

Longwood Gardens
Fellows Program

Making an Impact!

*A Toolkit for Advancing
Employee Development*



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A Toolkit for Advancing Employee Development

2021–2022 Longwood Fellows

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About the Fellows Program

The Longwood Fellows Program is a 13-month residential living and working experience that prepares high-potential professionals for high-impact roles in public horticulture. Fellows have unique opportunities to refine their leadership skills by heightening self-awareness, interacting with experts and thought leaders, and absorbing customized content on organizational behavior, nonprofit management, strategic planning, and team development. The program grafts theory with practice, offering Fellows the opportunity to conduct case-based discussions, learn from regional and global public horticulture leaders, and engage in pragmatic learning via departmental immersions, a two-month field placement with a partner organization, and a research-based cohort project focused on addressing pressing issues in public horticulture.

Hailing from Mexico, Nigeria, Colorado, and Washington, DC, the five Fellows of the 2021–2022 cohort have diverse backgrounds, careers, cultural experiences, and perspectives on public horticulture. Their collective experience spans the higher education, government, and nonprofit sectors.

More information about the Longwood Fellows Program can be found at longwoodgardens.org/fellows. Applications are accepted each July 1–August 31 for the cohort starting the following June. Organizations are invited to nominate outstanding staff members to participate in this prestigious leadership development opportunity.



Introduction

For decades, new technologies have introduced new working strategies. But it wasn't until the COVID-19 pandemic that a workplace revolution began for many industries, including public horticulture. Some of these changes have come with organizational challenges: lifelong employees are retiring (along with their institutional knowledge), employees are advocating for remote working arrangements, and experienced professionals are reevaluating their careers for personal and professional reasons. These changes are compounded by demographic shifts occurring in the general workforce.

As public gardens respond to this rapidly changing world, they are asking crucial questions:

- **How can public gardens both retain valuable staff members and create opportunities to engage diverse new talent?**
- **How can organizations identify high-potential employees to fill leadership roles at all levels while advancing community-improving missions?**
- **What are the tools needed to build staff capacity and ensure that gardens continue to thrive for decades?**

Fortunately, every period of significant social change also presents substantial growth opportunities. A 2019 survey conducted by Longwood Gardens revealed that many senior-level staff positions will open in the next three years. This presents a powerful opportunity for public gardens; they can both explore new talent pools and prepare the existing workforce to fill these vacancies. Today's leaders can ensure that public gardens live on for future generations by identifying and engaging those individuals who combine growth potential with dedication to public horticulture.

This toolkit is designed to offer practical resources for managers interested in recruiting, retaining, and developing staff to support organizational mission. Conducted over six months, our research reflects insights from 29 organizations in four countries. Our survey generated more than 300 responses about career trends, workplace practices, and organizational culture, and we were able to deepen those insights by interviewing 65 global leaders in public horticulture. We combined these responses with what we have learned about leadership, organizational behavior, and professional development. The resulting toolkit addresses two current workforce challenges: filling vacancies and leveraging the emerging priorities of a shifting workforce.

Focusing on recruitment, onboarding, training, and retention, this toolkit provides data-driven career development resources to cultivate engaged, strategic, and effective employees, united in achieving organizational goals. You will learn how to support high-performing employees so that they are ready to grow their careers within your organization. You will also find practical strategies to identify and develop employee skillsets so that each member of your team can continue to advance their mission in public horticulture.

We hope that both new and established managers can use this toolkit to increase employee retention, expand career opportunities, invest in meaningful professional development, and improve workplace culture—while increasing the effectiveness and impact of public gardens.



Chapter 1: Understanding Organizations

Effective employees are committed and energetic, driven and ambitious.ⁱ Offering professional development opportunities for these individuals can be an important way to cultivate them—and this can also translate into improved retention and productivity. Employees who feel they are being invested in are more likely to feel engaged and less likely to leave. By focusing on employee development you can save a significant amount of money in recruitment and hiring.ⁱⁱ

Starting an employee development program begins with understanding your organization's strategic plans. These documents may be viewed as abstract or even static, but they help track goals, amplify an organization's values, and ultimately work as a guide for decision-making in the organization. Developing employees feeds directly into supporting your organization's strategic plans.

How can you as a manager advance this essential development work? You can start by understanding your organization's mission, vision, and values, and then connecting your employees' career development plans with these collective efforts.

Just like this thriving native population of *Victoria cruziana* in Corrientes, Argentina, employees thrive in an environment that feeds them. The yearly flooding of South America's two great river systems covers huge swaths of land, creating thousands of nutrient-rich flood lakes that allow the *Victoria* to grow and thrive. Understanding the dynamics and culture of the organization can help individuals grow to their fullest potential.

Mission, Vision, and Values

Strategic planning is the ongoing process of mapping out an organization’s intended direction in alignment with its stated vision, mission, and values. A strategic plan can allocate resources, align shareholders and employees, and ensure organizational goals are backed by data and sound reasoning.ⁱⁱⁱ Table 1 on the opposite page provides more details about the key ingredients in a strategic plan.

It is important to tie your employees’ career development plans to your organization’s strategic goals. Doing so will allow you to allocate adequate resources to your employees’ growth while simultaneously encouraging them to seek success in relation to the organization’s priorities. Collaborating with your employees in this way also underscores your commitment to their professional advancement and creates a virtuous cycle of engagement and investment.

MAKE YOUR IMPACT

Reinforce your organization’s mission, vision, and values by publicly recognizing employees who embody those values and contribute meaningfully to the mission and vision. You may encourage other hidden superstars!

Table 1: Mission, Vision, and Values Defined

Mission	<p>A statement of why the organization exists, at the most meaningful level. It is both aspirational, in that it may never be fully achieved, and inspirational, in that stakeholders are energized in pursuing the mission. Your mission states why the organization does the work it does but does not define how that work is to be done.</p> <p>Mission can be defined by asking:</p> <p>What are we trying to accomplish? What impact do we want to achieve? What do we produce or create? Who do we serve?</p>
Vision	<p>A clear, specific, compelling picture of what the organization will look like at a specific time in the future, including those key metrics that define success. It outlines expected impact and the specific behaviors that support an organization’s success. A clear vision includes potential strategies and helps clarify what’s within or outside of the organization’s bounds.</p> <p>Vision can be defined by asking:</p> <p>Where are we going from here? What do we want to achieve in the future? What role do we play in an ideal society’s future?</p>
Values	<p>The boundaries within which the organization will operate in pursuit of its vision. It is critical to distinguish between core values (those on which the organization will never compromise and is willing to pay a price to uphold) and aspirational values (those that the organization espouses but has yet to embed in day-to-day operations). To be meaningful, values should be described in clear behavioral terms.^{iv}</p> <p>Values can be defined by asking:</p> <p>What do we stand for? How will we conduct our activities to achieve our mission and vision? What behaviors do we value over all else? How do we treat members of our own organization and community?</p>

Workplace Culture: Valued Skills of Managers and Employees

The most concrete way to understand an organization’s mission, vision, and values is to look at organizational culture. Workplace culture is defined in many ways, but for our purposes can be understood as those organizational conditions that are:

- Shared.** Culture reflects the learned patterns of beliefs, values, assumptions, and behavioral norms that are observable.
- Pervasive.** Culture covers nearly everything a group has learned as it evolved.
- Enduring.** Culture includes the self-reinforcing social patterns that direct the thoughts and actions of group members over the long term.
- Implicit.** Culture is instinctively recognizable; as humans we are wired to look for patterns and cues in group behaviors.^v

Workplace culture includes all aspects of organizational life and can be tied to skills and qualities valued in teams and individual employees. And although cultures are as rich and varied as the organizations that embody them, we identified several shared characteristics across public horticulture.

Our survey revealed that today’s employees value communication and expertise, regardless of their professional roles. However, the importance that employees placed on these characteristics and others varied according to whether they manage other employees or not. Table 2 outlines the top five characteristics that managers and employees seek in each other.

Table 2. Skills Valued in Managers and Employees

	From Managers	From Employees
Managers Look For:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communication Respect Transparency Team Building Expertise in Their Field 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Motivation/Drive/Work Ethic Reliability Expertise in Their Field Communication Problem Solving
Employees Look For:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Respect Communication Transparency Expertise in Their Field Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion 	

Employees at all levels look to their leaders for respect, transparency, communication, and evidence of relevant expertise. In contrast, managers prioritize motivation and reliability over these characteristics in their employees. This means that managers who want to grow their employees need to look with new eyes. Managers can create opportunities for employees to demonstrate respect, transparency, and inclusive team development in ways that both enhance an individual’s promotability and are meaningful for the organization.

On the opposite side of the spectrum, surveyed employees did not place a high value on leadership potential, being visionary, and productivity in their managers. This makes intuitive sense: employees recognize their managers as already being in actual, not potential, leadership roles, and they may also have difficulty translating a manager’s visionary thinking into day-to-day actions or recognizing that managers may be held accountable for types of productivity different from their own. Similarly, managers did not identify team building, transparency, or leadership potential as necessary skills for their employees. This may be because managers view team building as their own responsibility, and transparency as unnecessary for those employees who are performing tasks. Leadership potential can also be challenging to foster if career advancement opportunities are not immediately available.

By recognizing and promoting your team’s values, dynamics, strengths, and complementarities, you can start building a culture of transparency, clear communication, and respect. Doing so sets your employees on the path toward growth and development and can help you create a more ethical and equitable culture for all employees.

Once your team absorbs the mission, vision, and values and you have begun to build a culture of transparency, it’s important to consider one other factor in how you develop employees: the structure of both the team and the organization.

Organizational Structure

You as a manager can strive to promote standout employees, but opportunities to do so will be shaped by how your organization is structured. Organizational structure is the way in which tasks and team members are formally divided, grouped, and coordinated, while work specialization is the degree to which tasks in an organization are subdivided into separate jobs.^{vi} Organizations generally try to create structures that advance their mission, and ideally these structures help teams function effectively without overly complicating the work processes.^{vii} Learning how to use your organization’s structure to advance your team can be a powerful, strategic tool.

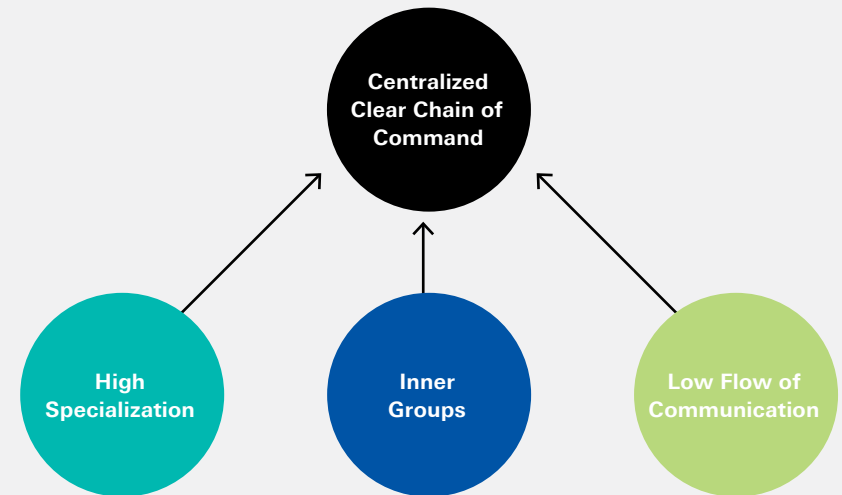
“We wound up investing more in our staff by adding to their salaries and added more grades within each position so that there can be more mobility through a career. Unless we can grow everything, there’s not much opportunity to move.”

—Brian Vogt, CEO of Denver Botanic Gardens

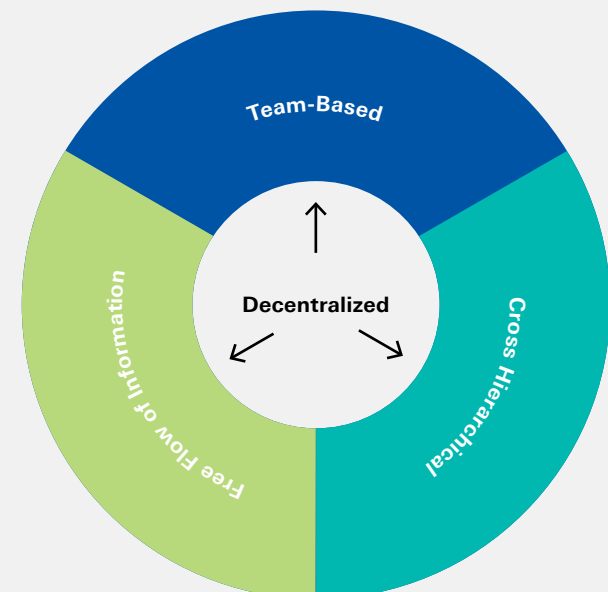
Assisting your employees in navigating your organizational structure can help them develop the skills they need to advance their careers. For instance, in more hierarchical organizations there are more opportunities for promotion, but it can be challenging for individuals to gain visibility and recognition. In contrast, more cross-functional organizations make it easier for employees to gain recognition for their skills from their leadership teams, but the pathways for advancement are less clear. Figure 1 illustrates the dynamics in each type of organization.

Figure 1. Sample Organizational Structures

Hierarchical Structure



Cross-Functional Structure



Hybrid Work

For decades, ways of working have changed as technology enabled new kinds of remote networks.^{viii} But public horticulture employees at all levels found a flexibility gap: they are increasingly asking organizations to adapt their work assignments and schedules. But a new kind of flexibility gap has emerged, as public horticulture employees at all levels are increasingly asking organizations to adapt work assignments and schedules.^x

Public gardens designing hybrid arrangements can creatively reimagine workflows. Start by determining the drivers of productivity and performance for key jobs and tasks, and then implement those systems that best support goal attainment. While horticulture will remain largely hands-on and place-based, managers would do well to take advantage of possible remote working opportunities. For example, some employees may find it easier to gain a voice through virtual platforms, and you as a manager can leverage technology to amplify and respond to these individuals.

One of the areas that could be a good fit for virtual work is training. Many training opportunities are now being offered online through platforms ranging from Coursera, a site offering free Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), to LinkedIn, a networking site offering skills training relevant to professional workspaces. In addition, many gardens around the world offer continuing education courses and professional development opportunities online. Your staff don't need to formally enroll in a course, though, in order to grow their skills. You can create staff discussion groups for podcasts or blog posts, invite staff from other organizations or departments to provide brown-bag lunch presentations, or ask staff to share 5-minute reflections on a relevant topic of interest.

However, implementing remote work will require some training in computer proficiency, time management, and instead resiliency for those who have to multitask when working at home. Investing in technology skills is crucial for all employees, even those in entry-level horticulture positions. Today's organizations operate in highly complex worlds, and there are very few leadership roles open to individuals without technological skills. Ensure that every member of your team can navigate basic software platforms—even if they rarely use technology in their current jobs, building these skills will lay the groundwork for future promotability. Not only does this benefit individual employees, it can also help create more equitable workplaces by broadening access to career advancement opportunities. As employees build their technological capacity, they will translate their increased confidence into continued productivity.

Understanding KPIs

As management theorist Peter Drucker famously said, “What gets measured gets done.” In other words, knowing that an outcome will get measured focuses effort on reaching that outcome. By measuring what worked—and what did not—you can also lead your team to develop better future strategies. A useful way to do this is using Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). These are tools for measuring not only outcomes but also progress toward goals. They can be quantitative in measuring factors like sales and business growth, or qualitative in measuring factors like employee engagement and satisfaction. Each organization will define their key indicators differently, but in every case, KPIs provide a focus for operational improvement and create an analytical basis for decision-making.

Gardens are often held accountable for KPIs like the square footage of gardens maintained, number of plants, and annual visitation. You can bring these to life for your staff by encouraging them to build goals in relation to organizational KPIs. It's easier to narrow than to broaden: break large goals into smaller chunks. Track the changes over time and remember to document the process and review with your employees to stay focused. Use approaches like the SMARTER approach on page 20 to help you stay organized and make success achievable.

The best KPIs reflect the idea that value creation is a two-way street, and that all stakeholders should get something out of them. With your leadership team, understand what's at stake for them in making decisions. With employees, understand how well your organization is meeting their expectations. Using KPIs to track (and motivate) strategies and performance can also help you as a manager support your team's overall development.^x

Managers sometimes forego this tool because KPIs are more often used to assess bigger picture, higher-level strategies across an organization. However, understanding how to connect your employees' career development plans with your organization's strategic goals will help you better understand how to leverage both the plans and the goals. Work with your employees to develop KPIs—like skill development, new project experience, and engagement levels—for their career development plans. Not only will this build career momentum for employees, it will also aid you in measuring impact on team productivity (and overall success). Measurement tools can include observation, meetings, interviews, informal discussions, questionnaires, surveys, and assessments.^{xi} Just remember to document well!

MAKE YOUR IMPACT

There are many resources to better understand strategic planning, mission, vision, values, and KPIs, but you can start simply. Ask a mentor or peer to share their quantitative and qualitative measures of success. Brainstorming with someone else can help you identify KPIs that are relevant to your team.

When developing KPIs for your team, remember that a useful KPI will:

1. Provide measurable evidence of progress towards desired results
2. Measure what is intended to be measured to inform better decision-making
3. Allow you to gauge performance change over time
4. Track standard performance indicators like efficiency, effectiveness, quality, timeliness, governance, project performance, team performance, or resource usage
5. Blend leading and lagging indicators (meaning those indicators that predict outcomes and those indicators that show that something has changed)^{xii}

Be creative! Hold conversations with your leadership team to fine-tune how different stakeholders define success, especially in relation to employee career development. Consider KPIs like staff retention, staff engagement, and team performance. Evaluate how many of your vacancies are filled by promotions versus external hires and then set a benchmarking ratio. You can make a substantial organizational impact by launching this evaluation process and contextualizing success for your own team.

In fact, getting clear on how success is framed in your organization is an essential first step. Success is generally defined as reaching a favorable or desired outcome, but definitions will vary among employees, you, and organizational leadership.^{xiii} Maintaining open dialogue with your employees about how they define career success will help you draw on shared goals and objectives in your planning. These goals can also drive evaluation plans as you focus on fostering success for your employees and the organization.

Defining Success

Using these tools to shape your strategic goals, you as the manager are well-positioned to help define success. As a key link between employees and leadership, you understand both parties' needs. Cultivating open lines of communication allows you to maximize productivity while providing opportunities for employees to grow their skills. This approach will create a pool of talented employees, deepen organizational knowledge and stability, and align employees' personal growth with the organization's needs. As you establish this approach, you can use the model in Appendix A to construct a comprehensive evaluation framework and define success.

The organization's leadership team will likely define success through the lens of a strategic plan, attending to how well the mission, vision, and values of the organization are achieved. Understanding how these factors drive the organization will help you frame staff development plans in terms relevant to the organization's leadership. This awareness will help you gain their support—and potentially garner more resources to invest in your team.

The manager plays an essential role in promoting organizational mission, vision, and values to employees, especially in communicating how they fit into the larger picture. It is your job to develop employees while ensuring that the goals of the strategic plan are met and a positive workplace culture is maintained. Shared values, interpersonal connections, and appreciation for employees' diverse skillsets contributes to the richness of a team. Our survey shows employees want respect, communication, and transparency at work. It is crucial for managers to create a positive work culture that embodies the values of the organization. Established ways of working and a clear understanding of an organization's structure helps employees know how they can grow within the team and advance strategies.

Using tools such as KPIs to measure progress toward goals helps managers improve decision-making and team engagement. The SMARTER approach facilitates goal setting in an achievable, organized manner, and supports the definition of success at all levels of the organization. By using these tools, managers can ensure that decision-making benefits employees, teams, and organizations.



SMARTER Approach

Craft objectives and goals with your employees by using the SMARTER approach, —one that is Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time-bound, Evaluated, and Reevaluated. This method will assist you in not only defining success but creating a level of accountability to track progress. Table 3 outlines how to use this tool to guide goal setting.

Table 3: SMARTER Approach^{xiv}

Use the following questions to shape your strategic goals.

S Specific	Goals should be clear and specific. What do I want to accomplish? Why is this goal important? Who is involved? Which resources or limits are involved?
M Measurable	Goals need to be measured to track progress and keep individuals motivated. How much or how many? (For example: trainings, time, and funding) How will I know when it is accomplished?
A Attainable	Goals should be reasonable with an achievable target. Is the goal realistic? Can it be achieved within the timeframe given? Can it be achieved based on the employee’s knowledge, skills, abilities, interests, strengths, and motivations?
R Relevant	Goals should align with the individual’s goals and the overall goals of the team. Is the goal relevant to an individual’s role and responsibilities? Is it relevant to their capabilities and growth potential? Is it relevant to your team and the greater organization?
T Time-bound	Employees need to know by what date a goal needs to be accomplished. Ensure milestones are set. When should the deadline be? What can realistically be achieved in this timeframe?
E Evaluate	Don’t wait until a project ends to review and reflect on what worked and what did not. What are the results we’re seeing so far? Are we satisfied or happy with the results? Were the right goals set? Did the goal progress in a way that promoted transparency and accountability?
R Reevaluate	As you evaluate, goals sometimes need to be revised. What should be changed and what should remain the same? Can we produce better results? How? Could different metrics track performance better? Are we measuring the right things? Do other people need to be involved?





Chapter 2: State of the Workforce

Like most industries in today's economy, public gardens must navigate an ever-changing labor market as employees transition across positions and organizations. This dynamism is embodied in a workforce increasingly diverse in gender, age, race, and ethnicity. Emerging generations are the most diverse populations to date and want to have more impact and influence than any generation before them. They want to contribute to something meaningful. They're proud of their diversity.^{xv}

A more complex labor market presents both opportunities and challenges for public horticulture. It is not enough to diversify the demographic makeup of a staff roster; organizations must also ensure individuals from all demographic groups are afforded equal opportunities to participate and thrive in employment processes, from recruitment to retirement.^{xvi}

Every employee that joins your team will have unique talents that can be cultivated. Managers should recognize and value the diverse perspectives, expertise, genders, ethnicities, races, and generational groups represented on their teams. By empowering all of your employees to develop their careers, you can foster institutional excellence. As your employees thrive, the impact will not only be seen on your team but also in the organization and communities you serve.

The *Victoria* 'Longwood Hybrid' is a giant waterlily, a hybrid between two species of the *Victoria* genus: *V. amazonica* and *V. cruziana*. It has superior hybrid vigor compared to its parents. Similarly, combining a diversity of employees helps create a more vigorous and resilient organization. It has superior hybrid vigor compared to its parents, blooms about 10 days earlier, and is prized for its size and strength of lily pads. Similarly, combining a diversity of employees helps create a more vigorous and resilient organization.

Ways of Working

When working with multigenerational staff, it is essential to understand what employees value. Table 4 outlines the differences in the skills, cultural elements, and motivational factors valued by each generation. In some sense, the differences reflected in generations are evened out in the workplace. People are seeking managers who have expertise in their field, offer transparency, and cultivate teamwork. They want to stay in jobs to make an impact. Enjoyable, healthy work environments can go a long way too.

In fact, the relationship between managers and employees directly correlates to retention and engagement. A 2021 Gallup study reported that the manager accounts for at least 70% of the variance in employee engagement, with employees who rate their managers highly more likely to stay in their positions longer.^{xvii} Building strong, positive connections with employees can help you make the connections needed to support long-term development at all career stages.

Our research gathered reflections on workplace culture and training opportunities. While most respondents expressed interested in improving themselves professionally, they also identified the need for managers to improve communications. Employees would like clear guidance, worthwhile tasks, assurance that organizations will protect them from stress and burnout, and the opportunity to develop their creative capacity through new tasks and challenges. See Figure 3 on page 26 for sample comments from respondents.

Table 4: Workforce Age Composition

Generation	Fellows 2021 Public Horticulture Survey	Bureau of Labor Statistics
Baby Boomers	23%	23.6%
Gen X	48%	41.1%
Millennials	26%	22.7%
Gen Z	3%	12.6%

Table 5: Valued Skills, Culture, and Motivation

Generation	Rating	Skills Valued in a Manager	Preferred Workplace Culture	Motivation to Stay
Baby Boomers	1	Communication	Communication	Enjoyable Work Environment
	2	Respect	Teamwork	Making an Impact
	3	Collaboration	Transparency	Mission
Gen X	1	Communication	Communication	Making an Impact
	2	Respect	Increase transparency	Mission
	3	Transparency	Expertise in the field	Enjoyable Work Environment
Millennials	1	Respect	Improve communication	Work Environment
	2	Communication	Increase transparency	Benefits Package
	3	Transparency	Expertise in the Field	Vacation
Gen Z	1	Communication	Encourage Creativity	Making an Impact
	2	Empathy	Increase Transparency	Co-workers
	3	Confidence	Expertise in the Field	Mission

Figure 3. Representative Comments Gathered From the Survey

Gen Z Perspective

“A lot of the positive environment at my workplace comes from the top. Our Executive Director is firm and believes in everyone’s abilities, but also understanding when things don’t go perfectly. I admire her prioritization of her staff’s happiness and well-being.”

Millennial Perspective

“Get to know your employees. Treat them as the individuals they are and acknowledge the work they do for you. Encourage development with opportunities. Compensate an employee for what they are worth. Consider work/life balance and provide any benefits possible to your employees. Trust your staff to do the job they were hired to do, otherwise they will not feel valued and will leave.”

Gen X Perspective

“Work has changed and become more stressful between COVID-19 and expectations to do more. Staff retention is hard because of the pay; base wages should be more competitive. There aren’t many layers for promotion, so finding ways for folks to expand skills and move sideways seems imperative.”

Baby Boomer Perspective

“Professionals don’t need to be possessive about their skills to the point of not sharing information that would improve the organization. They lose great staff because they are not financially rewarded or overload them and lead them to burn out. Thanking people for going an extra mile is a big help.”

Engaging a Diverse Staff

Public horticulture now comprises four major generational groups: baby boomers, which includes workers between 57–75 years; Generation X, or those who are 41–56 years old; millennials, who are 26–40 years old; and Generation Z, or workers who are 16–25 years old (see Table 4). Although generational descriptors can be generalizations, understanding where workers are in their career lifespans can help organizations better engage their employees.^{xviii} Appendix B provides insight into generational working styles, communication patterns, and workplace expectations. This information helps managers design better recruitment and retention policies to attract and retain talent from all generations.

Studies reveal that millennials and Gen Zers change jobs more often than previous generations.^{xix} This may not be a generational characteristic as much as it is a feature of age (that is, people in their 20s are more likely to change jobs than people in their 60s, regardless of which generation they're in). Older workers tend to stay in the same jobs longer.

Gen Z may not have developed a lengthy track record of permanent, full-time jobs yet because they are finishing high school or college, interning, or still navigating which direction to move in their careers. Gen X are generally in the middle of their careers and have established themselves within their field of expertise, while millennials are establishing and continuing to develop their career paths in the industry.

According to the Fellows 2021 Public Horticulture Survey results, the average duration of a full-time employee in a public garden job is 5–10 years, for the employees with enough career experience to sustain that level of tenure (see Figure 2). Career trajectories are different for each employee; not everyone has the same pace or objectives. At the same time, the industry and professional lifespans are evolving, as workers seek career advancement by changing jobs. This may be challenging from a retention perspective, but it is also how an organization can lay the groundwork for dynamic teams.^{xx}

Figure 2. Position Duration by Age Group of Individuals.

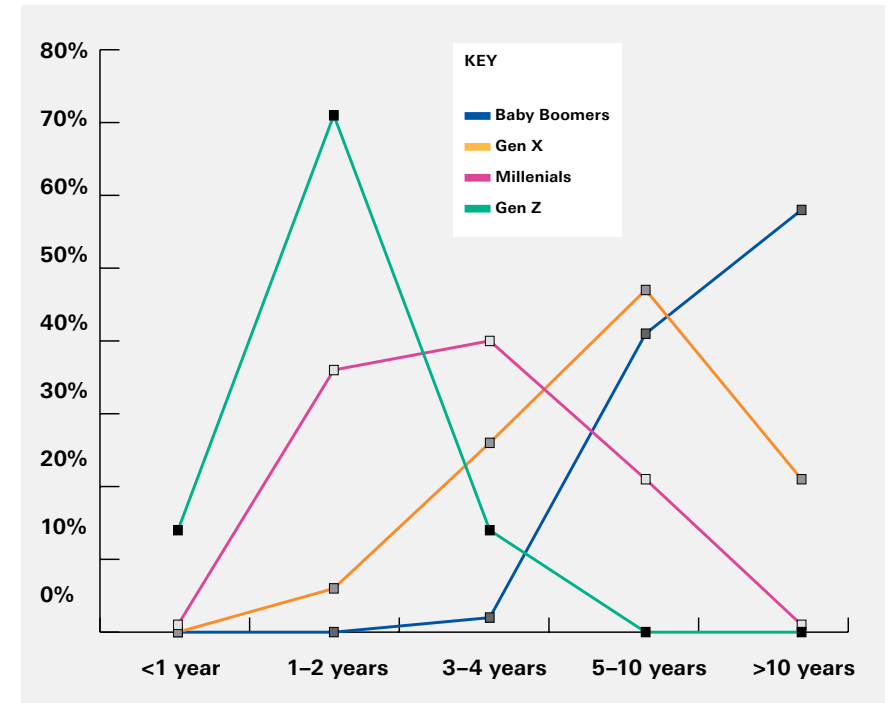


Table 6: Workforce Gender Composition

Gender	Fellows 2021 Public Horticulture Survey	Bureau of Labor Statistics
Men	38.72%	53%
Women	60.15%	47%
Prefer not to disclose	1.13%	N/A

Although leadership positions are more likely to be filled by men, in the past few decades, women have become the leading gender working in horticulture (see Table 6). Having a gender-diverse workforce is crucial to the success of your team, and managers can ensure that all genders are equally considered for advancement opportunities.



Table 7: Highest Educational Attainment of the Workforce

Educational Attainment	Fellows 2021 Public Horticulture Survey	Bureau of Labor Statistics
High School	1%	26%
Some College	7%	27%
Bachelor’s Degree	51%	24%
Master’s Degree	29%	11%
Doctorate	7%	4%
Others	5%	8%

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, people with some college or an associate degree have made up the largest share of the U.S. civilian labor force since 2012. Among the employed, the likelihood of working in a management, professional, or related occupation increases with educational attainment.^{xxi} Public garden employees are more likely to hold college degrees than the general labor force. Managers should remember that, when hiring someone at the beginning of their career, it is unrealistic to expect that person to hold a doctorate or have significant experience in their field. It’s also important to note that significant experience or a degree shouldn’t outweigh the importance of interpersonal skills when considering candidates. Managers can ensure that they are cultivating broad candidate pools by carefully reviewing the requirements for every open position. For example, evaluate whether you are asking for unnecessary credentials or experience. Advertising positions to broad candidate pools can also have a significant impact on your hiring outcomes.

MAKE YOUR IMPACT

Investing in your employees’ education can help build excellence in your organization. Encourage those you have invested in to share their experiences and be a leader in what they have learned.

Table 8: Workforce Racial Composition

Race	Fellows 2021 Public Horticulture Survey	Bureau of Labor Statistics
White	91%	77.4%
Hispanic or Latino	5%	1.8%
African American or Black	2%	12.6%
Asian	1%	N/A
Other	1%	8.2%

Today’s public gardens do not proportionally reflect the racial and ethnic demographics of the larger workforce. There can be many speculations as to why people of color do not have a larger presence in public gardens, but many public gardens are working toward improving inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility (IDEA). The American Public Gardens Association (APGA) has an IDEA Committee that shares literature resources, a discussion forum, tools you can use to evaluate your organization’s inclusivity, examples of KPIs and outcomes, goal setting and employee development ideas, and information about how other gardens are implementing diversity and inclusion initiatives. Additionally, the new IDEA Center for Public Gardens, launched by APGA with support from Denver Botanic Gardens and the Institute for Museum and Library Services, is focused on creating gardens and experiences for all people.



Chapter 3: Employee Development

Supporting employee development is crucial to engaging employees. By partnering with your team members to understand their goals and then connecting those goals to organizational priorities, you can substantially invest in your employees' potential. It is true that not all employees want to advance their careers, but if they know they are being supported in their career development through opportunities to learn and grow, there is also a greater chance of retaining them within your organization.

Typically, employee development is a continuous process of training, mentoring, and strategic supervision. Ensuring that your employees have the resources they need to excel will prepare them for greater responsibilities as they continue to build their careers.

The size and growth rate of *Victoria* platters are connected to the structure of their earthbound roots and the rise of water levels in the flooded lakes where the *Victoria* grows and matures. And just as leaves and flowers are energized by oxygen from the roots and growing tip, employees who feel supported by their leadership will bring new growth to organizations.

Having a budget for employee development can seem like a luxury, but it does not need to be large. In fact, many developmental assignments do not require any additional funding. Employees can be encouraged to stretch through assignments like:

- **Leading team discussions**
- **Joining a cross-division team project**
- **Providing training for colleagues**
- **Organizing an event**
- **Presenting a proposal to management**
- **Representing your organization to external partners**
- **Serving on a committee**

Appendix C offers an Employee Development Worksheet you can use with your employees to identify mutually beneficial growth opportunities. Tracking employee performance—like behavioral consistency, team contributions, and work ethic—can also reveal strong indicators about which employees might be ready to build their professional capacity.

Benefits of Investing in Employee Training

When you prioritize training opportunities for your employees, you show that you are invested in their values, growth, and development. This can also improve their performance by building their confidence and expertise. In turn, this pushes them to perform at a higher level and helps them excel in their roles and careers. Making this strategic investment also increases the odds that you will attract and keep your best talent—and will help you build a strong and healthy workplace culture.

“A public garden not only offers employment but also serves as a platform for professionals that want to develop horticulture skill and other qualifications. We give them the opportunity to advance their professional career, grow expertise, and sometimes a fresh start.”

—Sergio Sanchez Vázquez, CEO of Jardines de Mexico, Mexico

Matching Training Opportunities for Your Staff

As you better understand your employees’ strengths, interests, and areas of improvement, you can better direct them toward opportunities to enhance their skills. Start by encouraging employees to take advantage of trainings and other resources related to their areas of expertise. As their knowledge and confidence increase, encourage them to pursue opportunities to participate in professional membership associations and grow their leadership skills.

Be Creative

Each public garden handles training and development differently. While some organizations can allocate funding for this specific purpose, not every budget can stretch to cover classes, conferences, or learning exchanges with other gardens. Fortunately, there are many low-cost or free options, ranging from online trainings offered by professional associations to lectures on relevant topics provided by libraries or other local organizations.

You can also tap into the wealth of knowledge that already exists in your organization. Use the knowledge, skills, and abilities your team members have developed to train each other. For example, pick one day a month where you hold a brown-bag lunch to discuss topics of interest; you can learn together about emerging garden pests or brainstorm an innovative marketing strategy for an upcoming event. Reach out to neighboring gardens, museums, or community development foundations to partner with you on a localized training program. Connect with extension agents who can be a useful source of training provided by land grant universities. Plan a field trip to a local organization for a seminar or invite a subject-matter expert to speak with your staff.

Overall, the purpose of training is to help your employees develop their skills and stay engaged with the organization. Work with them to develop a program within your budget that will help them reach their career goals in the short- and long-term. This may take time, creativity, and investment from you, but in the end, it can pay off to have more productive, engaged employees.

Mentoring

Whether your organization is large or small, a mentoring program can be a valuable (and low-cost) tool for retaining and developing employees in any position. While informal mentorships are easy to launch, a more structured approach can be useful to strategically help support your organization’s growth. For example, if you are trying to support diversity and equity in your organization, mentoring is especially important for supporting employees in underrepresented groups; mentoring relationships can give the employee a different perspective and draw support from colleagues with different areas of expertise or experience (or even from a different organization within the industry). See Table 9 for other benefits of mentoring programs.



Table 9. Benefits of a Mentoring Program^{xxii}

Benefits to the Organization	Benefits to the Mentor	Benefits to the Mentee
Increases employee skills and competencies	Leadership development	Skill development
Useful for succession planning	Improves communication skills	Organizational knowledge
Develops leadership skills	Ability to give constructive feedback and feedforward	Support through a transition
Improves retention	Targeted professional development	Encourages ongoing learning
Supports inclusive culture	Improves awareness of learning gaps	Guidance for career development
Cultivates employee satisfaction	Elevates profile in the organization	Improved goal setting

The following steps can help you build an effective mentoring program:

- 1. Define the program's goal.** What is the purpose of mentoring? How will it benefit the organization? What are the anticipated outcomes for employees who participate as mentees? As mentors?
- 2. Create a holistic matching process.** For more general mentoring, having employees self-select their mentors can be the simplest method. However, in a small organization, there might not always be an obvious mentor available. In this case, consider asking someone outside of the organization to serve in this capacity. New employees can be strategically matched to mentors to build their organizational connections.
- 3. Set and measure goals.** Establish a timeframe and general expectations for mentoring. A formal document like a Mentorship Agreement (an example can be found in Appendix D) provides a framework for both mentor and mentee by defining expectations, setting SMARTER goals, and establishing accountability.
- 4. Continue to check in.** Make sure that mentors feel supported in their efforts, and that mentees are using the resource appropriately. Ask for status updates about the frequency and perceived effectiveness of mentoring meetings.
- 5. Use existing resources.** Public horticulture offers several industry-specific tools for developing mentorships. The APGA hosts a platform for mentor/mentee connections, and Women in Horticulture offers a similar program. In 2019, the Longwood Fellows Program published *Grow! A Scratchpad for People Developers*, which offers a quick guide to cultivating employee talent.

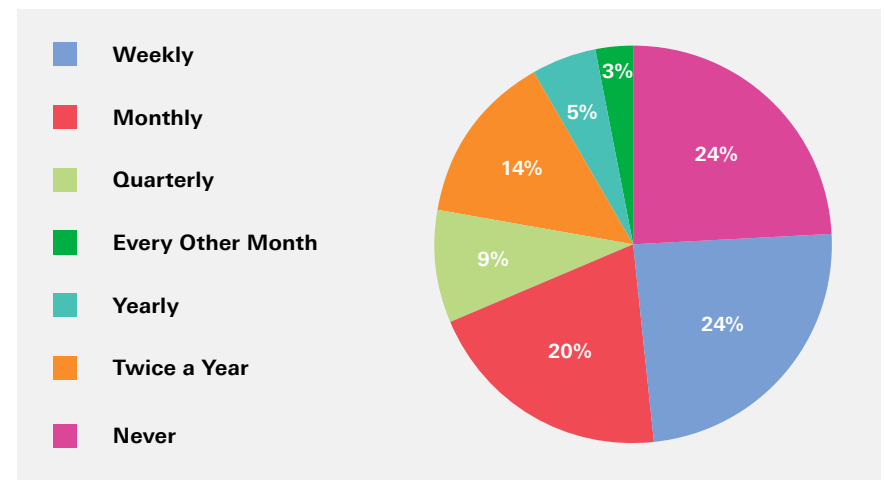
Check-ins

One of the most powerful tools for employee development is one of the simplest. Regular, structured one-on-one meetings between employees and managers provide important opportunities to discuss priorities, gather feedback, build trust, and solidify relationships. Standing meetings with employees can reduce the pressure of performance management; they support collaboration and foster professional growth for managers and employees alike.

How Often Do You Check In?

According to the Fellows 2021 Public Horticulture Survey, the top skill employees are looking for in management—and the greatest area of improvement they identified—is communication. Regular meetings with your employees are essential to good communication. How often and how long you meet depends on many factors, from upcoming deadlines to the size of your team, but having at least 30 minutes each week with each team member is ideal.^{xxiii} This frequency allows you to troubleshoot any issues early and assures employees that they will have a platform with which to ask questions and review any concerns with you. Establishing a schedule of routine check-in meetings also fosters equitable access. You can be confident knowing that you will have time with each employee and not just those who are more assertive.

Figure 4. Informal Check-in Survey Results



Empower all your employees to take ownership of these meetings by asking them to provide a short agenda prior to the meeting. In addition to communicating about current projects and tasks, encourage them to make time to think about their career goals and areas of interest. Encourage them to develop SMARTER goals, growth projects, or learning objectives.



Even scheduled check-ins can have an informal component, with time for you to get to know each individual and build a healthy working relationship, but having a loose structure will ensure that you are up to date on their current projects and career goals. Listen carefully for their areas of strength and then look for ways they can use those talents in new or special projects.

Remember that documenting conversations with your staff is crucial. The platform doesn't matter as much as the practice, so use the tools you prefer (a pen and paper can be just as effective as a tablet or laptop). Your notes will allow you to review your last conversation, check progress toward goals, and remind them of any upcoming deliverables. When it is time to conduct an annual or mid-year performance review, having documentation of your conversations can help illuminate trends and recall important milestones. To guide your conversations, see Appendix E for a question bank on performance review.^{xxiv}

MAKE YOUR IMPACT

Try feedforward. Shift the focus from feedback, which focuses on what someone did or didn't do to future-oriented conversations that focus on how you can coach your employees to achieve their goals.

Performance reviews, assessments, and check-ins should occur in relation to one another. Check-ins should be scheduled frequently and regularly, with assessments implemented at strategic points to develop an evaluation framework based on information gathered over time. Performance reviews are often tied to annual compensation and are typically held once a year. They should be built on the goals established through check-ins and other assessments. However, if you have regular employee check-ins and use assessments effectively, the performance review can be a natural continuation of these conversations. That is, your employees should be aware of strengths and weaknesses before their annual performance reviews and should adjust their behaviors and strategies accordingly throughout the year.

Assessments

Along with regular check-ins, formal assessments can be a powerful way to foster self-awareness in employees. They can also help you as a manager gather useful insights into individual strengths, areas of improvement, growth opportunities, and potential pitfalls. From an organizational perspective, employee assessments help shed light on how engaged employees are, to what extent they buy into the company's core values, how much pride they take in their jobs, what they enjoy about their work, and how likely they are to stay.^{xxv}

What is a formal assessment? Simply put, it is a tool that gives individuals a sense of where they are in relation to a particular standard. In practice, it often implies some feedback or other activation; many assessments offer tips for converting results into professional advancement. They are valuable communication tools because they standardize and depersonalize information, sometimes making it easier to spot patterns or get honest insights from employees. Given the ever-changing challenges and needs in most organizations, the baseline information generated through regular assessments will give you crucial tools for nurturing productive team dynamics.

There are a multitude of assessments that your organization can use to help employees both develop careers and contribute to the organization. These range from simple surveys for new employees to a comprehensive 360° feedback synthesis for established professionals. They can also be used to identify communication preferences (as with the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, or MBTI) or team dynamics (e.g., DiSC). Table 10 provides several types of assessments geared toward various stages of an employee's career development.

With assessments, managers can gain insights that help them reduce team conflict, improve morale, better understand varying perspectives, reduce employee turnover or dissatisfaction, and amplify organizational policies. Self-assessment tools can also facilitate employees' ability to think critically about their strengths, areas for improvement, career development plans, and levels of workplace engagement. Allowing your employees to share their results can also help to create a relationship of trust and understanding.

Conducting a Formal Assessment

While there are many existing assessment tools that can be easily implemented or adapted for specific organizations, managers are also able to develop their own tools. The secret behind any effective assessment is using clear, relevant KPIs and a standardized scale for measurement.

The career growth assessment in Appendix F provides a helpful example.^{xxvi} This assessment was created by first identifying the categories that were important enough to measure, and then attaching specific KPIs to each category. In taking the assessment, employees can simply check the column that reflects their level of agreement with each statement. Upon completion, employees can either be encouraged to reflect on their results by themselves or share their results with you as the manager for collaborative analysis. For example, analyzing why an employee disagreed with the statement "I know my work values" can provide guidance on areas for change or improvement.



MAKE YOUR IMPACT

Don't forgo the formal assessments! These powerful tools can provide insights that help managers reduce team conflict, improve morale, understand varying perspectives, reduce employee turnover or dissatisfaction, and amplify organizational policies.

Attaching numeric weight to response categories (e.g., Strongly Disagree = 1 and Strongly Agree = 5) can be helpful in tracking change over time. As an assessment is taken at regular intervals, managers can record varying results to document how an employee is changing in skills or perceptions. Rising scores should indicate growth. Again, this type of tool will help you identify areas of strength and improvement. You can review scores and address any issues appropriately.

360° Assessments

Many organizations use 360° assessments in support of holistic employee development plans. The 360° assessment compares an individual's self-rating with peer ratings of that individual through a comprehensive set of surveys completed by colleagues, friends, direct reports, managers, and others who have worked with or otherwise know the individual well (indeed, this is where the assessment's name comes from: it solicits feedback from people at all 360° points around that person's life). Comparing results from self and others provides insights into growth areas and blind spots (including positive aspects of that person's characteristics!).

When self-perceptions mirror the ratings from others, it means that the employees have a high level of self-knowledge in this area. They know who they are, and that knowledge is consistent with what others see. A 360° can be a particularly powerful way of identifying gaps in perception. You may discover that employees over- or underrate their own capabilities, or you may determine that their skills and talents aren't legible to others.

In either case, this is a good opportunity to increase employees' self-awareness. They can solicit further feedback from managers and peers and consider approaches to shrink the distance between what they see and what others see. These results should inform development and learning objectives as employees build on their strengths and shore up their weaknesses.

The 360° can be a helpful way for managers to identify leadership potential. Potential leaders are likely to have self-perception scores that align with those of their reviewers and to have above-average ratings for skills like communication, collaboration, and problem-solving. Use these results to identify strong candidates when opportunities for promotion arise. For an example of a 360° assessment, see Appendix G.^{xxvii}



Table 10: Types of Assessment

Assessment Type	Objective	Employment Stage	Organizational Impact	Employee Impact	Frequency
Onboarding	Diagnose and identify what attributes and skills will help employees be successful in their new role	Onboarding	Lays out the organizational expectations to the new hire Helps manager to be able to carry out an objective appraisal	Understand transition milestones, vulnerability, and team dynamics	30, 60, and 90 days after starting in a role and as the needs of the organization and its people change over time
Engagement	A measure of an employee's connection and commitment to their work. Measures how employees think, feel, and act toward helping their organization meet its goal	Retention	Improves employee connections, increases performance, productivity, revenue, and decreases attrition	Strategic alignment (understand where the organization is going and understand how their role contributes)	Annually
Growth and Development	Measure employee's advancement from their start date to current date of employment to track their career and expertise development	Training and Retention	Helps the organization to effectively manage employees' careers and identifies the value they can bring to the organization	Helps employees to develop short-term and longer-term goals for their careers and develop the skills and behaviors needed for the next stages in their career Prepares them for future opportunities	Occasionally
360° assessments	Measures the performance of an employee not only with their own perception, but also with feedback from their peers, direct reports, immediate supervisor, and people that interact with them	Training and Retention	Allows everyone to have a voice, opinion, critics, and compliments about the professional performance of a person Use to identify areas for improvement to achieve excellence	Reveals practices, processes and relations that can be improved, maintained, or expanded	Annually
Performance Reviews	A useful tool for connecting employee engagement, work-life balance, and growth and development	Training and Retention	Helps organizations approach employee development by connecting different assessments in one unified document	Helps employees know how they can impact organizations and advance their careers	Annually
Exit	Understand the reasons for leaving the organization and learn from employee's experiences and perspective (good and bad)	Turnover (Retention/ Resignation)	Provides insight from employees who want to share their honest experiences can highlight areas for improvement and underlying issues	Formally closes the employee/employer relationship in a constructive and helpful way	Resignation or retirement



Chapter 4: Recruitment/ Onboarding

If you've been working with your team to build their capacity, enhance collaboration, and open lines of communication, it is likely that employee retention and engagement will increase. Eventually, however, you will need to fill an open position. How can you use the hiring process to continue building a thriving team?

Building strong organizations and preparing employees for professional advancement both start with hiring the right people. As a manager, you are responsible for finding employees that will contribute to the mission, vision, and values of your organization. Hiring the right candidate can be a difficult process, especially in tight labor markets.

Given all your team development efforts, your first option for filling vacancies should be to promote from within. Strong internal candidates will demonstrate relevant skills and will take advantage of training opportunities, mentorships, and other resources to fill any remaining skills gaps. Assessing your current employees will support your ability to make strategic promotions as those employees with interest and aptitude will become clear.

Like new employees, young *Victoria* seeds need several months before they get acclimated, rising to the surface of surrounding waters like miniature pontoons. And just as rhizomes push out roots and new leaves in a response to their environment, new employees thrive in supportive and nourishing settings.

Promoting instead of hiring externally also allows you to preserve institutional knowledge, retain existing skills and abilities, and save the time and money associated with external recruitment. Hiring from within also presents a positive feedback loop for the whole staff to observe. Employees see that you reward dedication, and the team feels more engaged and likely to put in extra effort to stand out and succeed.^{xxviii} New employees will also observe the engagement and advancement of colleagues and be inspired to advance with the organization as well.

However, it is not always possible to fill open positions with existing employees. Your organization may be growing or you may need to add additional capacities to your team. In launching the recruiting and hiring process, prepare for success by:

- **Knowing what you look for in an employee (and what they look for in you)**
- **Creating attractive job advertisements**
- **Being transparent about the job structure and compensation**
- **Accurately assessing candidates' hard and soft skills**
- **Strategically using candidate references**
- **Leveraging a probation period wisely**
- **Providing a supportive onboarding process**

Depending on the size of your public garden, any of these responsibilities can fall on human resources, directors, managers, or supervisors. Whether working alone or with a team, use the questions and techniques in this chapter to recruit, hire, and onboard the right candidate for your organization.

Hiring with Purpose

The goal when hiring should be to find an employee who contributes to the organization's mission impact, brings new skills to the team, is open-minded to change, and seeks ongoing professional development. Start with your most important KPI: your mission. Painting a clear picture of the organization's mission and vision greatly affects the connection candidates can build upon from the start of their application through their first day of work. When you promote your mission to potential employees, it starts them down the path toward high levels of engagement, a positive workplace culture, and a sense of investment in the good work of your organization.^{xxix} When employees are engaged in the organization's mission during the hiring process, they better understand the purpose of their work from day one, making it easier for them to goal-set and feel that they are contributing to the team and organization.

Position Descriptions

How do you make your mission and vision clear? Start by incorporating your candidates into the position description.

A position description may be the first chance your potential hire will have to learn about your organization, your expectations, and workplace culture. Include a brief description of your mission and values, and list as an essential duty the expectation that the new employee will advance both. Showing potential hires how daily activities are framed through organizational values will help them to understand the impact and value of their work.

However powerful this approach can be, many managers find it challenging to write compelling position descriptions. They may be tempted to write unrealistic wish lists, overinflate required credentials, or summarize too much under "other duties as assigned." Position descriptions either end up too lean, hardly reflecting the position's range and nuance, or too bloated, with endless bullet lists of responsibilities and desired qualifications.

Of course, employees in most organizations must wear multiple hats and offer a wide variety of skills. But you can give potential employees an accurate sense of your open position with a strategic description of the responsibilities and expectations. Focus on the essentials. Complicated, lengthy job descriptions can discourage or intimidate potential applicants. The more employers add requirements to job postings, the more they narrow the aperture on finding the talent they need.^{xxx}

Stay focused on what's relevant. Align the job title with the responsibilities. (For example, does your "visitor experience manager" oversee your public-facing facilities? Consider renaming this role to "facilities manager" to generate applications from professionals with relevant experience.) Include reasonable skill requirements based on your team assessments and add the academic requirements that are essential. You may ask whether an advanced college degree is necessary, or whether a certain type or length of experience would adequately prepare someone for success in this role. Make performance goals highly visible in the position description. By making clear requirements for what is necessary (and reducing jargon), you may expand your candidate pool and find talent in unexpected places. Appendix H provides a more extensive guide to creating position descriptions.



Hard Versus Soft Skills

Desired skills are typically a cornerstone of position descriptions. These qualities and skills can be divided between hard (technical skills) and soft (interpersonal) skills. Both are necessary for any organization to ensure that teams have the necessary diversity of talents and skills. See Table 11 for a list of hard and soft skills.

Hard skills are competencies that are relatively easy to measure and are often validated with some form of qualification.^{xxxix} These are generally learned through school, training, apprenticeships, and previous work experience. Hard skills are objective; once someone has learned that specific information or task, they possess that skill. You can get a good idea of a candidate's hard skills by looking at their certifications, education, and previous experience, along with the more in-depth information they share in an interview.^{xxxix}

Soft skills are competencies associated with activities such as communication, problem-solving, and teamwork.^{xxxix} They may also be called people skills, interpersonal skills, communication skills, power skills or transferable skills. Soft skills can be more difficult to develop than hard skills and are practiced over time. They can also be difficult to evaluate. The best way to identify a potential candidate's soft skills is during the interview process and in conversations with references. Once you've selected a candidate, the onboarding process and probationary period will give you a much more intensive opportunity to assess soft skills.

Table 11. Hard Versus Soft Skills in Public Horticulture

Hard Skills	Soft Skills
Integrated Pest Management	Active Listening
Finance	Critical Thinking
Design	Problem Solving
Equipment Operation	Decision Making
Foreign Languages	Organization
Grant Writing	Social Perceptiveness
Graphic Design	Leadership
Arboriculture	Customer Service
Grounds Maintenance	Communication
Information Technology	Empathy
Marketing	Respect
	Team Orientation

MAKE YOUR IMPACT

What balance of hard and soft skills do you look for when recruiting for a new position? Make a list of skills you want from an ideal candidate for the specific job position. Ask yourself which hard skills are needed to complete the job. Then prioritize which soft skills are fundamental to a healthy team dynamic and continued growth.

Identifying a candidate's balance of hard and soft skills helps you determine whether they are a good fit for the job and your team. Every employee contributes something different based on factors such as life experience, self-motivation, or mindset. Has their professional experience to date given them the skills needed to succeed at your organization? How do they persevere through challenges? Are they looking at this position as a steppingstone or as a more permanent role? Ask candidates how they see themselves growing with the organization or what they are looking for in their career.

You may get lucky and find a candidate who meets every criterion in your position description. But it is more likely that each candidate you meet will offer a slightly different mix of skills that bring both advantages and disadvantages. If you must choose between a stronger set of soft skills or hard skills, hire for soft skills; you are more likely to be able to close a gap in hard skills. That is, you may be able to provide training or coaching on technical skills if a candidate has a growth mindset and a strong commitment to your mission and values. And don't forget to assess your organizational commitment to your new employee. If a candidate has desired soft skills and the potential to develop hard skills, are you willing to invest in them to build a better work culture?

Job Posting 101

Now that you have your position description, it's time to send it out into the world. In many cases, your job posting is your opportunity to attract skilled and motivated candidates.

Every organization has different methods for posting its job openings. Well-funded organizations can hire search firms or pay for high-profile ads, but not all organizations can do that. Luckily, there are numerous resources you can use that are free (or require a small one-time fee). Ask your employees and colleagues across the industry to share the job postings with their networks. Some professional associations (like APGA) host industry-specific job boards, and you can also reach out to local colleges and universities to post on their career center websites. Posting to local community websites and promoting through other cultural organizations may deepen your applicant pool.

Use social media to post positions too. LinkedIn, Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook are all free options that have groups and communities you can join. Ask other members of your team to consider posting through their accounts too.

To foster diverse hiring practices, try to hire outside of your network. Talk to professionals in different industries, especially adjacent industries, to ensure that your opportunity is seen by talented candidates that may not already be in your professional or industry networks.

Appendix I lists some fee-based and free sites to post jobs. Remember to ask candidates, especially those who are particularly strong, how they found out about your posting so that you know which channels were the most productive.

Interviewing Practices

You've written a clear position description and posted effectively, so now you have a strong applicant pool. How can you make sure the screening process goes well?

The goal of interviewing is to identify and select a candidate whose skillset and behaviors match the needs of a particular role; you're also looking for someone whose personality, interests, and values match the needs and mission of the organization. The interview questions you select are crucial to understanding a prospective employee's unique blend of knowledge, experience, and personality. Before you start interviewing, review the skills and competencies you're seeking and create a list of questions that reflect these characteristics. If managing contractor relationships is a core responsibility, for example, ask about how they hold people accountable to their commitments. To assess their hard skills, ask candidates to walk you through an example of how they put their knowledge into practice instead of simply reciting a list of prior tasks.

Interviews should be structured to elicit the best understanding of a candidate's qualifications for the role. Three common options are one-on-one, group, and panel interviews. One-on-one interviews are typically held between a single interviewer and a single interviewee. They allow for focused attention and close conversation and can be particularly effective when the interviewer is the person to whom the candidate would be reporting. However, with only one person observing the candidate, there can be bias. Follow-up analysis—especially to check perceptions—can also be limited because of having only one person's impressions.

Group interviews consist of several candidates interviewing at once, whether with a single interviewer or a panel. Typically, group interviews allow employers to use group dynamics in evaluating personality, skills, and qualifications of individual candidates. They may focus more on teamwork, collaboration, resolving conflict, and communication. This approach can help managers decide if candidates align with organizational culture and its values.^{xxiv} Group interviews can also be an excellent strategy for understanding how individuals interact with others and apply their interpersonal and communication skills, and they are efficient if you happen to be hiring multiple candidates for the same type of position. However, they can be intimidating for some candidates and may privilege those who are more assertive or confident—not necessarily those who can do the job best or have the most desirable characteristics. They can be time-saving in terms of reviewing multiple candidates at once, but they can also present challenges when coordinating candidate schedules.

Finally, panel interviews consist of several interviewers assessing an individual candidate. The interviewing panel may consist of a hiring manager, the supervisor, and one or more coworkers. In this format, interviewers take turns asking questions to observe how the candidate fits with the values, requirements, and culture of the organization. Each interviewer can not only interact with the candidate directly but also observes their interactions with others. Panel interviews invite multiple opinions into the decision-making process; further discussion of different perceptions and observations reduces the chance of bias. However, this type of interview style can be intimidating to the candidate. They can also be time-intensive for the organization, as each interview must be scheduled with many current employees.

“People rarely realize that some questions are raised to know how they will fit in the position. Asking what someone values most, what do they like to do, and what are their favorite processes in a task are say a lot more than what they think; either the position requires teamwork, leadership, or isolated work. And seeing through that answer helps to make the decision for hiring.”

—Jim Harbage, Director of Floriculture and Conservatories
at Longwood Gardens

Interview Question Bank

Regardless of the interview format you choose, the questions you use will be crucial to interviewing effectiveness. Your KPIs, including the essential skills needed and your organization's mission and values, can guide the questions you ask. If you know what you're looking for, you can choose questions that ascertain those characteristics.

Using a question bank can help you structure interviews to build more consistency throughout the process, ensuring equity and fairness for all your candidates. This also helps to keep continuity throughout the interview and reduces the chance of giving one candidate an advantage over another. Looking for quality—not just quantity—when asking about skills and experience can help you reduce bias toward specific age brackets.

The questions provided in Appendix J invite candidates to elaborate on their previous experience and demonstrate how they align with your mission and vision. Each of the 15 categories includes open-ended, situational, and behavioral questions, all of which will invite candidates to describe their competencies in real-life and relevant prior situations.



Importance of References

You've interviewed your candidates and narrowed the candidate pool down to your top choice. Now it's time to check references. Is it really worth it to make those calls, or do you already have the information you need?

Even with lengthy interviews, multiple interviews, and interviews with multiple reviewers, it can be difficult to fully assess a candidate's personality and skills. While candidates are generally trying to present the best version of themselves at every stage, they may simultaneously feel inhibited by the pressure that can build during interviews.

This is where references are useful. Even though references are generally supplied by the candidate and are thus people who are likely to speak highly of them, they can share observations about the candidate based on a much fuller viewpoint. (They are also unlikely to feel nervous about the screening process and will be more comfortable sharing their opinions with you.) You can also try to ensure a well-rounded view of the candidate by asking for references in specific categories, like a former supervisor, peer, or a direct report. (Remember that, although a current supervisor may be able to share more timely information, the candidate is unlikely to have already alerted that person to their potential new career opportunity with you and thus may not be willing to share contact information for this type of reference.)

Be aware that not every reference is able to speak freely about the candidate, especially if you have requested contact information for references in certain relational categories. Some organizations, especially those that are large and more bureaucratic, have policies that prevent current employees from sharing any information other than job title, dates of employment, and eligibility for rehire. When you start reference conversations, confirm whether there are organizational policies in place that would prevent that person from sharing information about the quality of the candidate's work. If there are, take note of the information they can share—and don't hold the lack of a glowing recommendation against your candidate.

Ensure that you ask specific questions about the qualities you're seeking. Do they consistently demonstrate ethics? What motivates them? How do they contribute to team projects? What are areas for improvement? Be sure you don't ask about protected employment categories like family composition, mode of transportation, or age. Check with your HR team, peers at other institutions, or the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) if in doubt.

Be aware that references can also be subjective to your network. You may be more likely to respect a reference given by a colleague or peer, especially if this person is able to speak freely with you about the candidate. Using a numeric scoring system for rating a candidate's characteristics, or asking a colleague to contact a reference you know personally, may be helpful in maintaining a level playing field.

See Appendix K for questions to ask a candidate's references.

Onboarding Process

Once your offer has been accepted by your candidate of choice, you can start the onboarding process. This is an important first step in what you hope is a long-term organizational relationship, and it is important to begin with that end in mind.

The following steps will help you build engagement and foster retention from day one:

- 1. Listen and engage.** Communication is essential to building a relationship with your new hire, so create an environment of openness to feedback and opinions. Your new employee has fresh eyes and can help to assess issues or changes that can be made. Stay open, keep listening, and foster a respectful relationship. Ask open-ended questions. Invite them to share their prior experiences. Schedule daily, weekly, or biweekly check-ins to make sure your new hire feels supported and knows how to access resources. Choose a location where your employee is comfortable sharing their observations without being overheard; ensure that your employee understands that your conversations are confidential, and their input is valued.
- 2. Set them up for success.** Implement training and onboarding processes that are clear. Write things down and show your new hire where to find information. Your new employee should be provided with guidance on policy and processes and have clear expectations about their new role. Regardless of the size of your organization, there should be tangible policies and processes documented and explained to your new employee to help them navigate the organization's expectations and culture. A binder, booklet, or electronic document with current policies is helpful to provide your employees so that they clearly understand protocols. If there is available information like technical manuals or process documentation, be sure to share it with them. To ensure equity and continuity, create consistent protocols that can be used for each new employee.
- 3. Don't forego basic onboarding policies.** Regardless of the size of your organization, provide your new hire with:
 - a.** An organizational overview (mission, vision, and values)
 - b.** General employment information (equal employment opportunity policy, employment eligibility, harassment and discrimination policy, any policies related to employee assistance or accommodations, attendance expectations around working hours, overtime, breaks, and remote work, if applicable)
 - c.** Standards of conduct (workplace professionalism, workplace violence prevention policies, safety and security)
 - d.** Payroll information
 - e.** Benefits (insurance, workers' compensation)
 - f.** Employee time off (vacation, annual and sick leave, jury duty, military leave)
 - g.** Use of company equipment and electronics (cellphone and computer policy)



Managers should also review with new employees' performance expectations and any evaluation systems in place.^{xxxv} Reference the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) website for many guides and templates to create specific policies.

4. **Expose new hires to different experiences.** Allow your new hire to explore the company's operations and culture. Avoid siloing your employee to just your team. They should understand the entire functionality of the organization to better understand the bigger picture and purpose. To allow them to integrate into a team, think about having a potluck, meet and greet, or virtual happy hour for other staff or departments to welcome the new employee and introduce them to the whole staff. Make sure they know who to contact if they have a specific question or comment.
5. **Use an onboarding assessment.** This tool helps identify the attributes and skills employees need to be successful in their new roles. It can lay out the organizational expectations for the new hire, thereby helping the manager to be able to carry out an objective appraisal. This assessment helps employees understand transition milestones, potential vulnerabilities, and team dynamics. It can be implemented at 30, 60, and 90 days after starting in a role, and as the needs of the organization change over time. Appendix L in this toolkit offers helpful questions to ask at various points during the first 90 days of employment.^{xxxvi}

Conclusion

Public horticulture is reaching a crossroads in terms of finding, retaining, and advancing effective team members. This issue has been accelerated by pandemic-driven shifts in the labor market and by the predicted wave of retirements from senior leaders in the next few years. We must respond thoughtfully and authentically so as not to lose the decades of institutional knowledge that will follow many individuals into retirement.

This toolkit likely doesn't have all the answers you are looking for and may even be leaving you with more questions about how to better do your job. And that's okay. People and workplaces are complex and ever-changing. The tools provided are only a small sampling of the useful tools out there. They are intended to help you think differently, to help you better understand the complexities and nuances of your employees, coworkers, organizational structures, and processes.

As a manager, the best way to measure the success of your employees is through holistic evaluation. The surveys and assessments in this toolkit provide you with a baseline for identifying the needs of your employees and to monitor their growth. Their growth will give you valuable insights into how successful your career development program is. Remember you are assessing people and people-driven processes. Both of these—and your evaluation strategies—will continue to evolve. Maintain open dialogue with all stakeholders so you increase your own understanding of which assessments are most effective, which employee development strategies have the best return on investment, which recruiting channels are the most generative, and what each generational perspective contributes to an equitable and well-rounded organization.

Don't be discouraged if your first attempts didn't work out perfectly. The important part is that you have begun the process. Much like plants have evolved with their environments, so will your process. And just like a seed must be planted to grow, we all must start somewhere.



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