

Longwood Gardens
Fellows Program

FROM **MISSION** TO **IMPACT**

EVALUATING INFLUENCE
& ORGANIZATIONAL ALIGNMENT



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About the Longwood Fellows

The 2023–2024 Fellows bring diverse international perspectives on public horticulture, with members from Ethiopia, Ghana, the United Kingdom, and the United States. They represent a wide range of horticultural backgrounds, including experience in entrepreneurship, government, education, design, and plant collections, but they share a common aim to deepen the impact of public horticulture through their future roles.

The Longwood Fellows Program is a one-of-a-kind leadership development program designed to prepare high-potential professionals for high-impact roles in public horticulture. Continuing Longwood Gardens' mission-driven history of targeted training and education for horticulture professionals, the Fellows Program supports the development of a robust, diverse, and qualified talent pool for the sector at large. 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.

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

Opposite: The 2023–24 Longwood Fellows (From left to right) Colin Skelly, Edem Kojo Doe, Abby Lorenz, Muluken Nega Kebede, and Nathan Anderson. At Edem Doe's invitation, all of the Fellows are wearing traditional Ghanaian smocks that signify Ghanaian culture and identity. Photo by Carlos Alejandro.

Project Overview: Understanding Mission to Grow Impact

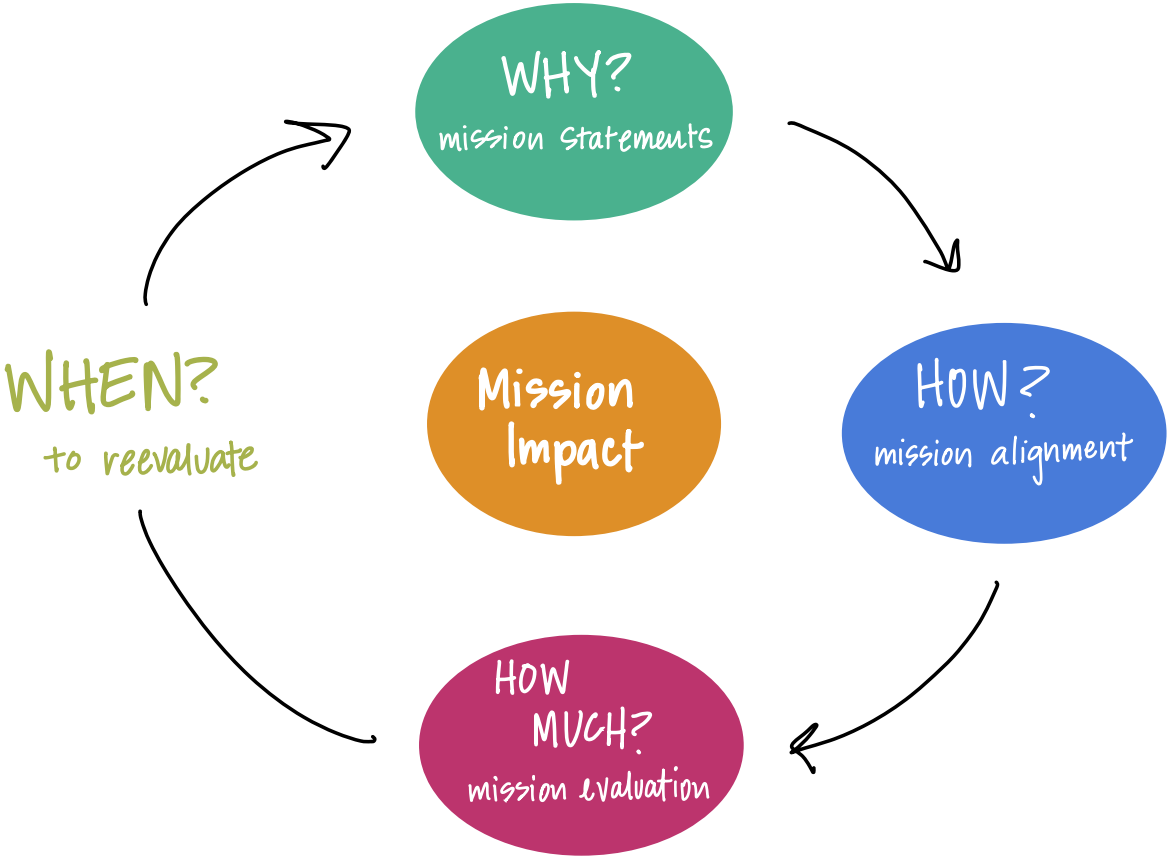
Public horticulture is a mission-driven sector. Many gardens, arboreta, historic houses, zoos, and parks share their mission statements on websites, add them to annual reports and other print materials, and sometimes emblazon them on walls or t-shirts. These mission statements provide meaning and guidance for day-to-day operations and support long-term stakeholder engagement.

When public gardens undergo periodic strategic and master planning cycles, updates to their mission statements are often part of this work. And while strategic planning typically stems from mission statements, the process of strategic thinking itself can also prompt organizations to reevaluate their mission statements.

Mission is the reason that a nonprofit exists, and financial resources – whether as earned revenue or philanthropic support – are key to an organization’s ability to fulfill its mission. Assessing mission impact relative to revenue generation, especially, is a pressing concern for leaders today. For nonprofits, the stakes are even higher, as mission impact “is the equivalent to making a profit.”¹ Return on Mission, or the measurement of how well an organization is fulfilling its mission, is as relevant as the more traditional metric of Return on Investment.²

Because it drives strategic thinking for leaders, careful attention to whether the organization is achieving its mission is a key accountability indicator. However, this is not a linear process. Just as strategic thinking and planning seek to optimize mission fulfillment, so an organization’s mission statement can evolve to reflect shifts in organizational and operational contexts.

As Longwood Fellows, we became interested in why deceptively straightforward mission statements can be the site of much attention, effort, and even debate as organizations face challenges. Our research put us in conversation with leaders of organizations that ranged from small to very large, including gardens from across the U.S. and around the globe. We spoke with public horticulture institutions that are centuries old and those that were established recently, as well as those with and without public programs.

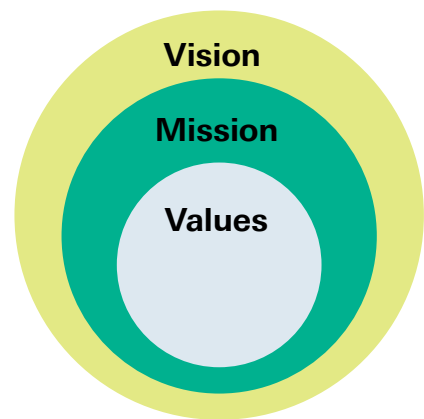


Our early findings made us curious about how nonprofits can most effectively use their mission statements to guide strategy, cultivate funders, engage communities, and enhance daily operations. We set out to combine examples of outstanding practices from public horticulture with recommended practices from the wider nonprofit sector. This included research focused on creating mission statements, activating mission-aligned strategies, and evaluating the impact of activities and programs.

The mission circle: what, when, why, and how of mission fulfillment. Illustration by Abby Lorenz.

We quickly found that there are three distinct components that form the foundation of an organization's identity and guide its actions: mission, vision, and values. Each plays a unique role in shaping purpose, direction, and culture.

- A **mission** can be defined as a concise outline of the fundamental purpose of an organization. It answers the question, "Why does the organization exist?" The mission statement serves as a guide for day-to-day operations and decision-making.
- A **vision** is a broad, forward-looking, aspirational description of the change the organization aims to make in the world. The vision statement provides a sense of direction and inspiration that is typically longer-term.
- **Values** are the core beliefs and principles that guide the behavior and decision-making and are essentially the building blocks of organizational culture, or the ways that the organization wants to work (internally and externally) to achieve its vision and mission. They represent the ethical and cultural foundation of the organization and serve as a set of guiding principles that help maintain consistency and integrity. Values may be descriptive or prescriptive.



These three components are distinct but interrelated. While the mission defines an organization's purpose and immediate objectives, the vision paints a picture of its desired future state. Values, on the other hand, are the principles that guide behavior and decision-making, contributing to the culture of the organization. Together, mission, vision, and values provide a framework for an organization to operate cohesively, drawing a thread of purpose from organizational vision to culture. While all of these elements are important, we have focused on mission: in public horticulture, mission statements are living documents as gardens revise them in relation to strategic planning and master planning processes. We will dig deeper into the dynamic relationship between mission and strategy, leaving the related topics of vision and values outside of the scope of this project.

Vision – Mission – Values: what's the difference?

This guide was created in the spirit of celebrating effective practices and highlighting great examples of organizations that have crafted impactful mission statements. Clean, solid ideas and recommendations equip leaders to meet the stresses of an often-messy reality, and we have compiled strong examples from organizations that are leading the way.

The ideas shared here fall into one of these three categories:



The following questions drove our research and shaped the information, case studies, and tools provided here:

<p>What makes a good mission statement?</p> <p>Which stakeholders should be involved in creating a mission statement, and why?</p> <p>When and how often should public gardens review their mission statements?</p>	<p>How do you know if activities and programs are aligned with your mission?</p> <p>How can you assess the mission alignment of existing and planned programs?</p>	<p>What tools and metrics can be used to evaluate mission impact?</p> <p>What data can be collected and used to deepen mission impact?</p> <p>Who and what drives mission impact?</p>
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We will explore recommended practices for nonprofits, providing case studies, tools, metrics, and processes that will help organizations craft effective mission statements—and lead to deeper mission impact.

From our research into nonprofit practices in public gardens, we identified several organizations whose practices offer helpful examples of how our sector is engaging in this work. We spotlight eight outstanding organizations—both well-established institutions and emerging green spaces, small and large, local and international—that have not only embraced their missions but have made a profound commitment to understanding and enhancing their mission and impact.

These case studies highlight how public gardens transform their mission statements into tangible impact, leaving a lasting mark on their communities.

At the core of every public garden is the potential for impact on society, the environment, and local communities. These case studies show us how mission statements are developed, activities are aligned, and mission impact is measured through a nuanced blend of quantitative data and compelling stories. The case studies illuminate how gardens effectively demonstrate value across a variety of metrics by unveiling smart strategies for facing challenges and providing valuable insights and inspiration for organizational leaders.

These stories do not just showcase achievements but serve as roadmaps, guiding leaders on a journey to amplify organizational mission. Each section includes exercises and guidance for translating these practices into new settings and providing practical application tools for advancing mission impact.

In essence, these case studies celebrate the unique journeys of public gardens, from revisiting mission statements and employing innovative tools to measuring the profound difference they make. Join us on this exploration of excellence, where these public gardens inspire leaders to guide organizations from mission statements to impactful outcomes.

Opposite: Auckland Botanic Gardens staff collecting seed from threatened sedge. Photo by Nathan Anderson.



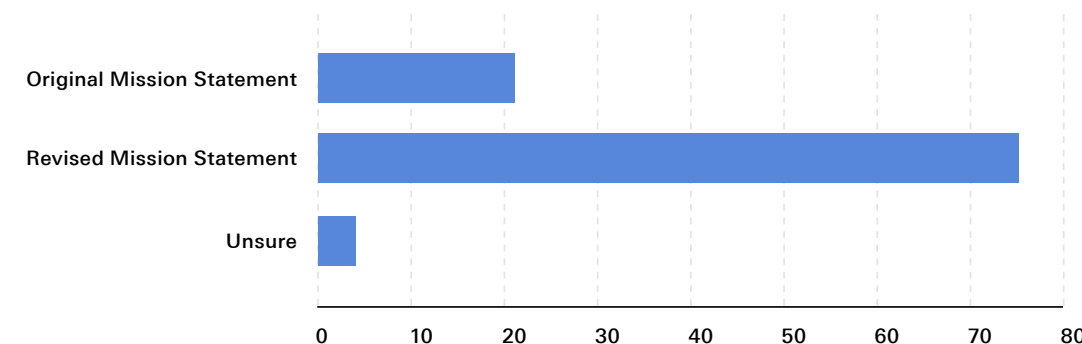
The Public Horticulture Perspective on Mission: Survey Results

To understand how organizations across public horticulture perceive mission in their work, we designed a survey to delve into how organizations are crafting mission statements and using them to measure organizational impact. In addition to compiling dozens of sample mission statement, we asked questions about how those statements were developed and the extent to which they influence strategic planning and evaluation.

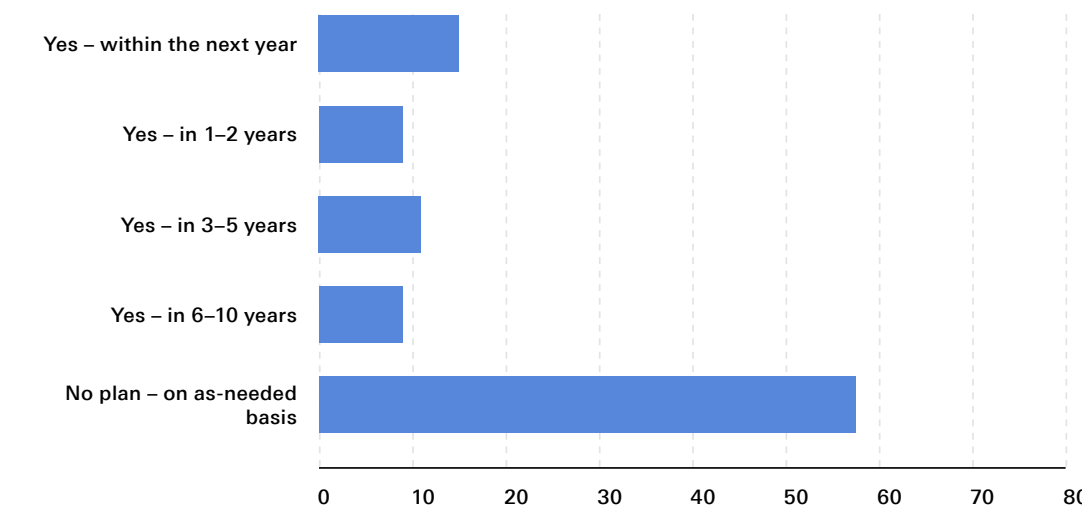
This survey was designed to gather quantitative data from a sample of organizations to understand how the industry approaches and utilizes mission statements. Additionally, we crafted questions to identify organizations for further interviews, aiming to delve deeper into the stories behind the data and uncover effective tools and approaches related to mission statements, alignment, and impact.

Our 52 survey respondents reflect a diverse array of organizational types, including botanical gardens, historic estates, cemeteries, zoos, university campuses, and arboretums. Geographically, the data encompass 23 U.S. states and Washington, D.C., as well as the United Kingdom, Singapore, and China. Participating organizations range in size, revenue models (e.g., paid versus free admission), and longevity (including both newer establishments and long-standing institutions).

While all organizations possess a formal mission statement, 21% are currently using their original statement and 75% are using revisions (with the other 4% unsure). 35% of organizations plan to revisit their mission statements within the next five years.



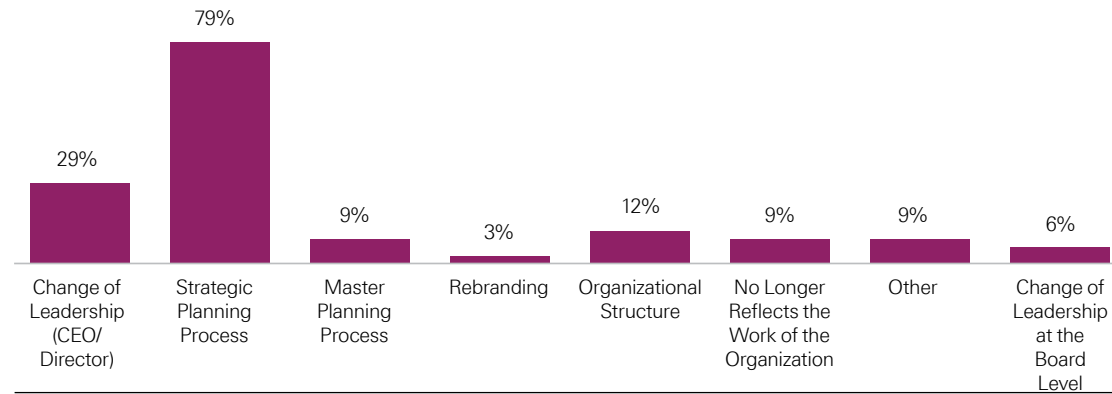
Do you plan to revise your mission?



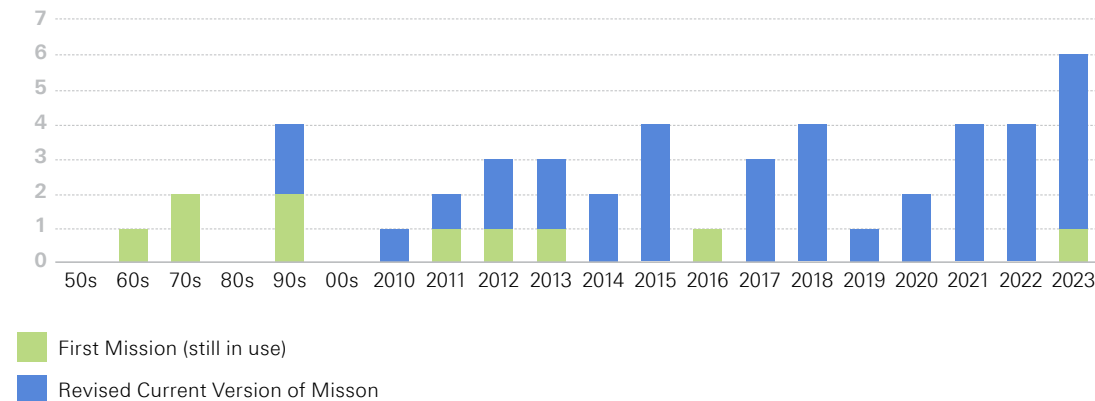
79% of mission statements revisions were prompted by strategic planning or master planning processes. This reinforced our hunch that strategic planning processes are not only flowing from mission statements but sparking their revision.

While strategic planning processes were overwhelmingly the lead reason for mission statement revisions, our survey found that 29% of respondents reviewed their mission statements when their executive leadership changed, while 15% did so as part of organizational restructuring or rebranding. This highlights the central role that crafting a purposeful organizational mission plays in managing public gardens today—and reinforces the dynamic connection between individual leaders and the organization’s mission.

What prompted your most recent mission statement revision?



When was your current mission created or revised?



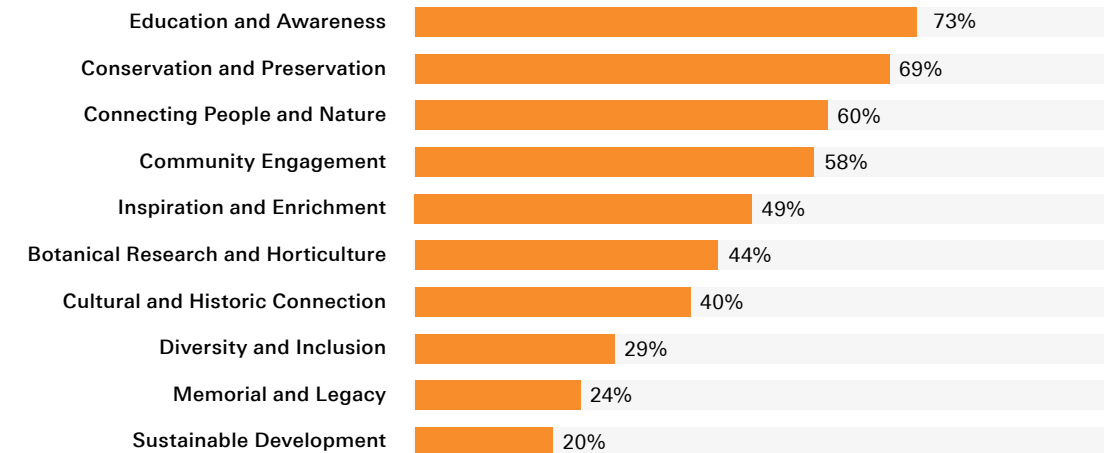
Mission statements written between 1950 and 2023 encompass immense societal, environmental, and technological shifts. Some mission statements have endured many of these changes, suggesting a lasting ethos within public horticulture that resonates with the mission and purpose of today’s public gardens. The prevalence of revisions after 2010 reflects a more recent trend of strategic and organizational shifts within the sector.

Most common words used in mission statements:



Common threads among the mission statements we studied include a dedication to connecting people with nature, fostering education and awareness of plants and conservation, engaging with communities, and inspiring a sense of enrichment and joy through plants and the natural world. Some organizations highlight unique emphases, whether on historical preservation, cultural connections, specific plant collections, or geographic regions.

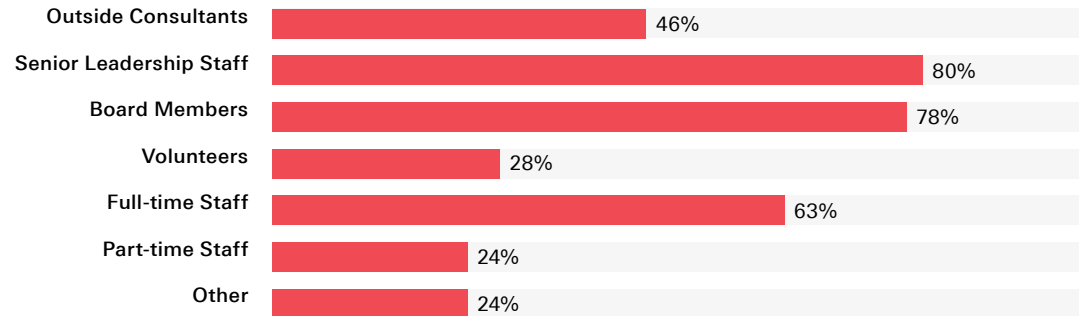
Prevalence of specific themes within mission statements:



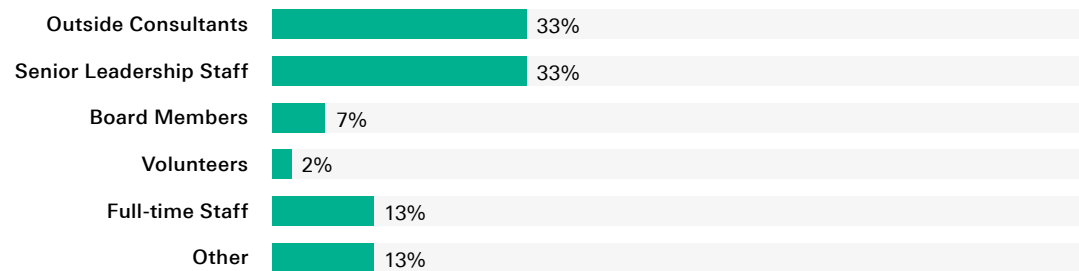
The themes that were most prevalent are not surprising: they reflect the most overt commitments of public horticulture as a sector. The less common themes such as diversity and inclusion and sustainable development reflect the increasingly nuanced understanding of these emerging priorities over the past decade, as well as a strategic response to evolving societal expectations.

How are these mission statements crafted? In our survey, we found a diverse assembly of contributors ranging from board members and senior leaders to part-time staff and volunteers. Additional contributors included university partners, organizational founders, community partners and stakeholders, outside collaborators, and industry colleagues.

Who was involved in creating your mission statement?



Who facilitated the process?

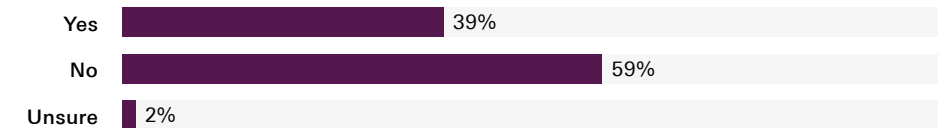


For the nearly half of organizations engaging outside consultants and a third utilizing them as primary facilitators, the resulting statements had fewer words (an average of 21 words per statement) than those statements developed entirely in-house (with an average of 27 words per statement). Consultant-led statements used broader language when compared overall to the statements that were developed within the organization itself.

While 63% of gardens involved full-time staff and 24% included part-time staff in creating their mission statements, only 39% incorporated the mission into employee appraisal processes.

This suggests an opportunity for organizations to use their mission statements more comprehensively, which could better align efforts to fulfill mission across all levels of an organization.

Does employee appraisal include advancement of your mission as measure of employee success?

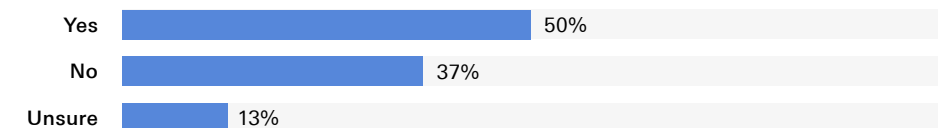


83% of organizations specifically assess the alignment of their educational programs with their missions. In contrast, only 50% measure the overall mission impact of their organizations. This suggests that educational programs are commonly seen as directly supporting an organization's mission, but there could be similar opportunities to assess mission impact across organizational activities such as operations or visitor experience.

Do you evaluate whether your programs advance your mission?



Do you measure mission impact?



Mission Statements

The following pages offer a straightforward overview of mission statements, break down the essential components of a mission statement, and include a worksheet exercise for crafting your own.

Beyond serving as a beginner's tutorial for creating a mission statement, this chapter serves as a valuable resource for reviewing and refining existing mission statements for clarity, usefulness, and impact. It is also beneficial for organizations considering a rewrite of their mission statements.

DEFINITION

1. A concise statement focused on the present that puts vision into action and creates a foundation for the organization's daily operations and strategic direction. It serves as a guiding framework for decision-making and communicates to both internal and external stakeholders why an organization was founded.
2. One or two sentences describing the reason your organization exists. (what you do + who/what you do this for)

CASE STUDY

While a mission is, simply put, a nonprofit's reason for existence, a mission statement describes what the organization currently does—and for whom or what—to pursue its long-term vision.³ Getting it right is crucial: crafting a mission statement is an important way to align expectations and efforts. The goal is to strike a balance between overt realism and optimism. Mission should be both aspirational and attainable, a distillation of what you uniquely do and whom you serve.

Public garden leaders have the responsibility to determine when, how, and whom to involve in developing these key statements. Our survey showed that most organizations engage staff in the process, highlighting the importance of input and buy-in across different organizational functions and hierarchies. A mission statement that accurately reflects both the whole organization's current activities and future aspirations can serve to clarify and inspire. In our survey results, one third of mission statements were guided by third-party consultants, drawing value from external, independent perspectives and specialist facilitation.

By bringing in cross-organizational and cross-functional voices, mission statement revisions will more accurately reflect the identity and purpose of the organization. In addition to being an important way to align staff, a mission statement can also empower fundraising strategies.⁴ Although Return on Mission is as important as Return on Investment in nonprofits, a mission statement that is both shaped by, understood, and shared across an organization can help drive competitive advantage for attention, attendance, and accolades.

It is important to distinguish “mission” from “vision.” A mission is present tense, meaning what organizations are doing now and whom that work benefits. A vision is a future objective: if organizations are successful in mission work, a new reality will be achieved. Although mission and vision statements should complement each other and share the same tone, they should be distinct and unique.

For example, The American Public Gardens Association (APGA) has successfully aligned its mission and vision statements as we have described:

APGA Mission Statement:
We champion and advance public gardens as leaders, advocates, and innovators in the conservation and appreciation of plants.

APGA Vision Statement:
A world where public gardens are indispensable.

Intro to Mission Statements

Functions of a Mission Statement

INFORM
YOUR
AUDIENCE

**FOCUS
& MOTIVATE**
STAFF &
VOLUNTEERS

GUIDE
LEADERSHIP
IN STRATEGIC
PLANNING
& DECISIONS

Guidelines for Your Mission Statement

CLEAR
EASY TO
UNDERSTAND

Use concrete language and keep things simple. An 8th grade reading level is appropriate.

CONCISE
SHORT &
TO THE POINT

Avoid buzzwords, adjective strings and fluff. Aim for 20 words maximum.

USEFUL
TO INFORM,
FOCUS,
& GUIDE

It does not matter how clever your turn of phrase is if it fails to inform others about what you do and focus and guide staff and decisions.

Adapted from TopNonprofits, 2017–2022.

Opposite: Photo by Nathan Anderson.



Mission Building Blocks

Rather than starting with a brainstorming session, take a step back and start with the different building blocks that comprise a mission statement.

Basic Approach

The most straight forward approach is to pair high-level actions with your beneficiaries or targeted audience.



To conserve native plants and habitats for the health and well-being of our people and our planet. Santa Barbara Botanic Garden

NOTES

Alternate Frameworks

In addition to actions and beneficiaries, other possible building blocks include services, causes, problems, and partners. Do not exceed more than five building blocks and no more than one word string (e.g. inspire and empower... OR ... people, plants, and the natural world).



Collect, study display and conserve trees and other plants from around the world to inspire learning, foster enjoyment, benefit communities, encourage action and enhance the environment. The Morton Arboretum



Desert conservation thru preservation, education, and appreciation. The Living Desert



We inspire people to appreciate, study and conserve plants to enrich society locally and globally. United States Botanic Garden



Inspire all who visit, comfort the bereaved, and commemorate the dead in a landscape of exceptional beauty. Mount Auburn Cemetery



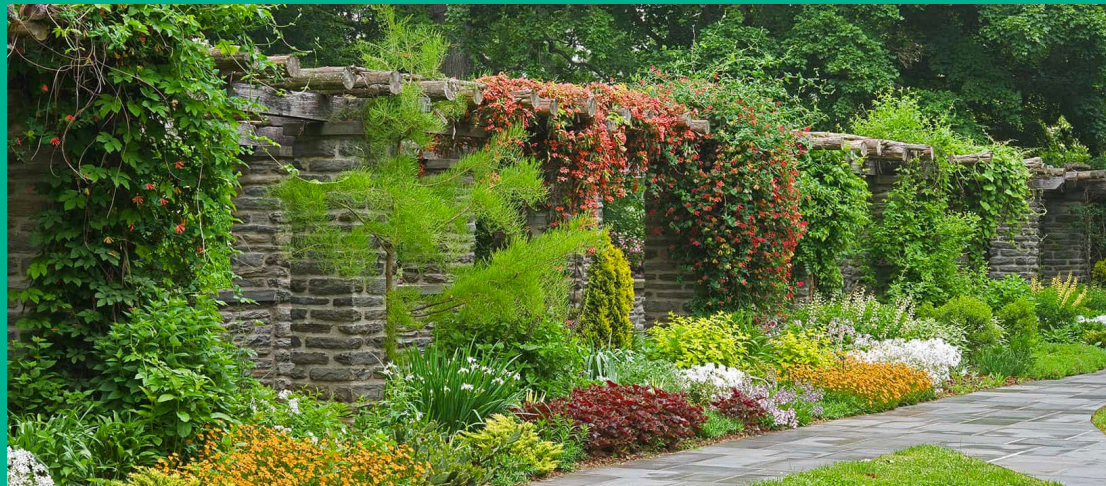
We cultivate the power of plants to sustain and enrich life. Chicago Botanic Garden



Enhancing lives by connecting people with plants to increase awareness and appreciation of our environment. Memphis Botanic Garden

Stoneleigh: *a natural garden*

Overview	Stoneleigh is a former private estate turned vibrant public garden that features extraordinary trees, accessible pathways, and sweeping vistas. Previously a traditionally managed landscape, the garden has been recently reimagined with innovative displays of native plants that support the natural world. Stoneleigh is owned by Natural Lands, a non-profit land conservation organization based in Media, PA.
Garden Size	42 acres
Location	Villanova, PA
Mission	The mission of Stoneleigh is to celebrate the beauty and importance of the natural world and inspire the cultivation of native plants for the benefit of all.



Stoneleigh's Pergola, with plantings composed of all native species.
Photo by David Korbonits, courtesy of Stoneleigh.

Stoneleigh is a 42-acre garden in southeastern Pennsylvania, owned by Natural Lands, a regional land conservation nonprofit. In 2023, the organization took a significant step forward by formalizing a new mission statement, a process that became the guiding force for their strategic plan. This comprehensive strategic planning effort underscored Stoneleigh's commitment to native plants and helped strengthen its relationship with Natural Lands.

Collaboration with Natural Lands during this process was pivotal, leading to the development of Stoneleigh's "Statement of Connection to Natural Lands." Emphasizing the importance of the relationship between the two organizations, this statement also borrowed and adapted three broad goals from Natural Lands' strategic plan by focusing on connecting people to nature and each other, ensuring organizational stability, and maintaining and enhancing Stoneleigh's gardens and historic buildings as models for best stewardship practices.

Engaging an outside consultant brought additional expertise to the mission-formulation process. The consultant helped gather and organize feedback from staff and stakeholders, keeping the planning process on track with clear deadlines and accountability. Their involvement ensured the mission and strategic goals stayed focused without getting bogged down in excessive detail.

The strategic planning process resulted in a three-year plan with clear goals and priorities. Guiding principles such as innovation by design, celebrating biodiversity, and inspiring action, were also developed. Director, Ethan Kauffman noted, "Writing down the goals during this process allowed us to align them with our priorities and principles and ensure they were connected to what we do and who we are as an organization."

A key outcome of this planning process was the elevation and completion of Stoneleigh's Biodiversity Plan, which began during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020–2021. The Biodiversity Plan addresses the management of Stoneleigh's land, considering the impact of their practices on local ecology and how these practices are communicated to the public in an engaging way.

Stoneleigh, an emerging garden that is free for everyone, used the strategic planning process to understand its engagement level and impact. This approach allowed them to think about measuring success in innovative ways beyond traditional metrics like visitor or membership numbers. They now define success through their presence as a leader in ecological horticulture through activities such as industry presentations, workshops, and tours.

Overall, the mission statement's formulation was a pivotal moment in Stoneleigh's history, acting as a catalyst for a broader strategic planning process. Reflecting on the process, Kauffman remarked, "Having this plan has been invaluable. It's like a rudder that guides us in managing our resources and deciding what we want to do. It provides us with a clear direction that benefits our efficiency, our community, and everything we do."

The Eden Project

Overview	The Eden Project opened in 2001 and is sited in a former China clay pit in Cornwall, United Kingdom, restoring a site of industrial extraction to a public garden within a wider landscape managed for conservation. Two geodesic domes recreate rainforest and Mediterranean biomes and house biocultural exhibits on themes of environmental sustainability, biodiversity conservation, and education on the interconnectedness of nature and human wellbeing.
Garden Size	30 acres
Location	St. Austell, Cornwall, United Kingdom
Mission	The Eden Project demonstrates and inspires positive action for the planet.



The geodesic domes housing humid tropic and warm temperate plant collections located within a former China clay mine. Photo courtesy of The Eden Project.

The Eden Project is an educational charity based in Cornwall in southwest England. Its headquarters, the Eden Project Cornwall destination and garden presents both wild and cultivated landscapes nestled in a 15-hectare crater. Opening in 2001, the Project has broadened its mission focus from the more horticultural goal of connecting people with plants to a greater social emphasis on reconnecting people with nature and each other. Reflecting the deepening evidence of global environmental concern at the disconnect of humans from the natural world, the Eden Project has over the years grown from being a site-based destination with an educational message to being part of a global movement responding to the planetary crisis.

The Eden Project is progressing from a single-site public garden to a multi-site family of destinations and continuing to work on outreach projects and programmes. To respond to this evolution, it developed a new mission statement to better reflect its strategic transformation and to serve as a more effective guide for planning future objectives and initiatives. Aligning the mission statement with the wider scope of its activities provides a clearer framework for decision-making about how different organizational outputs can drive optimal mission impact.

The Eden Project, like the world around it, has always embraced change. (In fact, this is why the word “Project” was retained in the organization’s title; the garden’s leadership wanted to signal their ongoing commitment to iterative experimentation.) Today, the Eden Project is working on adding two more destinations in the United Kingdom, Eden Project Morecambe and Eden Project Dundee, and potentially growing beyond UK shores. The Eden Project delivers onsite and online education programs for schools, universities, and continuing education programs both nationally and internationally; carries out nature-connected community programs across the U.K.; and runs a range of demonstrator nature recovery projects nationally and internationally. All of these initiatives are designed to achieve both social and environmental outcomes.

Over the past five years, their mission statement has gone through several revisions, including:

- The Eden Project connects us with each other and the living world, exploring how we can work towards a better future
- The Eden Project works to create a movement that builds relationships between people and the natural world to demonstrate the power of working together for the benefit of all living things

The Eden Project worked with an external agency to develop a new brand identity to reflect its evolution. A brand survey carried out in 2022 across the U.K. revealed that the Eden Project was predominantly viewed as a Cornwall destination. In response, the organization sought to revise its mission to that of an organization with a far wider purview. Working with the external agency and all the Eden teams provided the specialized expertise to successfully negotiate the reforging of the Eden Project’s mission statement to reflect its evolved identity and ambition.

6 Tips for Creating an Effective Mission Statement

A great mission statement is straightforward, to the point, meaningful, honest, and resilient. As you set out to write your mission statement, keep these six tips in mind so you can craft the best possible version.

1. Keep it simple

Clarity is key to a quick delivery. The easier it is to understand your mission statement, the more successful it will be.

2. Keep it focused

You don't need to compose a lengthy list of objectives and possibilities when crafting your mission statement. Rather, aim for the main point, and get there as quickly as possible.

3. Be purposeful

Your mission statement should be written with intention and meaning. Embrace deliberate and actionable language that describes what your organization offers and the values you hold. Vague references to your raison d'être won't have the same effect on your audience and employees.

4. Be believable

Above all else, your mission statement needs to be realistic. After all, if it sounds too good to be true, your audience may think it is.

5. Think beyond your immediate context

As a core tenet of your brand identity, your mission statement sets out to support your organization today and into the future. The fewer times you need to change your mission statement, the more resilient your brand. However...

6. Embrace revision if necessary

Your organization may change its mission as the years go by, particularly if your core services evolve or your audience base shifts. And that is okay! As your organization evolves, though, make sure that your mission can keep up. If you realize your mission is no longer propelling you toward your vision, it may be time for a refresh.

Adapted from namecheap.com.

Opposite: Photo by Daniel Traub.



Mission Alignment

How do you know if your activities and programs are aligned with your mission? Where mission statements define a public garden's purpose, the alignment of activities is in the territory of strategic planning. Leaders at all levels have a role in aligning current and future activities with stated missions. When these efforts are successful, cohesion and purpose stretch from board and leadership to staff, guests, and donors.

DEFINITION

The degree to which the activities, goals, and strategies of a nonprofit are consistent with its stated mission.

Organizations need to decide how they will know when they have achieved their desired impact. As a tool to make decisions and achieve goals, mission statements can serve as the foundation for an evaluation framework. For example, a theory of change makes explicit the operational steps needed to bring a mission statement to life.⁵ A clear framework built on a commitment to mission alignment can drive differentiation and focus day-to-day operations.

Assessment can also guide when and how often public gardens should review their mission statements: "Your mission statement is part of a story you are telling donors, sponsors, and grantmakers, but that story needs to logically fit with the work your nonprofit is actually doing."⁶ In other words, mission alignment is an active process requiring regular assessment. When mission statements and actions misalign, it is time to either change activities to fit your mission or to begin a process of revising your mission statement to fit the new realities of your garden.

In the nonprofit context, "mission creep" is the gradual, unintentional expansion of an organization's goals, scope, or activities relative to its mission. It often occurs when organizations say yes to opportunities that stretch activities beyond their mission-driven goals, or when they pursue funding streams that incentivize programs that they wouldn't otherwise implement.

Mission alignment is a critical aspect of organizational success, ensuring that all stakeholders and contributors work cohesively toward shared objectives. As our survey revealed, strategic planning often leads to a reconsideration of mission statements as organizational goals are revisited and potentially revised. Anecdotally, the cycles of strategic planning have become closer together, with planning processes being undertaken every 3–5 years.

Although public garden leaders need to regularly revisit mission alignment during formal strategic planning processes, the need for shorter cycles of review and planning is no less pressing. In the case studies that follow, the emphasis is on aligning programs and activities closely with organizational mission statements. San Antonio Botanic Garden conducts annual reviews of their programming to ensure that it is aligned with their mission statement. North Carolina Arboretum demonstrates a collaborative approach that ensures the flow of institutional mission down through departmental strategic and individual performance goals. Franklin Park's planning of the educational, social, and cultural pillars of its mission through its programs uses logic models to align its activities with its theory of change.

The case studies and tools that follow highlight some examples that public gardens can use or reflect on as they pursue mission alignment and avoid the risk of mission creep.

San Antonio Botanical Garden

Overview	The San Antonio Botanical Garden was first imagined nearly eight decades ago by civic influencers Mrs. R. R. Witt and Mrs. Joseph Murphy. Forty years of planning and partnerships finally blossomed on May 3, 1980, with the official opening of the Botanical Garden. As of early 2019, the Botanical Garden transitioned into privatization after a 30-year partnership with the City of San Antonio.
Garden Size	38 acres
Location	San Antonio, Texas
Mission	Enriching lives through plants and nature.
Vision	San Antonio Botanical Garden is a world-class garden recognized for outstanding horticulture displays, botanical diversity, education, conservation, and experiences that connect people to the natural world. The Garden embraces the sense of place that makes San Antonio unique.



Photo by Muluken Nega Kebede.

In a 2021 strategic planning cycle, Katherine Trumble, then Development Director and currently the CEO of the San Antonio Botanical Garden (SABG), was part of the leadership team during a significant revision of the organization’s mission statement. Trumble said, “the process was successful through collaborating closely with the board, senior leadership team, and a consulting group to facilitate the initiative.” The question of whether strategic priorities and programs align with organizational mission is perennial.

Katie Erickson, SABG’s Director of Programs, said that “the connection between mission and programs is established through an Education Master Planning process, done around [2015], which examined various thematic and educational approaches supporting the mission through a collaborative review of programs, best practices, and emerging trends and opportunities, informing a cohesive educational strategy. These approaches encompass key areas of gardening and conservation, culinary and wellness, arts and culture, and nature, strategically targeting key audiences such as families, communities, schools, and adults.”

SABG conducts a formal evaluation every year to assess their progress toward each program’s goals, which are established in alignment with the organization’s mission and core values. During this evaluation, employees reflect on their achievements and challenges, and they are encouraged to leverage the organization’s mission and core values when formulating each program’s goals for the upcoming year. This evaluation sparks department-wide dialogue during all-staff meetings, celebrating achievements and emphasizing areas of focus.

Their strategic plan outlines an ambitious target to increase school visits to the garden by 80% over the next five years. They track their progress towards achieving this goal, which is an important aspect of serving a diverse population in San Antonio. Erickson said, “...students represent a key aspect of this population, and the importance of engaging with them to promote environmental stewardship and education.” This strategic objective is reflected as one of their strategic goals, “to offer mission-focused educational programs...and ensure greater access to more school children throughout the city.”

Another strategy SABG uses to assess mission alignment is the use of geofencing, the application of defining visitors with a set geographic perimeter around the garden. Erickson said, “We scrutinize the demographics of our garden visitors and compare them to the city’s overall demographics. This analysis extends to different generations, socioeconomic levels, zip codes, age groups, education levels, ethnicity, and gender. As a garden striving to be inclusive, it’s crucial to evaluate not only the impact of our programming but also how well we reflect the diversity of the community we serve through our visitors.”

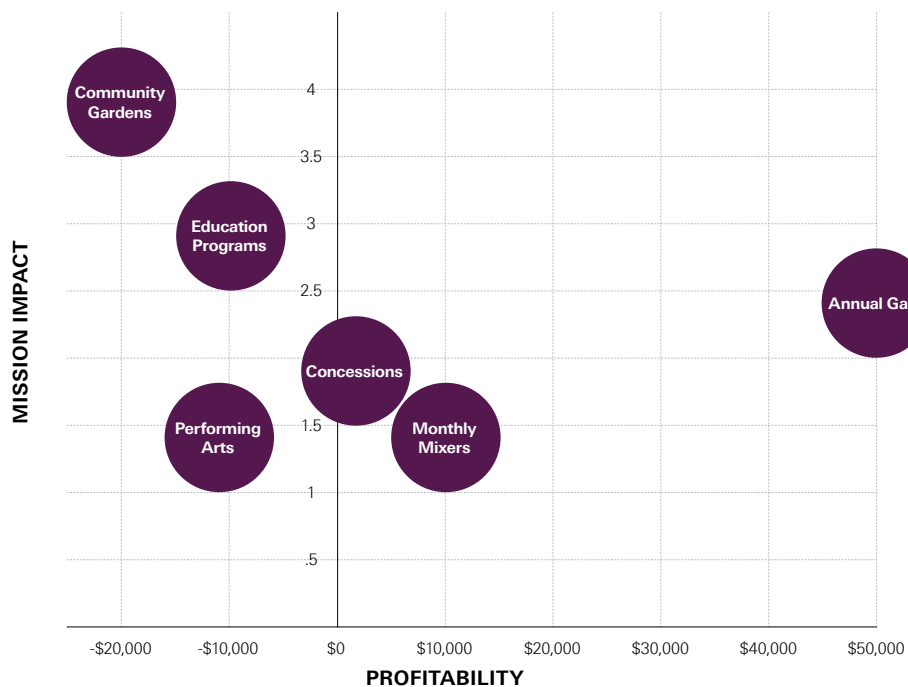
The organization’s commitment to ongoing evaluation ensures that their programs align with their mission, serve the community, and contribute to the overall health of the organization.

Matrix Map: How to Visualize Mission Impact with Profitability

The Matrix Map is a visual tool that plots all of an organization's activities—not just its programs—into a single, compelling image. By illustrating the organization's business model through a picture of all activities and the financial and mission impact of each one—it supports genuinely strategic discussions.

Below is an example of a Matrix Map for a hypothetical organization, Green Tree Gardens. Each circle represents a business activity. The circles higher on the map have higher impact than those lower on the map. This visualizes the relative size of each activity, and which ones make money, which break even, and which require subsidy from the organization's unrestricted funds.

Green Tree Gardens Matrix Map Mission Impact vs. Profitability



The resulting image often provides an "Aha!" moment for staff and board members. In one diagram they can now see how all initiatives work together to affect the impact and viability of their organization.

How to make a Matrix Map of your organization

There are four steps to create a Matrix Map:

1. **Identify your activities - all of them:** This is any program or fundraising event that requires effort.
2. **Assess relative mission impact:** Some programs have higher impact than others. Each organization will have different criteria for impact. Remember this is an informed self-assessment, not an evaluation. It is suggested a survey or discussion with the management team and the board that asks individuals or the group to rate each activity on a scale of 1 to 4 (with 4 equaling the highest alignment) using four criteria. Organizations can identify their own criteria for impact; here are a few examples:
 - **Alignment with Core Mission:** How closely does this program align with your core goals? Some programs may be excellent, but not as central to your mission.
 - **Excellence in Execution:** Organizations are simply better at delivering some activities than others. An activity may be important to your mission, but you may not have the right skills or financial resources to implement it with excellence.
 - **Scale:** How many people does each activity affect?
 - **Depth:** How deep an intervention or connection does each activity provide?
 - **Community Engagement:** How does this activity contribute to building relationships and serving constituents outside the garden?
 - **Fills an Important Gap:** If the activity were to go away, would your constituents be able to find a comparable activity elsewhere?

You only need to choose four or five criteria, and you do not need to use any of the above suggestions. After you have rated all of your activities, take an average of the scores each receives across the criteria and that will be its mission impact score. For example, if "Education Programs" were to receive the following scores:

Alignment with Core Mission: 4

Excellence in Execution: 3

Fills an Important Gap: 3

Community Engagement: 2

the **Mission Impact** score would be the average: **3.0**

- Determine the profitability of each activity:** Review how much an activity is contributing financially (profit) or how much it needs subsidy from the organization’s unrestricted funds (loss). Here is the summary for Green Tree Gardens:

Green Tree Gardens Annual Activity Summary								
	Community Gardens	Concessions	Education Programs	Annual Gala	Monthly Mixers	Performing Arts	Admin	Total
Revenue	\$41,488	\$60,590	\$56,473	\$145,258	\$40,750	\$15,000		\$359,559
Direct Expense	51,360	49,500	52,890	79,500	21,052	22,000	36,251	312,553
Shared Costs	5,802	2,800	7,320	9,750	2,450	1,132	2,123	31,377
Admin	5,608	5,697	6,782	11,331	3,305	2,842	-38,374	
Total Expenses	62,770	57,997	66,992	100,581	26,807	25,974	0	341,121
Surplus/ Deficit	-21,282	2,593	-10,519	44,677	13,943	-10,974	0	18,438

- Map the results:** Once these steps are done, you can map each activity on a grid, with Profitability on the horizontal (x) axis and Mission Impact on the vertical (y) axis. Transfer your data to a new spreadsheet in the following format:

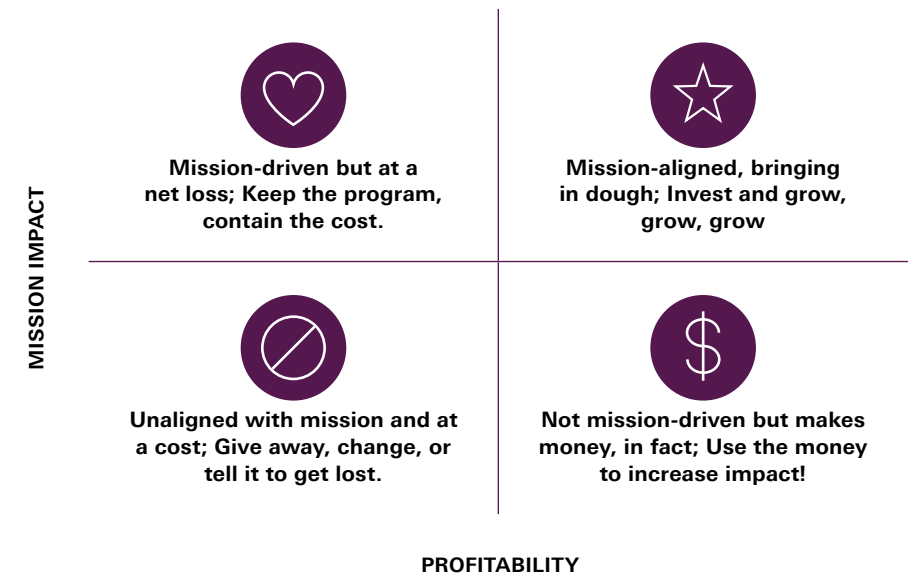
Green Tree Gardens Matrix Map Data		
Activities	Profitability	Mission Impact
Community Gardens	-21,282	3.85
Concessions	2,593	2
Education Program	-10,519	3
Annual Gala	44,677	2.6
Monthly Mixers	13,934	1.8
Performing Arts	-10,974	1.5

Using Microsoft Excel’s chart function, select “Bubble Chart” to create the Matrix Map seen at the beginning of this article.

More than just a picture, though, the Matrix Map can help engage board members in strategic discussions about how to strengthen the organization’s business model – understanding that the implications of their decisions will affect both mission impact and finances. And staff can see the whole organization at a glance in a way that focuses attention on activities and impact.

Strategic Imperatives

For many board members, the Matrix Map provides clarity on how the organization’s different activities interrelate. Beyond simply helping them understand the business model, the Matrix Map can help nonprofit leaders strengthen it. The next step is to superimpose a horizontal line across the map at Mission Impact value of 2 on the y-axis. From these four quadrants, strategic imperatives emerge. These imperatives are the actions that would most likely strengthen the business model and increase the organization’s sustainability.



For additional information about Matrix Maps and Return on Mission, Investment, and Values, refer to the 2022–23 Longwood Fellows toolkit “Cultivating Financial Resiliency: Sowing the Seeds of Innovation in Earned Revenue” at the following link: https://longwoodgardens.org/sites/default/files/2023-05/LGF_cohort_book_23-FINAL_uploadsreads.pdf

Adapted from “The Matrix Map: A Powerful Tool for Mission-Focused Nonprofits,” Steve Zimmerman and Jeanne Bell, April 1, 2014.

The North Carolina Arboretum

Overview	The Arboretum was established in 1986 by the North Carolina General Assembly to serve as a statewide and national resource almost one hundred years after Frederick Law Olmsted, the Father of American Landscape Architecture, completed the landscape design for his last project at the nearby Biltmore Estate. That design included an arboretum at the estate that was never realized. Olmsted’s design philosophy and approach to process formed the basis and standard of excellence of modern landscape architectural practice, an influence that permeates the planning, design and management of the North Carolina Arboretum.
Garden Size	434 acres
Location	Asheville, NC
Mission	The North Carolina Arboretum’s mission is to advance our state’s future by creatively connecting people, plants and places through education, design and economic development
Vision	The vision of the North Carolina Arboretum is to redefine the Arboretum concept as central to education and place-based economic development.



Quilt Garden at the Arboretum. Photo courtesy of The North Carolina Arboretum.

Propelled by its mission, the North Carolina Arboretum has shaped its internal organizational structure to strengthen operational alignment. The key to this is the Arboretum’s meticulous planning structure. The institution places significant emphasis on yearly strategic goal setting at all levels of the organization. As Human Resources Director Amy Owenby notes, “Each department has to find a departmental goal that feeds into that institutional goal, and then each permanent employee must find an individual goal that supports that department goal.”

The cascading approach ensures that every member of the team is actively contributing to the overarching mission and that activities and strategies throughout the organization are contributing and aligned with that mission. This is especially relevant to the Arboretum’s mission of connecting people, plants and places through all three avenues of education, design, and economic development because each department finds at least one, if not all, of these areas within their own departmental goals.

A key player in this strategic planning is the Mission Orchestrations Team (MOT), a diverse team including representatives from the education, marketing, and conservation departments. The team’s charter, sponsored by the executive director, outlines its membership and specific objectives. This team is responsible for creating and managing a well-designed, consistent, and coherent environment throughout Arboretum facilities and promoting inspiring learning experiences through interpretation, collections, exhibits, and art. Specific objectives include setting standards for programmatic offerings, monitoring program formation, providing a forum for staff to pitch innovative program ideas, and establishing process mechanisms and general timeline goals that ensure an adequate planning and design horizon for new and revised initiatives.

The MOT meets weekly, dedicating time to collaborative decision-making focused on programmatic offerings in exhibits, art, interpretation, and collections. It functions as a model of everyone working at the same level, creating a multidisciplinary approach that has been successful in advancing their mission impact.

For example, the Arboretum recently hosted a National Geographic exhibit. The MOT’s role involved educating directors on communications and marketing strategies to ensure that the exhibit aligned with the mission of the organization. By having all relevant voices at the table, such as marketing, education, conservation, and community partners, they could assess the viability and impact of the exhibit.

During the planning process, the marketing team loved the idea of the National Geographic exhibit because it resonated strongly with their brand, making it easier to promote. Meanwhile, the education team found ways to integrate elements of the exhibit into their programs, enhancing the learning experience for visitors. This collaborative approach, with input from various disciplines, ensured that the exhibit not only met its goals but also contributed meaningfully to the organization’s mission.

Another initiative involves the design of the Arboretum’s Quilt Garden, which integrates traditional quilt block patterns with plants. This design represents the close connection between heritage crafts and gardening, as well as the contemporary art and craft of quilting in the Southern Appalachian region. While the design of a garden bed may not typically fall under mission delivery, here it expresses the organization’s commitment to advancing both the heritage and the future of North Carolina through design.

The North Carolina Arboretum’s mission is intricately woven into the fabric of its organizational structure. Through the intentional structuring of roles, deliberate collaboration, and a commitment to collective strategic planning, the Arboretum succeeds in creatively connecting people, plants, and places.

Employees & Mission: Employee Performance Appraisals Can Strengthen Mission Alignment

Employees should have a clear understanding of how their individual roles directly contribute toward realizing their organization's mission. Performance appraisals can serve as a valuable tool to embed the mission into operations, emphasizing how each employee's day-to-day performance aligns with the overarching mission.

Here is a straightforward way to link your mission statement to performance appraisals.

Before completing an employee evaluation, ask the employee to identify three things they did over the past 12 months to *(insert your mission statement here)*:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Similarly, add a section to your existing review form that allows space for the manager to complete the following.

In the space below, identify three things this individual did over the past 12 months to *(insert your mission statement here)*:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

The manager's assessment may or may not align with the employee's perspective, but placing this at the end of every appraisal directs attention to what truly matters. And it prompts both managers and employees to acknowledge how their daily activities contribute to advancing mission.

Theory of Change: Applying Logic Models to Mission Alignment

The Theory of Change is a tool examining why and how a desired change can occur in a specific context. It establishes the connection between what a program does (activities) and its desired goals (impact). This theory is the basis for the logic model template that follows.

The Theory of Change can be divided into the following components:

- 1. Assumptions:**
These are the given beliefs underlying current activities.
- 2. Resources/Inputs:**
Identify the resources that are crucial for achieving results, including financial resources, staff time, and operational items.
- 3. Activities/Outputs:**
Outline the key activities and concrete actions that your program undertakes to achieve its intended impact. These activities are tangible efforts to deliver intended outcomes.

Identify all relevant outputs (the activities and results of what you did) essential to measure in relation to the desired impact.

Indicators are often numerical; for example, a Theory of Change may capture the number of sessions, the number of individuals delivering them, and participant satisfaction scores.
- 4. Outcomes:**
Outcomes are changes, benefits, learning, and effects resulting from your activities.

Brainstorm outcomes that are measurable, encompassing changes in attitude or other benefits.

Focus on short-term and intermediate changes occurring in program participants that directly result from the activity, program, or experience (e.g., an indicator may be pre- and post-survey results).

The most successful outcomes describe single changes rather than composite ones.
- 5. Impact:**
Impact refers to the broader changes that will occur within the community, organization, society, or environment as a result of your activities.

Impact indicators may be long-term outcomes reflecting lasting or widespread effects.

Logic Model Template

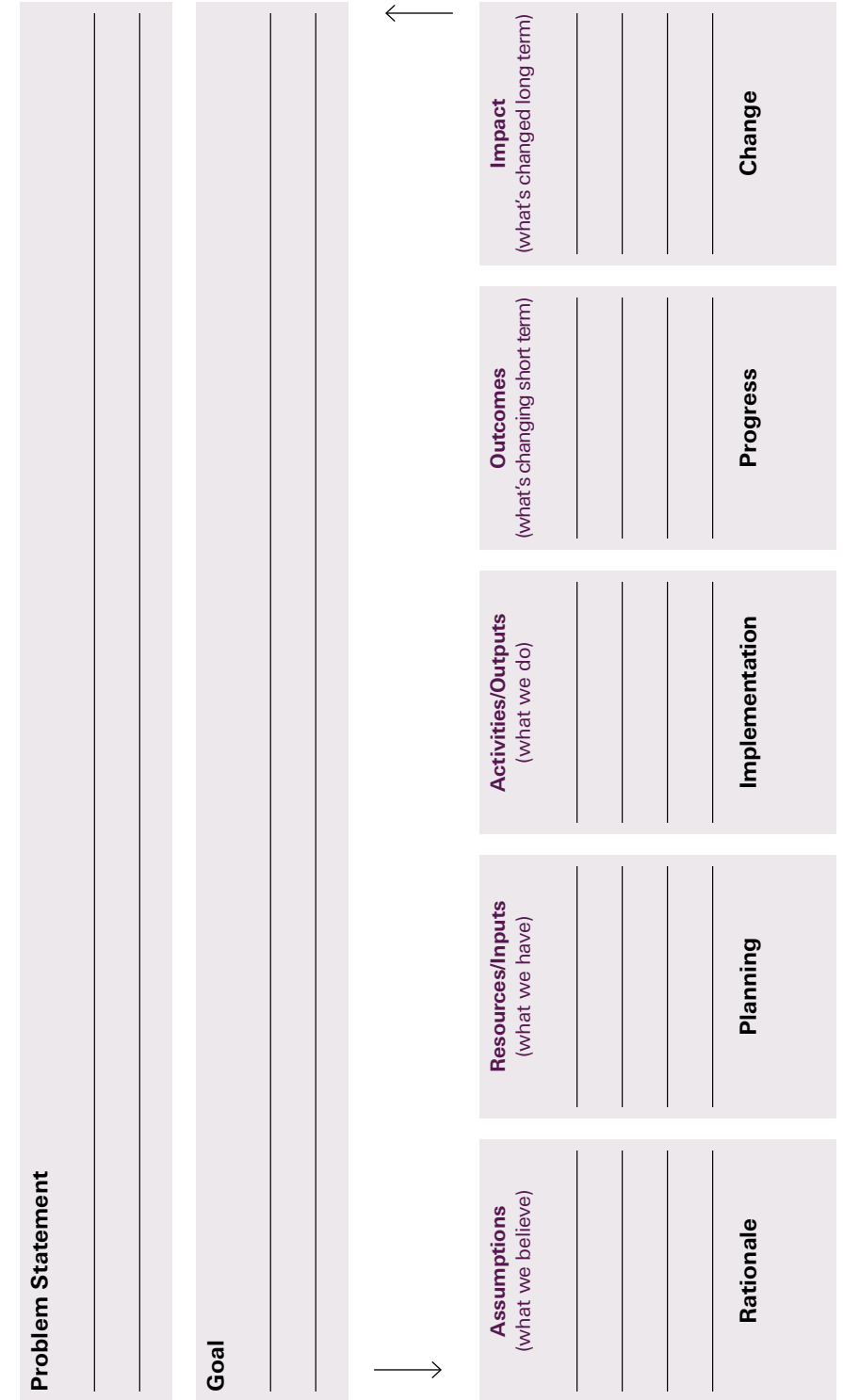
A logic model is a useful tool to confirm mission alignment of your organization’s activities. It is a visual way to illustrate the resources (inputs) required to implement a program, the activities (outputs) of that program, and the desired program outcomes. From this you can begin to identify the mission impact of these activities.

Reasons to consider developing a logic model:

- You want to see a quick snapshot of how your program operates and what it intends to accomplish.
- Program stakeholders are requesting details on your measurable goals and objectives, and you are looking for ways to visually display this information.
- A funder requires a logic model as part of an evaluation plan for a proposal.

Logic Model

Logic models are used to facilitate discussions among staff, funders, and other stakeholders about program design, expected outcomes, and resource allocation.



Franklin Park Conservatory and Botanical Gardens

Overview	Franklin Park Conservatory and Botanical Gardens, home to the iconic John F. Wolfe Palm House which dates back to 1895, is located within an 88-acre City of Columbus Park that borders several historic neighborhoods. The Conservatory as it is today opened in 1993.
Garden Size	13 acres
Location	Columbus, Ohio
Mission	Inspired by horticulture, Franklin Park Conservatory and Botanical Gardens elevates quality of life and connects the community through educational, cultural, and social experiences.
Vision	A world that celebrates nature as essential to the human experience.



Photo by Muluken Nega Kebede.

The Franklin Park Conservatory and Botanical Garden’s Community Outreach and Education Program (COE) has earned acclaim for its significant impact in the Columbus, Ohio, area. Renowned for its dedication to horticulture knowledge and engaging in both on-site and off-site initiatives, COE’s success goes beyond its garden space to establish numerous new edible gardens, home gardens, and city beautification projects throughout the community.

Jenny Pope, COE’s Program Director, framed their desired mission impact as “blue sky thinking”: their goal is that every citizen in Franklin County deeply cares about the environment and plants. Success is tied to whether their programs resonate with the community, stay rooted in nature and plants, and align with their mission statement. Strategic Plan priorities play a crucial role in defining the target audience, encompassing members, the general public, and considerations for equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI). The organization strives for inclusivity by aligning its service statistics with the diverse demographics of Franklin County.

In a comprehensive evaluation, the Conservatory considers various factors like numerical metrics, community relationship-building, repeat visitation, and specific evaluation methods like visitors and community stakeholders’ feedback, surveys, attendance and demographics. Strategic Plan priorities also extend to serving immediate neighbors, focusing on three specific zip codes with varying socioeconomic statuses to ensure accessibility and engagement.

The Conservatory defines success as whether its programs cater to the community’s needs, provide services effectively, and act as a catalyst for instilling a passion for nature and plants (particularly among those who may not have previous experiences or appreciation for the natural world).

The Conservatory actively evaluates whether its programs advance its mission, using logic models as a key evaluation tool. The logic model, which outlines short-term, intermediate-term, and long-term program goals, provides a framework for assessing whether these goals are being met and serves as a springboard for other evaluation tools. The logic model also helps ensure that evaluation processes align with the intended outcomes of each program by clarifying goals, identifying intended outcomes, establishing cause-and-effect relationships, guiding evaluation questions, ensuring relevant data collection, facilitating alignment with program theory, and enhancing credibility and accountability.

According to Pope, “we take evaluation seriously.” For them, an evaluation process involves examining metrics for each program, ranking them based on alignment with the mission’s three pillars: educational, social, and cultural. The Conservatory thus uses formal evaluation to validate successful initiatives and adjust when needed. Mission impact plays a crucial role in the organization’s strategic planning process.

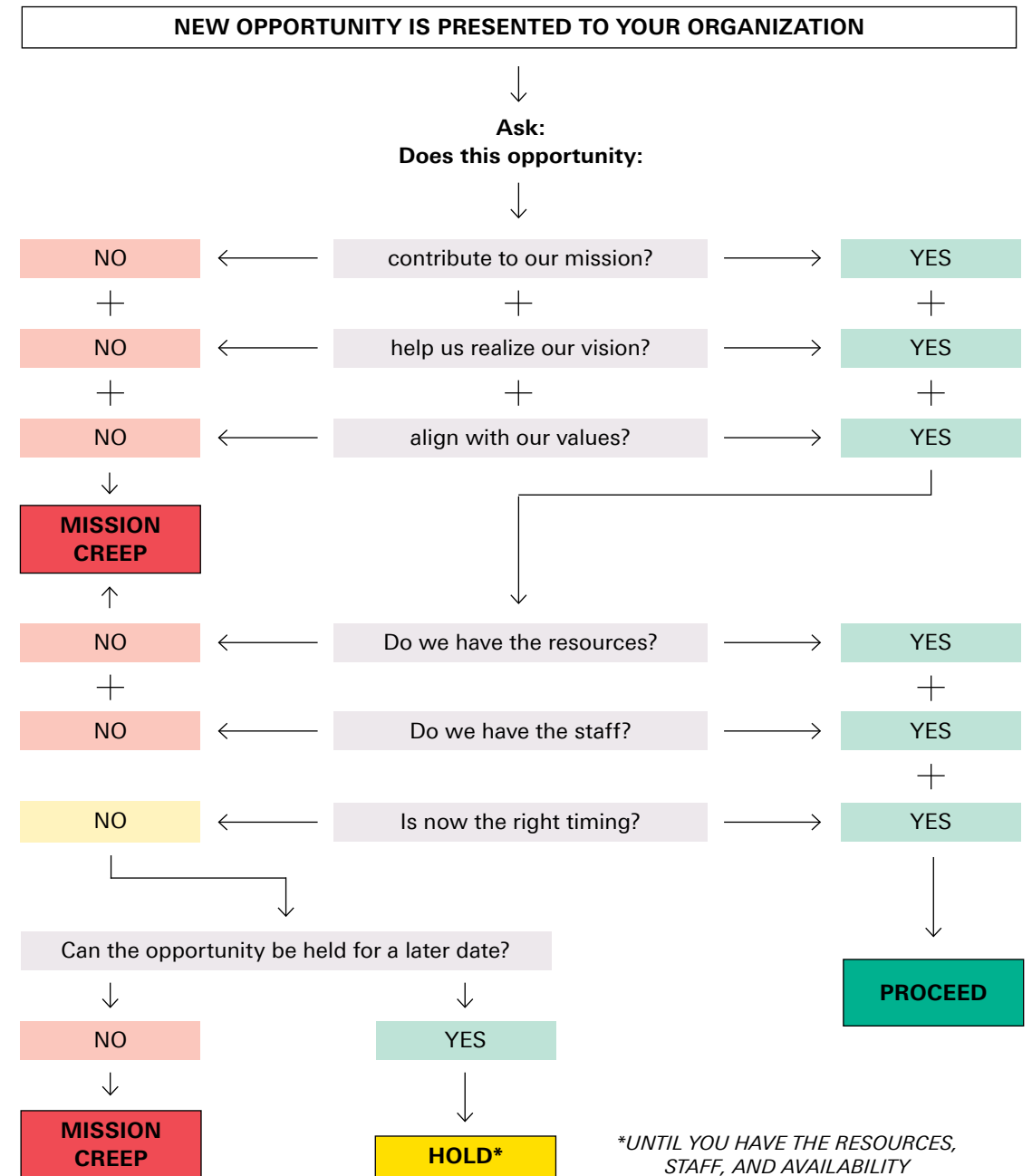
The Power of No: How to Identify Mission Creep

Mission creep occurs when the original objectives of a mission or organization gradually broaden, leading to unplanned commitments and shifts in purpose, staffing, and resource allocation. Examples include pursuing a grant solely because funds are available, even if the project is tangential to primary operations, or a board member imposing their ideas on programming due to power imbalances, leading staff to feel obligated to implement new services. Additionally, a major donor may influence the organization’s direction or program ideas with attached funding, further exacerbating mission drift.

The primary consequence of mission creep is a diversion of resources from serving the organization’s intended beneficiaries and programs. This can result in staff burnout, tensions among constituents, and brand confusion. To prevent mission creep, decisions should be guided by the organization’s mission, vision, and values, with a willingness to decline opportunities that do not align. It is important to recognize the limits of team capacity and resources in decision-making processes. Learning to say “no” is essential for safeguarding the organization’s mission.

Opposite: Adapted from "Here's How to Avoid Mission Creep and Stay True to Your Mission," LinkedIn article, May 4, 2023, Kerri Laubenthal Mollard

To determine whether a new opportunity is suitable, consider using the following flowchart that evaluates the proposal’s alignment with the organization’s mission and capacity, distinguishing between opportunities that are suitable now, in the future, or not at all.



**UNTIL YOU HAVE THE RESOURCES, STAFF, AND AVAILABILITY TO EFFECTIVELY EXECUTE.*

The Elisabeth Carey Miller Botanical Garden

Overview	The Miller Botanical Garden was the home of Elisabeth Carey Miller, a passionate gardener and plant collector who helped shape the Pacific Northwest (PNW) horticultural scene through her philanthropic support of Seattle’s cultural institutions and the larger community. The property was designated a botanical garden in 1994, focusing on new, rare, and unusual plants, as well as evaluating plants best suited for the climate of the maritime Pacific Northwest.
Garden Size	5 acres
Location	Seattle, WA
Mission	The Elisabeth Carey Miller Botanical Garden Trust enhances horticulture in the tradition of Elisabeth Carey Miller by discovering, displaying, evaluating, and disseminating information about plants suitable for landscape use in the Pacific Northwest, including familiar, new, and unusual plants.
Vision	Inspiring the highest standards of Northwest horticulture through practice and education.

The Miller Botanical Garden was the home of Elisabeth Carey Miller, a passionate gardener and plant collector who helped shape the Pacific Northwest (PNW) horticultural scene through her philanthropic support of Seattle’s cultural institutions and the larger community. She intended to leave her estate as a public garden, but the neighborhood where she lived was resistant to increased traffic and visitor activity in their quiet corner of the world. Ultimately an agreement was reached that, while the garden could continue beyond her death, visitation would be invitation-only and limited to 500 guests per year (although academic and industry-related parties could have access beyond this limit).

The grounds are an immersive oasis on the shore of Puget Sound. Miller loved texture more than flowers and color, and the grounds are dense with layers and a variety of foliage. The garden has been compared to Monet’s Garden at Giverny and the works of Brazilian landscape architect Roberto Burle Marx. Miller was an avid collector of plants from around the world, with a particular affinity for small and alpine plants, and helped support the propagation of many species to the industry.

Since 2017, Executive Director Richie Steffen has maintained the estate while simultaneously facilitating the Garden’s mission of promoting PNW plants. The most highly visible output supporting that mission is “Great Plant Picks” (GPP). A GPP committee, composed of horticulturists representing nurseries, garden design, arboreta, and botanical gardens from across the PNW, assembles annually to conduct roundtable discussions and complete collection visits to survey genera for that year’s recommended top plant performers fitting within a designated theme.

As essentially a best-of-the-best award, the annual picks are highly anticipated by the nursery and landscape industry and home gardeners alike. Each year selections are promoted virtually and via GPP posters that are printed and disseminated free of charge to nurseries and other industry organizations, along with media outreach and presentations at trade shows and community events. Local news outlets disseminate the list to the general public.

This program allows the Miller Garden to promote a comprehensive palette of outstanding hardy, reliable plants for regional gardens. The educational outreach provides a forum for sharing horticultural information with the wider gardening community and allows the Garden to expand its potential for impact beyond its geographic constraints.

The continued success of GPP uniquely demonstrates how a horticultural institution can meet its mission beyond the boundaries of their garden walls. Through this program, the Miller Botanical Garden reaches a regional audience that does not have traditional access to the garden proper, aligning with Elisabeth Carey Miller’s goals while superseding the physical limitations imposed upon the organization. Steffen notes that the program has matured to the point where the Garden is now contemplating how it can be replicated in other geographic regions, extending the impact of this private garden and Elisabeth Carey Miller’s passions well beyond the original confines placed upon them.



Image courtesy of greatplantpicks.org.

Mission Evaluation

Public gardens typically advance their missions through activities like landscape cultivation, display horticulture, conservation initiatives, scientific research, and educational public programs. Assuming these efforts align with mission statements, what impact do they make? What impact does one activity or program make relative to others? What measurements can be used to evaluate how much difference these efforts make?

Assessment of an organization's success in fulfilling its mission; evaluation can provide a quantitative and qualitative understanding of whether programs, activities, and overall performance are effective in relation to mission.

DEFINITION

Mission evaluation is the act of capturing data, quantitatively and qualitatively, to measure the success of activities relative to mission.

In our survey, on a ten-point scale, public garden leaders scored the importance of highlighting mission impact during the strategic planning process at an average of 8.4. This ratio is most clearly reflected in educational programming: for educational programming, 83% of survey respondents currently evaluate how educational programs advance mission impact. For activities other than educational programming, 50% measured the mission impact of wider organizational activities such as operational practices, the visitor experience, or the garden itself.

At the beginning of their tenures, many public garden leaders focus on understanding what their organizations do, why they do it, and how to improve their work. As organizations grow and evolve, leaders attend to whether their mission statements effectively reflect their impressions. Organizational performance can be measured against key goals by collecting, assessing, and analyzing data. When performance is assessed through data analytics, the results can enable learning and improvement when communicated across stakeholder groups.⁷ Just as a for-profit board closely monitors financial data, nonprofit leaders monitor the pursuit of their missions to secure impact.⁸

How do public gardens know if they're fulfilling their missions? Measuring mission impact in public gardens is a complex process that demands a thoughtful blend of quantitative and qualitative data.

Public gardens have evolved beyond aesthetic showcases to multifaceted activities like education, conservation, and community engagement, so assessing effectiveness in achieving organizational mission has become increasingly important. Measuring mission impact requires recognizing the diverse dimensions of a nonprofit's work and the importance of creating meaningful metrics to capture their holistic contributions to their communities.

Education is a core program for many public gardens, and these programs are often where public gardens focus on gathering data. Assessing their impact involves gauging not only the number of participants (the outputs) but also the depth of learning and the long-term influence on attitudes and behaviors (the impacts). Many gardens do not have the capacity for in-house specialists, but bringing in third-party expertise can make a big difference. Mission impact is difficult to measure. Recognizing the role of public gardens in achieving mission fulfillment necessitates a diverse set of metrics that capture their impact. As our case studies show, data gathering to evaluate mission impact can adapt to the size and scope of the public garden and its mission. The important takeaway is that by developing mission evaluation frameworks, public gardens can assess performance relative to their missions and then refine their strategies to optimize impact. Crucially, this process also enables gardens to demonstrate value to their communities and helps to instill confidence in donors through the demonstrable impact that their investments can make.

Mt. Cuba Center

Overview	Mt. Cuba Center is a beautiful botanic garden committed to the conservation of native plants and their habitats. Since 2005, Mt. Cuba Center has granted over \$100,000,000 to conservation partners, preserving approximately 14,000 acres of natural areas. Mt. Cuba Center was opened to the public in 2013.
Garden Size	271.12 acres
Location	Hockessin, Delaware
Mission	Mt. Cuba Center inspires an appreciation for the beauty and value of native plants, and a commitment to protect the habitats that sustain them.
Vision	Mt. Cuba’s Founding Intention derives from the Copelands’ shared desire to share their gardens and natural lands with the public in the interest of encouraging a connection with nature and fostering concern for its conservation. Mrs. Copeland eloquently summed up their vision in 1990: “I want this to be a place where people will learn to appreciate our native plants and to see how these plants can enrich their lives so that they, in turn, will become conservators of our natural habitats.

What actions visitors reported doing or intending to do in the weeks after a visit (n=114)

Data from follow-up survey, 6–8 weeks after a visit to Mt. Cuba Center.

	I already did this before my visit	I started or plan to do this	I don’t think I will do this	N/A
Spending more time in nature spaces	95%	5%	0%	0%
Adding native plant(s) to my yard or landscaping	49%	38%	3%	11%
Newly start gardening	50%	30%	7%	29%
Removing or avoiding non-native, invasive plant(s) in my landscaping	46%	14%	8%	16%
Gardening more or more often	48%	24%	13%	15%
Trying a sustainable gardening technique that was new to me	21%	48%	16%	14%
Donating or volunteering for a environmentally-focused organization	42%	31%	23%	4%

Figure shared by Mt. Cuba Center.

In the heart of Delaware lies Mt. Cuba Center, a captivating botanic garden born out of a visionary dream and a profound commitment to the conservation of native plants. The story begins with a poignant quote from Mrs. Copeland who envisioned the garden as a haven for learning and appreciation of native flora. “I want this to be a place where people will learn to appreciate our native plants and to see how these plants can enrich their lives so that they, in turn, will become conservators of our natural habitats,” she declared.

The mission of Mt. Cuba Center was refined in 2013, stemming from Mrs. Copeland’s inspirational words. The mission became a commitment “to inspire an appreciation for the beauty and value of native plants and a commitment to protect the habitats that sustain them.” The garden remained a hidden gem until its public opening in 2013, inviting visitors to immerse themselves in the wonders of native plant life.

At the core of Mt. Cuba Center’s mission is its plant introduction program, a pioneering initiative exploring the potential of underutilized native plants to contribute to garden diversity. The research team diligently evaluates native plants for both horticultural and ecological value, emphasizing the ecosystem services these plants provide. Through the plant introduction program, staff identify, evaluate, name, and commercialize plants with unique characteristics.

The impact of Mt. Cuba Center’s native plant introduction program is measured by the widespread interest in cultivating native flora and the high demand from select nurseries and consumers, particularly within the Northeastern United States. Their research initiative on native plants serves to enlighten both suppliers and customers on which species thrived during trial under varying growing conditions; this information sustains supply and demand for these native species. One notable example is that some nurseries clamor for the center’s high-performing trials, as evidenced by the swift sell-out when the “Carex Report” was released to promote a problem-solving perennial. According to a four-year trial conducted by Mt. Cuba Center, Carex, also known as sedges, are one of the most effective

and versatile problem-solving plants for home gardens. They can be found in a wide range of habitats and provides food and shelter for wildlife, as well as being a sustainable alternative to traditional turfgrass lawns. The trial evaluated 70 types of Carex, including 65 species and five cultivars native to the mid-Atlantic region, and results are available in the report, Carex for the Mid-Atlantic Region.

An additional impact arises from the biodiversity survey conducted on Mt. Cuba Natural Lands, aimed at assessing the efficacy of their natural lands in providing habitats and supporting wildlife, as well as generating media recognition. The reports generated serve to promote awareness of native plants and are typically published by newspapers such as the Washington Post and New York Times.

In 2022, Mt. Cuba Center carried out an interpretation evaluation through a survey aimed at ascertaining the impact of garden visits on visitor behavior. The surveys revealed that two-thirds of visitors engage in further research on native plants after interacting with interpretation signs. For example, some visitors went online to explore the ecological value of native plants and identify nurseries where these plants could be purchased. Mt. Cuba Center’s reputation as an authority in native plants reverberates in the horticultural community. The introduction of new cultivars, backed by rigorous research, expands the availability of high-quality plants with ornamental appeal, adaptability, and ecological value.

As a non-profit organization, Mt. Cuba Center demonstrates the varied ways in which Gardens worldwide can serve as valuable resources within their communities by incorporating native species and implementing practices that aid in cultivating horticultural plants of great worth, while conserving native flora. By remaining steadfast to its mission and dedicating efforts towards achieving it, Mt. Cuba Center can generate profound impact. The public trusts them as a beacon in public horticulture, and their website is a reference for those seeking authoritative information on native plants. Detailed research reports on trials are published on their website and can be downloaded for free.

Top Tips for Creating an Effective Survey

- 1. Before undertaking a survey, ask yourself what you are trying to answer.** Identify what you don't know and why knowing that answer would be helpful.
- 2. Measure what you value and value what you measure.** Don't collect data for data's sake. Know what you are going to do with the data.
- 3. Ask questions that measure the impact of your activities, not just empirical data.** For example, your survey may explore a participant's change in thinking from pre-event to post-event.
- 4. Don't underestimate the power of just a few questions.** Shorter surveys with fewer open-ended questions can yield higher response rates. Three questions prompting quick, unique answers can produce very useful results.
- 5. Be mindful of survey fatigue.** Your audience is likely inundated with survey requests. Ask yourself how your survey can be as easy as possible to complete.
- 6. If your survey captures negative situational feedback that reflects a shortcoming on service, acknowledge it with a follow-up (if appropriate and possible).** Opening a dialogue can facilitate further engagement, where a lack of response may end the connection altogether.
- 7. Share feedback internally—but strategically.** Unfiltered comments, especially those that are negative, can be reviewed and discussed by leadership. Maximize positive feedback by openly sharing praise with your team, but address negative feedback with staff selectively and deliberately.
- 8. When you are creating your first survey, remember that the process is not only about gathering a new dataset—it is also about creating the baseline for your programs.** It is much harder to measure change when your starting point is unknown or unclear.

Opposite: Photo by Meghan Newberry.



Evaluation Questions

Franklin Park Conservatory and Botanical Gardens employs diverse data collection methods across various areas, utilizing electronic surveys for members and visitor feedback, external firms for community insights, consulting firms engaging different stakeholders for benchmarking and strategic planning focus groups, and one-on-one interviews.

The Education Department employs both paper and electronic surveys for adult programming, field trips, and camps, while summer school programs use brief, informal, and immediate exit tickets to gather participant feedback. To meet specific grant criteria, the Conservatory conducts surveys, uses observational techniques to measure levels of engagement and participation, holds focus groups, and conducts participant interviews. In the community gardening program, a consultant conducts surveys and one-on-one interviews with community leaders. The combination of these varied approaches to data collection ensures that the Conservatory is attaining a comprehensive understanding of its impact.

Jenny Pope, Director of Community Outreach and Education, points out,

“Evaluation is very difficult; do you hear anyone saying it is easy?”

However, the team at Franklin Park is clear on the benefits of ongoing evaluation, continuing to make resources available despite inherent challenges. And while they acknowledge the need for and value in comprehensive evaluation tools, the Conservatory’s in-house team currently utilizes easily accessible tools such as Google Forms, SurveyMonkey, and logic models.

In fact, many of their evaluation tools are straightforward. For example, they created a simple one-page survey to guide their data collection using their key questions, see opposite page.

Sample Evaluation Plan for an Education Program

Questions (for assessing program effectiveness and impact)	Indicators	Possible Methods
To what extent were participant/students engaged in the program activities?	Students look/watch, follow directions, ask questions, comment, help others	Program’s delivery, impact, and effectiveness observation during in-class visits by facilitators/teachers
To what extent did participant/students learn the intended content?	As determined by program developers As determined by each teacher	Brief, informal, and immediate Exit Tickets from a sample of participant/students. Observation by teachers*
To what extent did participant/students apply learning from one activity to another?	Ask relevant questions and/or make comments during FPC activities	Observation during in-class visits Observation by teachers*
To what extent did the program raise interest in learning about plants and nature?	Responses to key questions	Brief structured interviews of sample of Community Day participants

Data Collection and Analysis

Method	Data Collection	Analysis
In-person observation of program’s delivery, impact, and effectiveness	By staff during in-classroom visit	Staff weekly debrief supported by Observation Sheets
	By teachers	
Brief, informal, and immediate Exit Tickets	Distributed and collected by program teachers from a sample of students by grade/camp/age	Qualitative analysis of data for patterns and trends. For example: Analyzing open-ended responses, like “Can you describe your experience with the program?” or “What did you learn from the program?”
Structured Interviews	Brief (less than 5 minutes) structured interviews of sample of family participants in Community Day, conducted by evaluator	Quantitative analysis of percentage of correct responses
Tracking metric like number of visits, frequency of visits, and coupon redemption rates	Redeemed coupon	Quantitative analysis of responses to closed-ended questions and qualitative analysis of open-ended responses
		Count of return visits as percentage of those who indicated intention to return

Tools modified and used with permission from Franklin Park Conservatory & BG program evaluation plan.

Developing Your KPIs for Mission Evaluation: Decide and Prioritize What Data to Collect

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are quantifiable measures of performance over time in relation to a specific objective. This worksheet will help your team identify your most important evaluation questions and the information you need to answer them. Completing this exercise as a group is the most effective way to maximize input.

What information do you need?

Individually or in pairs, give yourselves five minutes for each section to come up with as many questions as you can.

What questions do you have about your program or service?

1. Think about WHO you are serving: are you reaching your intended audiences?

2. Think about HOW people are engaging with your project or program: what do people think of their experience?

3. Think about WHAT difference it makes: what would you need to know to discover whether your program is achieving its goal? How often should you evaluate your impact?

Discuss your answers as a group

How would knowing the answers to these questions help you in your role? What might you do differently? How often would you need to review this information?

Prioritize

Rank your questions, and any data points or responses you want to explore further, in order of importance.

Our most important questions:

Things we think can already be answered with existing data / information but would like to explore further:

Looking at your most important questions, what information do you need to answer them?

The information might be qualitative (for example, the words and stories people use to describe a particular program) or quantitative (for example, how many times people visited a garden in a given year). Don't worry for now about whether you have all of the information you need.

Our most important questions	Information needed to answer each question

Above: Adapted from: NPC – New Philanthropy Capital, thinknpc.org.

Opposite: Artist at work at Grounds for Sculpture. Photo by Nathan Anderson.



Developing Your KPIs for Mission Evaluation: Agree On Your Impact and Outcome Goals

This worksheet will help your team develop consensus about the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that you need to measure and achieve your program goals.

Long-term Changes

Key questions	Your response	Guidance
What is the long-term change (or impact) you are aiming for?		This may not be something you can achieve within the duration of your project if your goal is long-term and reflects a sustained change. Consider linking back to the needs and audiences you have already considered.

Shorter-term Changes

Key questions	Your response	Guidance
What shorter-term changes (or outcomes) are you aiming for that can contribute to your long-term goals?		It is often helpful to think about short-term changes in knowledge, skills, attitudes, or behaviors that will contribute to the long-term change you want to achieve. Think of these as the assets you want your audience to have or the ways you are trying to equip them for change.

Existing Research

Key questions	Your response	Guidance
What does the existing research say about how to achieve the change you want to see? Have other organizations tried a similar approach?		Think about the existing research that has already been published. Is there anything you can draw on? Are there peer institutions with similar programs?

Best Practice

Key questions	Your response	Guidance
What can you learn from other organizations that are offering similar programs or trying to engage similar stakeholder groups?		Think about the best practices or quality principles that are already out there. Is there anything you can draw on?

Adapted from: NPC – New Philanthropy Capital, thinknpc.org.

Collecting Qualitative Data

The Franklin Park Conservatory and Botanical Gardens defines mission impact both quantitatively and qualitatively, emphasizing the significance of numbers but also gathering stories and pictures termed “mission impact moments.”

These mission impact moments are usually quotes collected by staff in the Development team, visitor surveys conducted by the Visitor Experience department, and evaluation reports primarily generated by the Community Outreach and Education department. They can also include numeric data and photographic data.

These moments support the Conservatory’s fundraising strategy and their overalls communications with stakeholders. The annual report is an excellent opportunity to share mission impact moments.

Here is how weekly HR updates remind staff:

Impact Stories:

Have you had a great patron experience recently? Consider sharing your story with the Development team. These stories show donors the impact the Conservatory has on our community and could be used in the Annual Report, Donor Newsletters, and more!

The opposite page shoes how mission impact moments are presented in the annual report.

Opposite: Annual report excerpts courtesy of Franklin Park Conservatory and Botanical Garden.

HARVESTING SUMMERTIME FUN

On any given Wednesday throughout the summer, children of all ages were busy trying new veggies and herbs, learning all about how plants grow and doing nature crafts and activities as part of the new Let's Grow Garden Club in the Scotts Miracle-Gro Foundation Children's Garden! Over 300 children took part, growing gardening memories to last a lifetime.

“We LOVE Garden Club! Freddie had so much fun when he came and his membership pin is proudly displayed on his backpack.”
- Freddie's mom, Nelsie

“I just wanted to let you know how much my 2-year-old daughter (and myself!) enjoyed Garden Club this month! We met friends every single week in September and were blown away each time!”
- Ellwyn's mom, Ashley

The Conservatory had another excellent season in the Children's Garden, welcoming a total of 65,209 three- to twelve-year-old children for hands-on exploratory play, nature storytime, discovery station lessons, visits by special guest entertainers and the new Let's Grow Garden Club!





HELPING YOUNG MINDS BLOOM

Touching autumn leaves, watching ice melt and burying seeds in cups of soil might seem like simple activities, but they powerfully illustrate fundamental understandings about nature and science for young children.

- 10 Head Start center locations
- 28+ classrooms
- 400+ children reached through monthly spring and autumn site visits
- 2 fun hands-on field trips for children from each center

The Conservatory's partnership with Head Start, an early childhood education program for low-income families, continued for a second year in 2022 with support from PNC Grow up Great, Ohio Children's Foundation, and Columbus Kiwanis Foundation.

Three- to five-year-old children were treated to nature-based lessons facilitated by visiting Conservatory educators, engaging their five senses to help them learn counting, shapes, colors, and vocabulary, build critical thinking skills and strengthen an appreciation for nature that they can carry into Kindergarten and beyond.

“All I'm doing is opening a little door. And hopefully when they go home tonight they will look at that tree in their yard.”
- Becky Scheffer, Conservatory Early Childhood Educator

LEARNING, FOR ALL OF LIFE'S SEASONS

Here at the Conservatory, we believe gardening is for everyone! 2022 marked our first year of offering a free monthly Communal Garden class series, a way for adult gardeners and community garden leaders to build horticulture knowledge that they can use to grow something beautiful in their communities.

112 learners took classes covering gardening topics ranging from brassicas to garlic to seasonal planting tips and tricks!

This free class series is part of the larger Conservatory Growing to Green initiative that builds capacity and helps people grow their communities through gardening.

“Great class! I learned so much and I am very eager to start planning... and eating!”
- Greg T.

In addition to Communal Garden classes, a total of 286 adult classes with 2,170 participants helped people from all walks of life learn about gardening, fine arts, culinary skills and glass blowing in the Hot Shop.





HELPING MAKE OUR GARDENS GROW

Volunteers helped the Conservatory flourish in 2022! 910 volunteers gave at least one hour of service for a whopping total of 12,958 total hours of time spent supporting the Conservatory's mission.

- 51 corporate and civic groups brought 543 volunteers
- 367 individuals gave 1+ hour of service.
- 183 new volunteers completed the on-boarding process.
- \$350,780 in value of volunteer labor

These dedicated folks planted, weeded, led Children's Garden and community activities, provided outstanding customer service, directed guests during special events, helped prepare for special exhibitions like Pumpkins Aglow and made the Conservatory the premier botanical garden destination that it was in 2022!

Whether they served one shift or 100+ hours, every one of our volunteers helped make Columbus a little happier, healthier and more vibrant. **Thank you!**

“Conservatory volunteers are at the heart of everything we do at the Conservatory— their dedication keeps us going...and growing!”
- Alison Davis, Volunteer Manager

Newquay Orchard

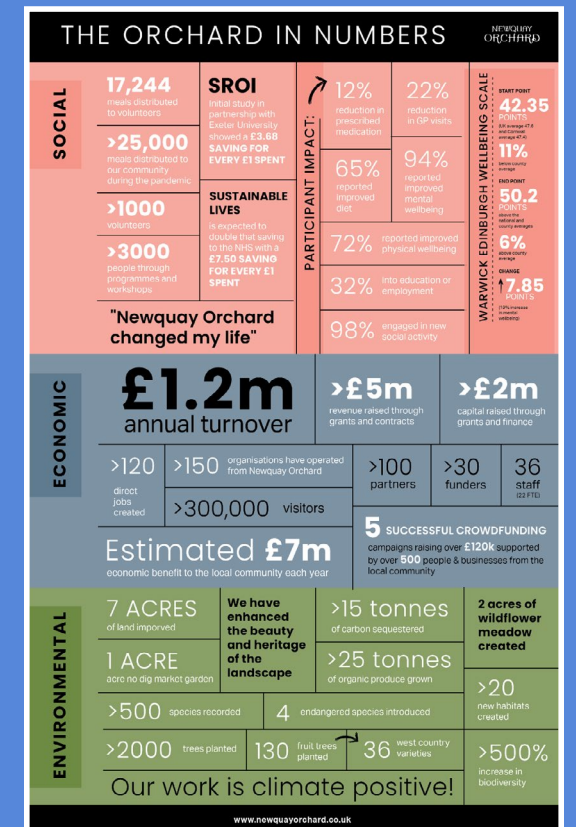
Overview	Newquay Orchard is a community-led project in Cornwall, England, featuring a young apple orchard, forest garden, and community spaces, offering courses, events, and facilities like a co-workspace and café, maintained by over 600 volunteers and serving as a hub for sustainable living, education, and social enterprise.
Garden Size	7 acres
Location	Newquay, Cornwall, United Kingdom
Mission	We will create the best green community space in the UK. We will empower our community to evolve Newquay Orchard to meet the needs of people and planet, while creating profit. We will use Newquay Orchard to demonstrate a replicable and financially sustainable solution for communities across the UK to help them thrive and tackle local issues that are important to them.
Vision	For everyone to have access to green community spaces that are good for the community, good for nature, and good for the economy.

Newquay Orchard is a 7-acre community garden on the north coast of Cornwall in southwest England. Central to its mission is its ambition to create a demonstrable triple bottom line community organization to “meet the needs of people and planet while creating profit.” This interlinkage of social, financial, and environmental health drives its activities, which center on accessible, financially sustainable models that communities can replicate to achieve their own goals. For example, Newquay’s market garden supplies vegetable boxes to their local community while supporting training and volunteering opportunities.

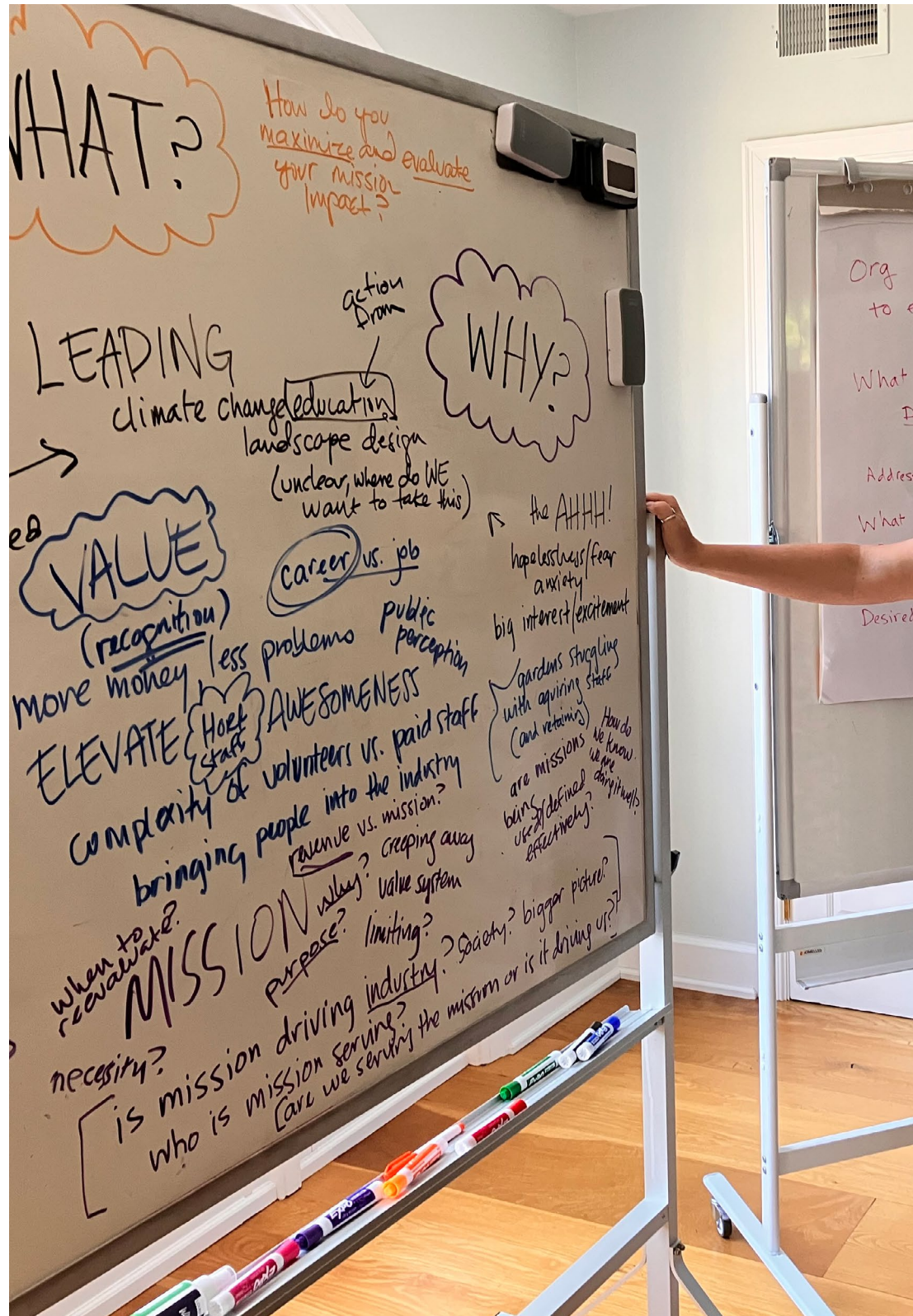
The impact of the activities supporting this mission (including several programs, an entrepreneurial enterprise incubator, community volunteering opportunities, and organic fruit and vegetable production) is captured through a triple bottom line evaluation.

Socially, Newquay’s measurements range widely. They count the number of meals provided using food produced onsite annually, the total number of volunteers engaged and program participants served, and new employment opportunities created. They measure improvements in physical and mental well-being and social activity through a participant survey. They also capture more complex data in partnership with other organizations and funders by calculating the wider social and economic benefits of their programs; for example, they evaluate how many of their program participants reduce their need for medical care and other supports through their experience with Newquay. All of these outcomes show that their programs create a net social return on investment by promoting gains in health through physical, social, and economic activity. Newquay’s impact can be captured not only through data like attendance numbers and self-reporting by program participants but also by utilizing established assessment tools (here the Warwick Edinburgh well-being scale) and by drawing assumptions from a dataset developed by partners (for example, the University of Exeter study calculating Social Return on Investment and Sustainable Lives research).¹⁸

Newquay Orchard calculates their economic impact by counting the number of jobs created (whether direct with the garden or indirect) and economic benefit to the local community. Environmentally, Newquay’s impact is captured by data such as acres cultivated, trees planted, and species recorded, and also by extrapolating assumptions from published data. For example, they translate their horticultural operations into percentage increases in biodiversity and tons of carbon sequestered. These efforts are time-consuming but straightforward, demonstrating that even a relatively small community garden can capture and translate its activities into a measurable evaluation of its mission impact. This work enables it to tell a compelling impact story that is supported by both qualitative examples and quantitative summaries of its impact on visitors, program participants, and its broader community.



Newquay Orchard’s mission impact in numbers, 2022, courtesy of Newquay Orchard.



Tips for Expanding Your Dashboard

A digital dashboard can pull huge amounts of data from multiple sources into a high-level overview of operational performance. These dashboards have become a common tool for organizations to convey data and meaning directly and succinctly. With 24/7 accessibility and high levels of interactivity, dashboards enable users to view current data and trends whenever and wherever they are and to use individual widgets to access more detailed layers of data. Often designed for board members, dashboards can also be useful for staff and volunteers to get a quick snapshot of organizational health.

Dashboards can allow leaders to improve and further fulfill their organizational missions. Defining KPIs – and then tracking, reviewing, and evaluating them – can be a learning opportunity for teams to understand what they value and how they define success.

Leaders should not assume dashboards are only for large, expansive institutions, as there are many free and low-cost resources available for creating and maintaining digital dashboards. For example, Boardsource has downloadable materials with how-to instructions to get started using only Microsoft Excel.

A successful dashboard will create a snapshot of a program's current status—as well as trends over time—and clearly show performance against defined targets. In addition, a dashboard can:

- Align definitions of success across the organization
- Encourage dialogue about progress toward goals
- Ground decisions in concrete data and evidence
- Illuminate relationships among different activities
- Effectively communicate strategic-level results
- Present data in a user-friendly visual format
- Highlight out-of-the-ordinary results
- Include a manageable set of key performance indicators (KPIs)

The key to effective dashboards is knowing what to share and why. Moving beyond usual data points like attendance, revenue, and membership, a dashboard can also be a method for representing qualitative data, such as visitor feedback, program evaluations, or employee satisfaction. A simple widget sharing the most recent comments from collected surveys, or a word cloud summarizing an event's most cited adjectives, is another way to think about sharing performance assessments quickly and keeping mission top of mind.

Adapted from: The NonProfit Dashboard: Using Metrics to Drive Mission Success, Butler, Lawrence, 2012.

Opposite: Photo by Muluken Nega Kebede.

"Models and Components of a Great Nonprofit Dashboard," Nonprofitquarterly.org, Hilda H. Polanco and Sarah Walker, December 18, 2019.

Third Party Evaluation

The Franklin Park Conservatory budgets for third-party evaluators because they acknowledge their value: these evaluators offer valuable insights and expertise for an organization committed to continual program improvement. In cases where the Conservatory doesn't assign its own evaluation team, or cannot afford a third-party evaluator, staff members are responsible for creating and maintaining their own evaluation tools. Despite the challenges posed by a busy workload, the Conservatory recognizes the importance of ongoing evaluation efforts.

At the Conservatory, Jenny Pope, Director of Community Outreach and Education, is a strong advocate for formal evaluation processes. She points out that they have found success with their STEM Pathway program (a four-week program serving Columbus City School students, inspired by the Conservatory's unique resources that bring bringing STEM concepts to life through experiential learning for students interested in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) because they implemented Exit Tickets from students as "an effective evaluation tool established at the program's inception using a third-party evaluator." This evaluation tool examines effective learning and knowledge gains.

Over the years, the program has been refined in response to regular evaluation cycles, resulting in outstanding outcomes. Columbus City Schools now recognizes the Conservatory as their top partner in STEM programming. Exit surveys indicate effective learning and knowledge gains for students, a fact reinforced by third-party evaluations employing a diverse range of methods, including surveys, observation, focus groups, and interviews. The STEM Pathway program impact is further evidenced by students recognizing educators when they see them in the city and expressing their sense of connection. Over the past four years, the Conservatory has transformed from having no relationship with Columbus schools to establishing a robust partnership, showcasing the successful alignment of the program with the Conservatory's mission and the effectiveness of its evaluation and program development efforts.

Opposite: Photo by Daniel Traub.



The Future of Measuring Transformation?

When evaluating mission impact, public gardens often rely on tools like post-visit surveys and other self-reporting to identify changes in behavior, thinking, or feeling. But the future could hold new data collection tools.

The emerging field of neuroergonomics focuses on the brain's response to a variety of environments – including how the brain responds to nature. At Drexel University, Hasan Ayaz, Ph.D., associate professor at the School of Biomedical Engineering, Science, and Health Systems and at the College of Arts and Sciences, is leading an innovative study to measure the brain's response to natural settings. Using mobile neuroimaging technology in the form of high-tech headwear, Ayaz and his team moved their work out of the lab and into Longwood Gardens in Kennett Square, Pennsylvania. They collected and recorded brain activity and physiological data such as heart rate and electrical properties of the skin as participants walked around Longwood. Using these data, Ayaz and the Drexel team published a paper in the 2023 Applied Human Factors and Ergonomics Proceedings confirming the positive benefits of nature on human well-being.

This one-time study suggests that, in the future, we may not be limited by self-reporting to measure the transformative experience of visiting a public garden. Imagine a scanner at the gate that unobtrusively measures brain activity upon entrance and exit of the garden. Setting aside any implications of any dark intentions related to artificial intelligence, we could see a brave new world of technological advances confirming horticulture's positive physical effects on health and wellness, potentially giving gardens and arboreta empirical evidence related to mission impact.

Reference: Longwood Chimes 307, Summer 2023, "Brain Waves," by Jourdan Cole.



Opposite: Photo by Laurie Carrozino.

Conclusion

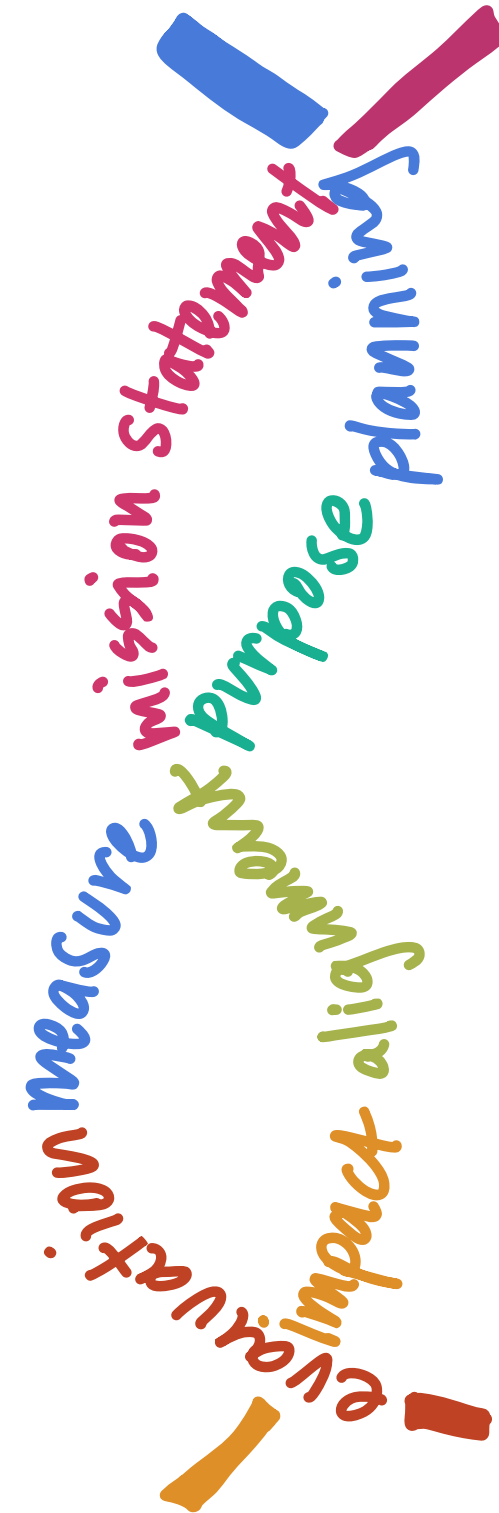
Mission impact is the result of the activities of a nonprofit organization—the positive changes that result from its outputs. For example, a student or visitor may have learned about composting (a program output in a Theory of Change) but the impact of that output would be the amount of green waste removed from waste collection streams and the compost created (and possibly even the biodiversity, water retention in the soil, and carbon sequestered by its use in the garden). While mission statements clarify an organization’s purpose, mission alignment directs activity in line with this purpose, and evaluation measures whether activities result in the desired outputs. As the positive difference that result from these activities, mission impact is the *raison d’être* of nonprofit organizations—it is not the activities and outputs in and of themselves.

DEFINITION

The tangible and positive benefits that a nonprofit generates in line with its mission; it reflects meaningful, measurable change or outcomes resulting from programs, activities, and initiatives.

Mission impact is the DNA that guides the growth of public gardens. It drives why we write mission statements, strategize mission alignment, and evaluate mission-focused activities. Understanding impact tells us why our work matters. This is the reason individuals build purpose-driven careers, why nonprofits are founded, and why funders invest in compelling ideas. In the end, every entity in public horticulture is trying to improve the world, both for our communities and the generations that will follow. Using a mission impact framework helps us identify and document the positive outcomes achieved by our many efforts.

Opposite: The DNA of mission fulfillment. Illustration by Abby Lorenz.



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