

Gardens Trust Training Handout: Audience Development Basics

What is audience development?

'Audience development' is a term used to describe the way in which relationships are managed between audiences and cultural organisations such as County Gardens Trusts, particularly in terms of working to consciously extend the range and numbers of people with whom organisations engage, and the nature of this engagement.

This handout looks at 'audience development' particularly in terms of building relationships with new people from more diverse backgrounds than you may usually attract.

Why strive for audience development?

It's very easy and comfortable for organisations to keep doing similar things, in similar ways, that they know will appeal to the kind of people that they already involve in their activities.

However, this can lead to a silo effect in which the organisation becomes distanced from new ideas and opportunities, and can slip into becoming isolated from the evolving society around it.

Audience development is a way of reaching new and more people in order to:

- increase the net of people who might join your organisation or events and therefore increase your income;
- develop a wider pool of people, perhaps with new skills or experiences, who might want to volunteer to support your work;
- engage more and different people to support your mission and therefore help you achieve your heritage or conservation goals;
- help you be socially responsible by sharing the learning and pleasure from things that are important to you;
- meet interesting new people who may bring fresh perspectives on things you are perhaps 'too' familiar with.

It is a crucial part of any drive to increase your organisation's sustainability.



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Audience development plans

To make limited resources work harder and most effectively to reach new audiences, efforts are best undertaken as part of a strategic audience development plan. This does not need to necessarily be lengthy or formal, but should identify:

- What you want to achieve
- What is your potential, what are the limitations?
- How will you achieve success?
- What will success look like? How will you measure it?
- What will you do, when?
- Is it working? What do you need to change?

There is an excellent guide to audience development plans by the Audience Agency: <http://thegardenstrust.org/conservation/hlp-hub/networking-materials/audience-development/>

Some achievable ideas for reaching new audiences

Some organisations may want to try some early steps to reach new audiences before developing a proper audience development plan. We have suggested 8 simple ideas, below.

1. Messaging

- If you want your communications to be accessible and welcoming, then impact is just as much through the way you communicate as the content itself. Choice of words, pictures and presentation is critical.
- Be mindful that most of the population will have received a different education from you, have different learning styles, have different life experiences, and different preferred ways of communicating. Reread everything you write, from websites to newsletters to exhibitions, and question whether you might have made assumptions about their reading level or existing knowledge.
- Think about your choice of words, e.g. if you are hoping to recruit volunteers new to academia, 'finding out about your open space' is more accessible than 'researching garden history'.
- It's easy to make statements like 'Everyone is welcome in our organisation/event', but then undermine this message by using only images of a certain type of person, which could then make others feel alienated. Try to use images that show diverse people of different ages, physical abilities and cultural backgrounds. If you do not already hold photos of this type, you could rebalance your existing photos with clip art or drawings, and should definitely consider hosting an event for diverse

audiences that could then be recorded in photography for future. (Ensure you get photo permissions, and that your event is genuinely inclusive and not simply a tick box exercise.)

- You can find a range of materials to help improve your communication style here <http://thegardenstrust.org/conservation/hlp-hub/networking-materials/audience-development/>

2. Go online

- It's nice to have a good newsletter to post or email to members, but the reach of social media can be huge, and sometimes even easier. Access our easy social media training at <http://thegardenstrust.org/conservation/hlp-hub/networking-materials/social-media/>
- Even events can be run online, potentially removing barriers around travel, weather, disability, and even Covid-19. An online event would make a lovely complement to ones in-person. The Heritage Open Days team has produced advice, which is on the GT's Resource Hub at <http://thegardenstrust.org/conservation/hlp-hub/networking-materials/audience-development/>
- These days, your website is your most important shop window to the world – first port of call for most people once they hear your name. Don't treat it as an add-on, and if you've got into a pickle using developers who hold the keys to making even small necessary changes, this is the time to talk to them about rebuilding it on a platform that you can easily update yourselves.
- If you're sharing news about your events or information about local sites, your own website and social media is a great place to start. But don't forget, there are huge audiences waiting on other people's sites and social media. Look for opportunities to post comments on others' blogs, discussions groups and social media.
- Sharing your knowledge of historic parks and gardens via lectures, newsletters, books or exhibitions is brilliant, but even the most successful reach a tiny number of people compared to sharing that knowledge online. There is excellent expert advice from the National Lottery Heritage Fund at <https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/publications/digital-guide-getting-started-online-learning>
- The Heritage Alliance is working with Lottery funding to offer free training and support for organisations such as County Gardens Trusts to gain better digital skills and strategies – more at <https://charitydigital.org.uk/heritage-digital>

3. Be part of a bigger picture

1. Bandwagons have a bad reputation, but they can be invaluable for helping your messages get more attention – think of how Capability Brown and Humphry Repton hit the headlines thanks to the pooling of our efforts.
2. In 2020-22 the Gardens Trust is working to a collaborative theme of Unforgettable Gardens, which is designed to highlight the value of historic parks and gardens, the threats they face, and the ways that people can get involved in their conservation. This is a collaborative effort, and we hope that County Gardens Trusts will plan events, publications, campaigns and other activities under this banner.
<http://thegardenstrust.org/campaigns/unforgettable-gardens-saving-our-garden-heritage/>
3. The global calendar is peppered with 'awareness days', in which people and organisations voluntarily combine efforts to share messages or activities under focussed designated headings, e.g. National Gardening Week, Volunteers' Week, or Black History Month. These can be a great focus for your activities, including social media work. You can download a calendar of appropriate awareness days from the Planning Inclusive Events section, here <http://thegardenstrust.org/conservation/hlp-hub/networking-materials/>

4. Volunteer recruitment and projects

- Too often we rely on our existing membership to provide volunteers for an initiative, but this might be at odds with the reason why people joined, and so prove limiting. By looking at a broader base, it is possible to recruit more volunteers with new skill sets and energies.
- In 2018-19 the Gardens Trust piloted a research and recording project (including a conservation message with Statements of Significance, and events for local people), for people new to garden history. This resulted in c.10 new volunteers, all highly trained. You can reuse the materials and plans from this project, downloadable from the Warley Woods section, here <http://thegardenstrust.org/conservation/hlp-hub/networking-materials/sharing-repton-2/>
- During the same period, as part of the Sharing Repton: Landscapes for All project, the Gardens Trust worked with London Gardens Trust to deliver workshops and guided tours introducing communities, including refugee groups, to their local Repton-designed parks: Kenwood, Russell Square and Barn Hill, Brent. These informal and light-touch events introduced the concept of landscape design and conservation, again for people new to these ideas. As a result, attendees were invited back to further events at Kenwood; some volunteered to garden at Russell Square; links were forged with the Barn Hill Conservation Group; one attendee now plans to organise a local study day; and London GT gained new volunteer researchers, as well as greatly expanding their network. Materials to help you create a similar event are available here:

<http://thegardenstrust.org/conservation/hlp-hub/networking-materials/sharing-repton-2/>

- The GT has recently partnered with other organisations to deliver landscape research and significance and conservation training for people living near historic parkland in Bedfordshire (with the Greensand Country Landscape Partnership) and Essex (with the Land of the Fanns Landscape Partnership Scheme). This training, which includes classroom, archive and fieldwork sessions over several months, is obviously a greater commitment than a one-day event, so you might want to consider a shorter version, or perhaps even appointing a consultant to help with training. The projects resulted in around seven new volunteer researchers for an ongoing project in Bedfordshire and has given a great boost to Essex GT's research team. Further information and materials are available here: <http://thegardenstrust.org/conservation/hlp-hub/training-materials/research-recording-knowledge-power/>

5. Events and activities

- To engage with new people and not simply keep 'feeding' your existing membership, do consider organising visits or other events for people outside of your membership, either with paid tickets, for free, or using grant funding.
- Heritage Open Days offer a structured and supported way to organise an achievable event for new people. It just needs to either be in a landscape not normally open to the public, or in a public landscape but with something extra, such as an exhibition or tour. A HOD must be free, although you could make money through membership sales, refreshments or plant sales. There are excellent support materials at <https://www.heritageopendays.org.uk/>, and even some designed especially for CGTs at <http://thegardenstrust.org/conservation/hlp-hub/networking-materials/sharing-repton-2/> under the Catton Park event.
- The Gardens Trust has piloted several event formats designed to reach new audiences – facilitated family excursions, an excursion for dementia patients, a large public open day and a small open day. You can download materials from these at <http://thegardenstrust.org/conservation/hlp-hub/networking-materials/sharing-repton-2/>
- Not everyone enjoys the traditional garden history lecture, but that doesn't mean they wouldn't love to find out about garden history. Dr David Marsh, and other speakers, offer a lively and interactive alternative through their 'Garden History in 10 Objects' events <http://thegardenstrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/10-OBJECTS.pdf> and are available for hire. Contact David for further details: <https://gardenhistorytalks.com/>
- The Gardens Trust commissioned Dr Audrey Gerber to write and pilot the 'Garden History Lucky Dip', which uses a flexible lucky dip model to trigger discussions about garden history, be you an adult, garden

historian, or child. All the materials for you to run your own Garden History Lucky Dip are available under the Blaise Castle event at <http://thegardenstrust.org/conservation/hlp-hub/networking-materials/sharing-repton-2/>

- The Capability Brown Festival of 2016 resulted in a good number of achievable audience development activities – these are detailed at http://thegardenstrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/CBF-adp_projects_final_write_up_web_version.pdf

6. Families and schools

- The Gardens Trust has a package available for working with schools around garden history - <http://thegardenstrust.org/conservation/hlp-hub/networking-materials/>. This is an excellent way to get children, but also their parents and teachers, interested in our favourite subject, and the conservation of their local sites.
- For simple garden history activities that you can offer children, please visit the 'Garden History Social Event', 'Public Open Day' and 'Facilitated Excursion' sections of <http://thegardenstrust.org/conservation/hlp-hub/networking-materials/sharing-repton-2/>. You will find plans for tree measuring, paper boat making, garden designing, lucky dip, and view spotting.
- Since 2016 the Gardens Trust has partnered with County Gardens Trusts to run an annual Family Picnic, at which children as well as adults are all welcome to come and learn about a historic park or garden together. Please email lindengroves@thegardenstrust.org if this is something you would be interested in partnering with us on in future.
- County Gardens Trusts often find it hard to enlist younger volunteers who may be busy with work and/or children. Some CGTs, such as Nottinghamshire, have developed a way of working which accommodates the restricted timetables of working parents/carers. By holding evening, weekend or lunchtime meetings; and making as many as possible of their events child-friendly, they not only have three volunteers with young families on their committee, who frequently bring their own children to meetings and events, but also attract a young family audience to many of their activities.

4. Interpretation: leaflets and exhibitions

- For those of us who have loved garden history for many years, it is easy to forget that it is new to most people, who will need a different type of explanation, and may be interested in different aspects of the subject than you.

- Resist the temptation to share every detail of a subject that interests you, cramming a dissertation onto a single exhibition board! This may offer a lot of information, but the chances of it being read by anyone other than garden historians are slim. For example, 100 words and a picture on a single well-designed page or board is ample.
- We all love pictures, but one big picture is far more effective than 4 small ones.
- Professional designers are surprisingly affordable and worth every penny. Just because you can lay out a leaflet or poster in Word yourself, it doesn't mean you should!
- It is considered best practice to write to a reading age of 9 years old if you want your words to be accessible to a broad audience. There is useful explanation and advice at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/content-design/writing-for-gov-uk>
- In 2018-19 the Gardens Trust worked with volunteers and a professional interpretation consultant to produce an accessible yet informative leaflet on Warley Woods, an 18th century landscape now a public park. This is available for you to copy, at <http://thegardenstrust.org/conservation/hlp-hub/networking-materials/sharing-repton-2/>
- You can read more about accessible interpretation at http://capabilitybrown.org/sites/default/files/appendix_b_-_interpretation_-_sharing_your_venues_story.pdf, or the Accessible Interpretation section of <http://thegardenstrust.org/conservation/hlp-hub/networking-materials/sharing-repton-2/> or under Guidance for Better Communication, here <http://thegardenstrust.org/conservation/hlp-hub/networking-materials/audience-development/>

Further reading

- http://capabilitybrown.org/sites/default/files/appendix_c_-_audience_development_and_activities_ideas.pdf
- The Gardens Trust's Sharing Repton: Historic Landscapes for All project in 2018-19 piloted 6 projects and events to engage new people. Case studies and materials from these are freely available via <http://thegardenstrust.org/campaigns/sharing-repton/>

Historic Landscape Project, thanks to Lottery players.

September 2020



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