



Volunteers Can Turbocharge Forestry Programs

We've all heard excuses for forestry departments to avoid using volunteers, from a lack of time to coordinate them to difficulty controlling them. Yet resistance to working with community volunteers can harm a program in the long run.

Volunteers save urban forestry programs money and time. In 2011, Independent Sector estimated the average value of a volunteer's time at \$21.36 an hour.

Volunteers also build community relationships and are the biggest advocate an urban forester or community arborist can have. It may take some time and effort, but those relationships steadily built within the community are invaluable to our job as stewards of the environment.

In fact, a tip sheet called *The Care and Feeding of Volunteers* from the Citizen Forestry Support System* states that the success of tree programs needs to be measured not in the funding available to hire staff to maintain the trees, but in their ability to "attract and involve hundreds of volunteers."

Below are some of the most common ways to incorporate volunteers into your forestry program:

- Arbor Day celebrations
- Tree tagging events
- Watering crews
- Tree planting
- Tree boards
- Tree stewardship

All these activities have an education component in addition to physical work. This is important, as it provides an incentive for volunteers to come and a sense of accomplishment when they leave. Both are important to keep volunteers engaged and empower them to advocate for trees in their communities.

Many online resources can help a forestry department get started in developing a volunteer program.

Start small by finding a dedicated person or two whom you work well with and cultivate them as the lead volunteer who will coordinate future volunteers and projects. This reduces the extra staff time it may take to managing a group, but still provides staff with enough direct contact to guide the group's direction.

Whatever difficulties you may have had with volunteers, remember that there are hundreds of positive experiences for every one or two negative experiences. Being flexible and understanding can make the difference between a good or bad experience. You may need to adjust your procedures if volunteers are doing the work, but the work still will get done.

* Quoted in *Restoring Nature: Perspectives from the Social Sciences and Humanities* by Paul H. Gobster, Paul H. Gobster R. Bruce Hull

Resources for working with volunteers:

Alliance for Community Trees [NeighborWoods program](#). Nationwide volunteer urban forestry program. [Downloadable volunteer management guides](#) and [webinars, downloadable guide for forestry volunteers](#).

Arbor Day Foundation. National organization's website has [links to organizations around the country](#) that use volunteers to plant trees.

Tree Board University. [Online training courses for tree volunteers](#). From U.S. Forest Service.

Openlands. Chicago-based [Openlands](#) operates [TreeKeepers](#), one of the nation's oldest nonprofit community forestry programs.

Southern Illinois University: <http://mypage.siu.edu/urban.forestry/>, great programs and resources for communities outside of the Chicago region.

Video on Why I Volunteer: <http://youtu.be/JRf6TQVZTss>

Video on The Power of Volunteering: <http://youtu.be/aS-mAz34NAo>