A	SA
25. They like helping people	SD	D	N	A	SA
26. They like the recognition associated with being a volunteer	SD	D	N	A	SA
27. Their friends are involved	SD	D	N	A	SA
28. They continue to gain experience	SD	D	N	A	SA
29. They receive status in the community	SD	D	N	A	SA
30. They continue to derive personal satisfaction from working with plants	SD	D	N	A	SA
31. They were asked to continue volunteering	SD	D	N	A	SA
32. They continue to meet new volunteers	SD	D	N	A	SA
33. They can't say "no" when asked	SD	D	N	A	SA
34. They want to continue to gain skills which might lead to employment	SD	D	N	A	SA
35. They value the positive relationships formed with the staff	SD	D	N	A	SA
36. They embrace more self improvement opportunities	SD	D	N	A	SA

37. They enjoy “break time” snacks and socializing	SD	D	N	A	SA
38. They like belonging to a community minded organization	SD	D	N	A	SA
39. They value a personal “thank you” from staff	SD	D	N	A	SA
40. They appreciate the holiday gifts received in December	SD	D	N	A	SA

<b>I believe people quit volunteering at the (small, municipal public garden) because...</b>	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree
41. Time commitment required	SD	D	N	A	SA
42. Conflicts with staff	SD	D	N	A	SA
43. Conflicts with other volunteers	SD	D	N	A	SA
44. Burnout	SD	D	N	A	SA
45. Too much responsibility	SD	D	N	A	SA
46. Lack of recognition	SD	D	N	A	SA
47. Other volunteer opportunities	SD	D	N	A	SA
48. Cost involved	SD	D	N	A	SA
49. Volunteer expectations	SD	D	N	A	SA
50. Conflicts with visitors	SD	D	N	A	SA
51. Lack of appreciation from staff	SD	D	N	A	SA
52. Lack of appreciation from other volunteers	SD	D	N	A	SA
53. Lack of appreciation from community	SD	D	N	A	SA
54. Lack of training	SD	D	N	A	SA
55. Lack of communication	SD	D	N	A	SA

56. Lack of self-improvement opportunities	SD	D	N	A	SA
57. Differences of opinion with staff	SD	D	N	A	SA
58. Differences of opinion with other volunteers	SD	D	N	A	SA
59. Inappropriate jokes	SD	D	N	A	SA
60. Personality conflicts with staff	SD	D	N	A	SA
61. Personality conflicts with other volunteers	SD	D	N	A	SA

**Instructions:** For each of the following questions listed below, please mark an X next to the most appropriate answer.

62. After a day of volunteering at the (garden), I feel... **(Please mark all responses that apply.)**

\_\_\_\_\_ a) Happy

\_\_\_\_\_ b) Fulfilled

\_\_\_\_\_ c) Content

\_\_\_\_\_ d) Inspired

\_\_\_\_\_ e) Like I made a difference

\_\_\_\_\_ f) Disappointed

\_\_\_\_\_ g) Frustrated

\_\_\_\_\_ h) I wish I would have spent my time doing something else

\_\_\_\_\_ i) Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

63. What kind of support is needed for small, municipal public garden's volunteers  
(Please mark all responses that apply.)

- a) New Volunteer Orientation
- b) Available ongoing training classes
- c) Awareness of volunteer resources and materials
- d) Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

64. How important is the volunteer program?

- a) Highly important
- b) Important
- c) Not important
- e) Highly unimportant

65. Would you be willing to share your perspective regarding volunteering a one-on-one interview? Interviews will last approximately 60 minutes, and you will be compensated for your time with a \$5 Starbucks gift card. Interviews will be digitally recorded so the researcher can note all of the participants' words.

- Yes
- No

If yes, would you list a phone number and email address at which you can be reached?

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix G: Follow up Postcard

Last week a survey seeking your opinion about what motivates volunteers to want to work in a botanical garden was mailed to you.

If you have already completed and returned the survey to us, please accept our sincere thanks. If not, please do so today. We really appreciate your help because it is only by asking people like you to share their personal opinions that we can understand ways to improve our volunteer coordination program. CSU's Institutional Review Board (IRB) acknowledgment is on file.

If you did not receive a survey, or if it was misplaced, please call 307-631-1494 or email [Tyler@botanic.org](mailto:Tyler@botanic.org) and we will get another one in the mail to you directly.

## **Appendix H: Research Consent Form**

### **Consent to Participate in a Research Study**

#### **Colorado State University**

**TITLE OF STUDY:** Investigating Volunteer Retention at a Small, Municipal Public Garden

**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:** Dr. Nancy Irlbeck, Associate Dean of Academic Affairs, College of Agricultural Sciences, Nancy.Irlbeck@colostate.edu, 970-491-6274

**CO-PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:** Tyler Mason, Master's of Agriculture Student, College of Agricultural Sciences, Tjmason78@gmail.com, 307-631-1494

**WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH?** You have a valuable perspective being a past and/or present adult volunteer with the Cheyenne Botanic Gardens. Your thoughts and experiences are important to understand ways to improve volunteer management practices. All subjects must be at least 18 years old to participate

**WHO IS DOING THE STUDY?** Dr. Nancy Irlbeck and Tyler Mason are carrying out this research study. It is being conducted as part of Tyler Mason's CSU Master's degree requirements.

**WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?** We are conducting research to identify the underlying factors that influence volunteers' motivations to work in a public garden. Specifically, we are collecting information on what encourages better volunteer interactions.

**WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?** The one-on-one interview will take place where you feel most comfortable. This will take about one hour of your time. This is a one-time meeting. The volunteer observations will occur during your normally scheduled volunteer time. The observations will occur randomly two times out of your next four scheduled volunteer days.

**WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO?** If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to share your thoughts related to volunteering at the Cheyenne Botanic Gardens. Open-ended questions will be asked to understand how the Cheyenne Botanic Gardens can improve volunteering. Participating in the volunteer observation portion of the study will occur randomly, so you are encouraged to treat your volunteer work day just like any other day.

**ARE THERE REASONS WHY I SHOULD NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?** Volunteers younger than 18 years old are excluded from the study.

**WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS?** There are no known risks to participating in the study. However, it is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, but the researchers have taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known and potential, but unknown, risks.

**ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?** There are no direct benefits to research participants. We hope that your participation in this study will lead to a deeper understanding of the volunteer perspective.

**DO I HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY?** Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw your consent and stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Choosing to refrain from participating in this study will not impact the relationship you have with the Cheyenne Botanic Gardens, its staff, or other volunteers.

**WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT I GIVE?** We will keep private all research records that identify you, to the extent allowed by law. For this study, we will assign a code to your data so that the only place your name will appear in our records is on the consent form and in our data spreadsheet which links you to your code. Only the research team will have access to the link between you, your code, and your data. The only exceptions to this are if we are asked to share the research files for audit purposes with the CSU Institutional Review Board ethics committee, if necessary. When we write about the study to share with other researchers, we will write about the combined information we have gathered. You will not be identified in these written materials. We may publish the results of this study; however, we will keep your name and other identifying information private.

**WILL I RECEIVE ANY COMPENSATION FOR TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?** You will receive a \$5 gift card to Starbucks as a token of appreciation for taking part in the personal interview. You will also receive a \$5 gift card to Taco John's restaurant as a token of appreciation for taking part in the observational study.

**WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?** Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions about the study, you can contact the investigator, Tyler Mason at 307-631-1494. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact the IRB Coordinator Evelyn Swiss at Evelyn.swiss@colostate.edu or the CSU IRB at: RICRO\_IRB@mail.colostate.edu; 970-491-1553. We will give you a copy of this consent form to take with you.

**WHAT ELSE DO I NEED TO KNOW?** This research study is based on three data collection methods: surveys, one-on-one interviews, and observations. Volunteers that return the surveys will have the option to participate in the one-on-one interviews and/or observations. I will be contacting you to setup an interview, if you choose to participate.

Please initial by each research activity listed below that you are volunteering to participate in.

- Researchers can observe me in the course of my daily work activities \_\_\_\_\_ (initials)
- I will participate in a one-on-one interview \_\_\_\_\_ (initials)

Permission to re-contact:

Do you give permission for the researchers to contact you again in the future to follow-up on this study or to participate in new research projects? Please initial next to you choice below.

- Yes \_\_\_\_\_ (initials)                       No \_\_\_\_\_ (initials)

Permission to audiotape interviews:

The researchers would like to digitally record your interview to be sure that your comments are accurately recorded. Only our research team will have access to the audiotapes, and they will be destroyed when they have been transcribed.

Do you give the researchers permission to audiotape your interview? Please initial next to your choice below.

- Yes, I agree to be digitally recorded \_\_\_\_\_ (initials)  
 No, do not audiotape my interview \_\_\_\_\_ (initials)

Permission to use direct quotes:

Please let us know if you would like your comments to remain confidential or attributed to you. Please initial next to your choice below.

- I give permission for comments I have made to be shared using my exact words and to include my name \_\_\_\_\_ (initials)  
 You can use my data for research and publishing, but do NOT associate my name with direct quotes. \_\_\_\_\_ (initials)

Your signature acknowledges that you have read the information stated and willingly sign this consent form. Your signature also acknowledges that you have received, on the date signed, a copy of this document containing 3 pages.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of person agreeing to take part in the study

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed name of person agreeing to take part in the study

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of person providing information to participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Research Staff

## Appendix I: Observation Instrument

### Volunteer Engagement Checklist

Date:

Location:

Volunteer:

Work Performed:

#### Observations

	Very Low	Low	Medium	High	Very High
<b>Time Investment</b>					
Volunteer demonstrates time commitment (absent, leaves early, on time, late, arrives early).					

	Very Low	Low	Medium	High	Very High
<b>Positive Body Language</b>					
Volunteer exhibits body posture that indicates he/she is enjoying their volunteer experience (smile, laugh, openness, eye contact, etc.).					

	Very Low	Low	Medium	High	Very High
<b>Consistent Focus</b>					
Volunteer displays focus on task and goal oriented (shows commitment to assigned task instead of procrastinating or wandering off).					

	Very Low	Low	Medium	High	Very High
<b>Verbal Participation</b>					
Volunteer contributes to conversation with staff and/or other volunteers.					

	Very Low	Low	Medium	High	Very High
<b>Volunteer Confidence</b>					
Volunteer exhibits confidence by completing a task with limited coaching.					

	Very Low	Low	Medium	High	Very High
<b>Volunteer Attitude</b>					
Volunteer displays interest and enthusiasm for assignment (positive humor or encouraging comments).					

	Very Low	Low	Medium	High	Very High
<b>Behavioral Engagement</b>					
Volunteer demonstrates passion, effort, persistence, and determination to finish the assigned task.					

	Very Low	Low	Medium	High	Very High
<b>Cognitive Engagement</b>					
Volunteer exhibits interest or ownership of the assigned task.					

	Very Low	Low	Medium	High	Very High
<b>Relational Engagement</b>					
Volunteer displays passion for connecting with other volunteers, staff, or garden visitors.					

	Very Low	Low	Medium	High	Very High
<b>Overall Level of Volunteer Engagement</b>					
Volunteer is engaged in the assigned work activity as evident by their work and attitude.					

**Observer Reflections:**

## **Appendix J: Personal Interview Question Form**

Facilitator questions used while conducting one-on-one interviews to identify and describe underlying factors influencing volunteer retention.

### **Opening**

How long have you volunteered with the (small, municipal public garden)?

What is your favorite volunteering activity?

### **Motivation**

What first motivated you to want to volunteer at the (garden)?

What do you find meaningful or rewarding about volunteering at the (garden)?

Do social interactions (staff, visitors, or other volunteers) influence your desire to volunteer?

How important would you rate the acquisition of skills as a main factor for volunteering?

What continues to motivate you to volunteer?

What discourages you from volunteering?

### **Expectations**

What benefits do you associate with volunteering?

What costs do you associate with volunteering?

### **Experience**

How are your skills utilized in your volunteer work?

How would you describe your volunteer experience?

How important would you rate “break time” for volunteers?

How would you describe the level of communication between staff and volunteers?

## **Recognition**

Do you feel appreciated for your (garden) work?

What are some of the ways your work is recognized?

How does public recognition influence your level of motivation?

How much do annual holiday gifts or birthday celebrations influence your level of motivation?

What level of importance would you place on a personal “thank you”?

What types of additional recognition could the (garden) provide?

## **Future**

\*Prior to asking the next set of questions the interviewer will describe upcoming construction of the \$12 million renovation and expansion of the (garden)

What do the volunteers need in order to continue supporting the (garden) in upcoming years?

What kind of training or resources do the volunteers need to help the (garden) in the future?

What currently hinders volunteers from furthering the (garden’s) mission and goals to the greatest extent possible?

What can be done to improve the volunteer experience at the (garden)?

What do you tell friends about volunteering at the (garden)?

\*To protect the identity of the research participants “small, municipal public garden” or “garden” has been used as a substitute for Cheyenne Botanic Gardens.

## Appendix K: Survey Extended Responses

62. After a day of volunteering at a small, municipal public garden I feel...
- Tired
  - I quit volunteering because of my health
  - I had to quit for health reasons
  - Frustrated, because I was treated like I knew nothing
  - That it was time well spent, worthwhile
  - Like I made a valuable contribution to the community
  - Reasonable time well spent
  - Needed and welcomes, as well as sense of belonging
  - Sometimes I feel like my time was wasted
  - Contributing to something worthwhile
  - Smarter
  - Same as how I feel on most days
63. What kind of support is needed for volunteers at a small, municipal public garden?
- More chocolate snacks
  - Question the volunteers as to what they enjoy the most and have them work in that area
  - A volunteer needs to know that they are really needed
  - Support new volunteers as part of the group
  - Tour of the grounds
  - Perform an exit interview with resigning volunteers
  - Decent tools and lockers
  - Just a thank you
  - Role modeling/ on-the-job training
  - More time to socialize with other volunteers
  - More opportunities to volunteer