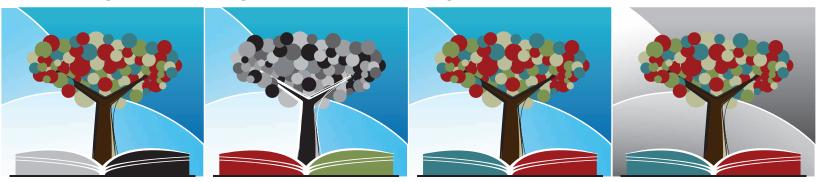# Working With Your Local Government: A Manual for Environmental Groups and Volunteers

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Working With Your Local Government: A Manual for Environmental Groups and Volunteers

Introduction and context

Across Canada, citizens and nonprofit groups are getting involved in greening their communities. In our 15-year history, Evergreen has witnessed an increase in environmental volunteerism as more and more citizens participate in green space planning and habitat restoration activities. Canadian municipalities directly engage thousands of these volunteers each year and work with hundreds of voluntary-sector stewardship organizations. Yet we know relatively little about municipal volunteer engagement. Few attempts have been made to document best practices for volunteer groups that wish to work with their local governments, and municipalities often lack information on how to effectively engage environmental volunteers and organizations.

In the fall of 2006, Evergreen undertook an in-depth investigation of environmental volunteer and partnership programs in three Canadian municipalities where collaborative greening efforts have become a way of doing business. *Working with Local Government: A Study of Municipal Environmental Volunteer and Partnership Programs in Canada* aimed to gain insight into the factors affecting a program's success from both the municipal and the volunteer perspectives. The overarching goal of the research was to enhance the ability of voluntary groups and local governments to work together on urban green space planning and habitat restoration and stewardship projects. As a first step, we have assembled our research findings in the form of a manual for environmental groups and volunteers that would like to work with their municipality on community greening initiatives.

A note for municipalities

This manual and the research results summarized in it are directed to environmental groups and volunteers, but it also includes valuable information and lessons for municipalities. Two key ideas are particularly important for municipalities. First, environmental groups and volunteers are passionate and professional, and are looking for a professional, supportive, and collegial relationship with local governments. Second, working models for successful environmental volunteer engagement are out there. Talk to colleagues in other cities to find out how they've set up their programs. You'll still need to come up with your own home-grown solution, but you can use the success of others as a starting point.

Municipal stewardship: A growing trend

Evergreen's ongoing interaction and collaboration with local governments and our research on municipal green space management indicate that Canadian urban municipalities engage significant numbers of volunteers and voluntary organizations in a variety of environmental programs, ranging from habitat restoration projects to citizen participation in environmental advisory committees. All parties benefit from these programs. Municipalities have an opportunity to tap into the community spirit and specialized skills of the voluntary sector. Stewardship groups are able to build organizational effectiveness, coordinate their efforts with other volunteer groups, and ensure that their work is consistent with the municipality's long-term conservation and land-use planning goals. Individuals have a chance to be directly involved in shaping and transforming their urban environment – an experience that can bring a host of personal benefits.

What you will find in this manual

As part of our recent study, Evergreen conducted research, including program analysis, questionnaires and focus group sessions, with environmental volunteers and municipal staff in Calgary, Alberta; Waterloo, Ontario; and Winnipeg, Manitoba. These people shared their stories of struggle and success, their strategies for effecting meaningful change in their communities, and their tried-and-true tips for successful collaboration. This manual contains advice and insights drawn directly from those conversations and informed by Evergreen's 15 years of experience in working directly with local governments, supporting environmental nonprofits across Canada, and brokering partnerships between the public and voluntary sectors.

If you or your group is working with local government on a greening initiative or if you're thinking of becoming involved in local stewardship issues, this manual is for you. In it, you'll find tips on getting started, key principles of success, practical suggestions and best practices for overcoming common challenges, and real-world examples taken from our focus group conversations.

Municipal profiles

After conducting a web-based review of environmental volunteer engagement programs in seven Canadian communities, we selected three of these communities to be the focus of our in-depth questionnaires and focus groups (see Appendix A for information on how we selected these three communities). The selected municipalities were: Calgary, Alberta; Waterloo, Ontario; and Winnipeg, Manitoba. Below is a summary of each city's approach to environmental volunteer engagement and a list of the programs they discussed with us. In addition to contextualizing the information that comes later in this manual, these summaries also give you an idea of the range of environmental volunteer programs available in Canadian municipalities.

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Calgary
Calgary is Canada's third-largest and fastest-growing city, with a population of one million. Environmental volunteer programs are managed within the city by the Parks Department, through the Public Education and Program Services division. Community associations and other groups also take on environmental projects, which may be supported by staff liaisons in the Community and Neighbourhood Services Department or by local councillors. We spoke with volunteers from many community associations who had taken on projects in their parks, boulevards, and green spaces, and also with some of the municipal staff who run the volunteer programs listed below.

Adopt-A-Park: Volunteers assist in the maintenance and care of community green spaces.

Natural Environment Adopt-A-Park: Volunteers help to maintain and restore natural environment parks.

Volunteer Ranger Program: Rangers welcome park users and inform people about appropriate park use.

Community Neighbourwoods Pilot Project: Volunteers in this tree stewardship program help to care for the urban forest.

Inglewood Bird Sanctuary: Volunteers in this urban wildlife reserve provide environmental interpretation, host visitors, and lead day camps.

Pathway & River Cleanup: Volunteers participate in an annual cleanup of public park spaces.

Bowmont Park Volunteer Observers: Volunteers assist in research on park use in off-leash zones that are being piloted in the park.

BP BirthPlace Forest: Volunteers help with yearly tree planting that honours all babies born in Calgary.

Forever Green Community Tree Planting Program: The city provides free trees to approved groups that want to plant on city land.

Scoopy-Doo: Volunteers participate in an annual dog poo cleanup day.

Graffiti Volunteer Program: Volunteers assist with graffiti removal in their neighbourhoods.

www.calgary.ca

Waterloo
Waterloo is located in southern Ontario and has a population of 110,000. The Environmental Services Unit of the Public Works Department works with the city's Volunteer Services Unit to carry out many of the programs listed below. Some community groups are supported by staff liaison officers who are also responsible for environmental work within the city; many volunteers are involved in these projects as well as in projects that they have developed on their own initiative. We spoke with volunteers from community groups, advisory committees, and volunteer programs, and with city staff from four departments who work together to deliver these programs.

Partners in Parks: Volunteers assist in the maintenance and care of community green spaces. **Clean-up & Planting Events:** Volunteers participate in events such as the 20 Minute Makeover, Sunoco Earth Day, Tim Horton's Community Cleanup. **Waterloo Citizens' Environmental Advisory Committee:** Volunteers on the citizens' advisory committee to city council help to keep the city's work consistent with its Environment First Policy.	**Laurel Creek Citizen's Committee:** Volunteers protect, rehabilitate, and enhance the waterway system and work as a resource to the city. **Trails Advisory Committee:** Volunteers advise council about the planning, development, and promotion of trails, greenways, and cycling facilities. **Adopt-A-Road:** Volunteers assist in the maintenance and care of road right-of-ways.

www.city.waterloo.on.ca

Winnipeg
Winnipeg is a prairie city of 700,000 located at the geographic centre of North America. Environment-related volunteer programs are run by the Naturalist Services Branch and the Parks and Open Spaces Division within Public Works. Community-based environmental initiatives are also supported by the Community Support staff. We spoke with volunteers from community associations and local environmental groups that partner with the city, as well as with staff from all of the above areas within the city.

Adopt-A-Park: Volunteers assist in the maintenance and care of community green spaces.

Living Prairie Museum, Prairie Volunteer Program: Volunteers are involved in education about and preservation of the tall grass prairie.

Community Gardens: Volunteers develop and plant community gardens around the city on city land.

Partnerships with local stewardship groups: Naturalist Services develops individual relationships with community groups rather than developing specific programs. Volunteers and city staff work together to plant, clean up, build trails, and interpret natural areas. In 2006, the city had 35 relationships with groups across the city.

www.winnipeg.ca

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The context for municipal environmental volunteer engagement

Our conversations with focus group participants in Calgary, Waterloo, and Winnipeg yielded rich insights into the current trends affecting environmental volunteerism and the interface between the voluntary and municipal sectors. Below we discuss the three key themes that emerged from these conversations.

From "planning for" to "planning with"

Research participants repeatedly noted that the traditional relationship between municipal and voluntary sectors is evolving and that volunteer groups are increasingly faced with the challenge – and opportunity – of taking a more proactive role. In the three communities where we conducted focus groups, the idea that municipalities are the agenda-setters who simply notify or consult with the citizenry once a policy has been developed is becoming a thing of the past. Old-style "inside-out" programming is giving way to a more collaborative model in which citizens and citizen groups are as likely as town planners to drive the agenda and municipal staff recognize the benefits of planning *with* the community rather than planning *for* the community. This means that a municipality may work with citizens and volunteer organizations to achieve consensus at a very early stage in policy or program development, sometimes casting itself in a fostering role by incubating nascent community stewardship groups and offering support for grassroots greening initiatives.

With this new dynamic comes a new set of challenges. Where environmental groups are taking more ownership of stewardship programs, the line between the roles and responsibilities of the voluntary sector and municipalities may be less clear. This can

sometimes lead to misunderstandings. For example, a savvy community group may approach the local government looking for wholehearted cooperation, with every expectation of working collaboratively on a multi-faceted, long-term stewardship plan for a particular site. But if the municipality is not used to the community taking such a proactive approach, it may find it too complicated and burdensome to engage with the group. If there are few precedents for partnership with volunteer groups, staff may have little experience dealing with proactive organizations. They may also have legitimate concerns about project sustainability, liability, and fit with the municipality's green space policy.

Changing volunteer communities; changing volunteer programs

Focus group participants noted that the volunteer community itself is changing. The proactive, forward-thinking citizen groups that work with municipalities to solve local problems tend to be driven by a new 'breed' of volunteers. While such organizations still recruit volunteers to attend events and offer time and labour, they also depend on a smaller group of 'super-volunteers' who are well-educated, well-informed about local greening issues, and prepared to participate actively in conceiving, planning, and managing stewardship initiatives. These volunteers often have specialized expertise that is invaluable to a project.

Some local governments are responding to these changes by making their volunteer engagement programs more collaborative and ambitious. They are also broadening the whole idea of environmental volunteerism to encompass not only individual volunteers but also partnerships with organizations and citizen participation in advisory committees. In

some communities, the voluntary sector is helping to drive this process by encouraging the municipality to seek collaborative relationships with nonprofit groups and to develop policies that provide a framework for community partnerships.

Environmental volunteers' motivations

Focus group participants identified a broad range of motivations that move people to get involved in greening initiatives, from a desire for more beautiful and healthful communities to an interest in enhancing property values or gaining job experience. Here is what some volunteers and municipal staff said.

- Community safety: *"The reason I got involved with the community association was a merge of safety and security and social issues . . . the safety and environmental safety of a community."*

- Gaining new skills or job experience: *"I was just looking to put some of my knowledge to use because there were no jobs at that point in time."*

- Passion for the environment: *"Why did I get started? Well, I've always had a passion for environmental [issues]. You know, that's why I went to school in that."*

- Beautification: *"Our group started with community gardens, and it was, I think, image-based . . . for beautification. It was an easy way that residents could get involved."*

- Health: *"It's a beautiful garden, and a lot of the plants are indigenous and people are picking teas and things in the common areas. Because diabetes is so rampant, and type II now, [it's great] to give them options for recipes they can use."*

- Community life: *"I think one of the issues with talking about environmental volunteerism is that it's . . .all linked together with general community goodwill. . . .There's different people that come at it from different interests."*

- Community empowerment: *"The message was so powerful because, you know, this is our community and we're cleaning up garbage. . . .I get shivers thinking about it!"*

- Seeing success motivates people to do more: *"Now it's not a dumping ground. We have this trail in there, you know. We have all these people that are embracing it and going, 'Oh my god, this is fabulous!' So it's a bit of a motivation to keep going on."*

- Property values: *"This increases the value of my property by my looking after the green space that I live across from."*

- Seeing an unfulfilled need: *"Government wasn't going to do it for us. So we finally realized that we have to step forward and do the starting, and then they'll help us."*

Getting started

Building a strong relationship with your municipality won't happen overnight. If you're just starting to forge that partnership, you need to be able to answer a few fundamental questions.

1. *Is your work in the broad community interest beyond your own 'backyard'?* The municipality is more likely to sign onto your project if it meets a clear need in your community and has (or is likely to gain) strong, widespread support among citizens.

2. *Are other organizations already involved?* Find out about other groups in your community that are actively involved in stewardship and what they've already done.

3. *Is it a municipal concern?* Try to put yourself in the municipality's shoes, and ask yourself why they should work with you on this project. Familiarize yourself with your city's official plan and its environmental or stewardship policy, and assess how your project fits into the municipality's mandate.

4. *What is the municipality already doing?* Before you approach city staff with a proposal, be sure that you're familiar with the municipality's current stewardship initiatives. You need to be able to demonstrate that your work is augmenting what's already being done, not duplicating it.

5. *What kind of support are you seeking from your municipality?* Each municipality supports volunteers and community groups in its own way. While some cities offer funding programs for stewardship groups, others are more likely to lend tools and hands-on expertise to your project. Find out what your municipality is accustomed to offering, and make reasonable requests. As your partnership is strengthened over time, you may be able to expand the range of ways that the municipality supports the voluntary sector in your community.

"Passion Is necessary, but you also need to do your homework!"

Before moving ahead with your plan, do extensive networking and thorough research to find out about the history of your site or issue, what the municipality or other groups have already done about it, who the likely stakeholders may be, and what their interests are. This will give you valuable insights into how to proceed and will build relationships along the way. For more tips and suggestions for getting your project started, check out Evergreen's *No Plot is Too Small: A Community's Guide to Restoring Public Landscapes*, available online at www.evergreen.ca.

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Principles of success

Every community is unique, and each municipality finds its own locally appropriate ways to work with the voluntary sector. But our conversations with environmental volunteers and municipal staff in three different cities also demonstrated that some key principles are common to all successful stewardship partnerships. These key principles are:

1. *Collaboration:* Be prepared to work flexibly with the municipality and other organizations.

2. *Communication:* Strong partnerships rely on clear and consistent communication. Try to find a municipal staff member who can serve as your liaison, and designate someone from your organization to be the city's contact person.

3. *Credibility:* Demonstrate your organization's credibility by being well-informed and professional when you meet with the municipality. If you have experience carrying out projects, demonstrate your track record by documenting past accomplishments. Finally, building a strong base of support for your work will boost your organization's credibility.

4. *Perseverance:* As many environmental volunteers already know, the process of effecting change can be frustratingly slow. Keep at it; your perseverance will pay off.

5. *Community support:* It is a rare project that can succeed without broad community support. Reach out to your community with information and an invitation to get involved.

6. *Policy support:* Sound policy supporting your work will help ensure municipal buy-in and can protect your project from the vagaries of political trends and staff turnover.

7. *Thinking local:* Projects and strategies that work well in one community may fall flat in another. Use a place-based approach for your planning that takes into account local assets and liabilities, the unique culture and natural history of your city, and the particular strengths of people in your community. Ask yourself the following questions:

   - What are the interests of distinct populations in my city? For example, the Métis community in Winnipeg got involved in stewardship as an extension of a community gardening project to help address the loss of indigenous plants.
   - What makes my city unique? For example, the Laurel Creek Citizen's Committee in Waterloo galvanized support for their work by tapping into citizens' awareness of, and pride in, a local waterway.
   - What are the high-profile problems or issues in my city or neighbourhood? For example, the Coalition to Save the Elms in Winnipeg started out as a group of citizens concerned about Dutch Elm disease and expanded into a multi-stakeholder coalition concerned with the overall health of the urban forest.

> **Get it in writing!**
> One of the keys to clear communication is follow-up after important conversations. When you finish a chat or meeting with your municipal liaisons, take the time to send a note or an e-mail thanking them and summarizing the conversation. If your staff contact changes, or you need to trace the development of an idea, you'll have a record to refer to.

Key challenges and best practices

This section of the manual discusses the challenges identified by the voluntary sector participants in our focus groups and includes the tips and stories they shared with us about how they overcame these challenges. We begin with relationship-building issues, including the need to mobilize broad-based support for your efforts, and the specific challenge of working with municipal political and bureaucratic structures. We then move onto volunteer management and explore the municipal structures and protocols for working with volunteers and stewardship groups. Finally, we look at the practical challenge of securing the money, materials, and knowledge to get the job done, and the important but difficult job of evaluating success.

1. Mobilizing support

To get your stewardship initiative off the ground, you'll need the support of a broad range of stakeholders in your community. The following three groups are particularly important: the community, including local families, neighbours, and other stewardship groups; schools and school boards; and your local government. The advice and examples here will help you connect with all of these groups.

Be open to a collaborative approach

Working collaboratively often helps boost your project's reputation and fundability and can ultimately contribute to long-term success. Collaborations can take many forms, from a short-term partnership for a jointly funded project to a longstanding, multi-stakeholder coalition. Regardless of scale or scope, collaboration is always a balancing act: you and your partners need to work towards common goals while retaining the flexibility to accommodate each other's

agendas. The following are important to effective collaboration.

- *Start early:* No stakeholder appreciates being informed of a project plan as if it were a *fait accompli.* Collaborate with municipal staff and other partners right from the inception of a project. If your partners' interests are reflected in the plan from the start, you're less likely to encounter resistance later on.

- *Be flexible and patient:* In the spirit of true collaboration, come to the table with an open mind, and be prepared to adjust your vision somewhat to meet your partners' needs. This kind of shared planning can take time, but the resulting project will more faithfully reflect your community's best interests.

- *Cast a wide net:* Synergy can result from bringing together community members, city staff and politicians, other nonprofit groups, and even local businesses or corporations for a common purpose. Large, long-term initiatives in particular are enhanced by an inclusive approach to collaboration. You may even find allies in unexpected places. For example, sports teams may be interested in supporting a naturalization effort in the parks where they play, and seniors groups are often happy to find new opportunities to be involved in the community.

- *Be an ally, not a blocker:* Be aware of how your group is perceived in the community, and strive to position yourself as an attractive partner. Rather than throwing up obstacles to projects or developments that you oppose, try to engage with the proponents to find solutions.

- *Develop a compelling vision:* People are easily motivated to sign onto a plan if it looks like a success story in the making. Approach your local government or other allies with a strong vision, specific goals, and a clear idea of how you'd like to proceed. Be sure that all members of your group understand and can communicate your vision in a consistent way so that you don't end up giving conflicting messages to your partners.

> **Too much of a good thing?**
> Recognize the limits of collaboration. Once you've done your homework and consulted a range of stakeholders, you may find that the best path is to proceed on your own, or with only one strategically chosen partner, while keeping the lines of communication open with other groups. Once your organization or initiative is well established, you will gain allies naturally and may consider inviting a broader range of collaborators.

Use communication and education to gain support

Getting the word out about your project is crucial to developing a support base. Remember that communication and education go hand-in-hand. The more people understand about your work, the more likely they are to support it and talk about it to others. Here are some ways to get the word out.

- *Use the personal touch:* Whenever possible, talk to people in person rather than over the phone or by e-mail.

- *Tap into your networks:* Each person in your group has a network of friends, colleagues, and acquaintances in the community. Use these networks to create a buzz and get people talking about your cause.

- *Post signs at your greening sites:* Neighbours and other citizens may be wondering what's going on at their local park or riverbank. A simple sign at the site can fill them in on what you're doing, how it will help, and who to call for more information.

- *Use local media:* Letters to the editor, press releases, public service announcements, and articles in the local newspaper are all powerful, low-cost ways to raise awareness about your work, recognize volunteer contributions, and gain community support. One volunteer said, *"I think it's good to meet the media contacts in your area. Media is a huge powerful tool. We have a thing coming out in Saturday's paper for volunteers of the group. Media is great."*

> **Communications and media relations**
> Evergreen's *Keeping it Green: A Citizen's Guide to Urban Land Protection in Canada* has advice on developing a compelling message, as well as tips for writing a great press release and low-cost ideas to help you get the word out about your project. Check it out at www.evergreen.ca.

Foster a sense of place

Neighbours and other community members may already have a sense of ownership and responsibility for your greening site. For example, a Winnipeg staff member noted that *"Adopt-a-Park is often an extension of the person's own property. And they have a vested interest in what's happening in that place because they live next door."* Harness this feeling of ownership and responsibility by engaging directly with neighbours and users of your site. They may make the best volunteers and spokespeople for your cause! You can also nurture this sense of place by ensuring that your sites are easy to access and well maintained.

2. Municipal politics and bureaucracies

Working with local government comes with a distinct set of challenges. Many of these challenges stem from two realities: (1) decision-making at the municipal level is inherently political and is affected by political processes, and (2) most local governments have complex bureaucratic structures.

Why municipal politics matter

Sometimes the best efforts and intentions of municipal staff and volunteers can be frustrated by an unsupportive council. Municipal staff are mandated in their work by policies and directives from council, and councilors themselves are under tremendous pressure to respond to constituents' concerns while making politically advantageous choices. For voluntary-sector greening groups, this means that it pays to consider the political implications of your project and to use them to win the support of elected officials.

Understanding the bureaucracy

Municipal bureaucracies are perhaps *the* most frustrating element of working with local government. Even apparently simple greening projects often fall under several departmental jurisdictions, may be subject to an array of different (and sometimes conflicting) policies, might require several permits, and may meet with opposition simply because of a lack of communication among staff at city hall. These issues can be compounded if you're working in an amalgamated city or regional municipality. In addition, community stewardship projects often require a holistic approach, whereas municipal bureaucratic structures are likely to be compartmentalized. For volunteer groups, all this can add up to uncertainty and, ultimately, burnout.

Working within the bureaucracy: Municipal staff perspectives

Whenever you feel frustrated by the bureaucratic structures of your local government, try to keep in mind that your counterparts at city hall experience these structures from the inside and must cope with them daily. Your municipal contact may be personally committed to your work and willing to advocate for you, but must operate under the constraints of tight budgets and timelines and ever-changing political realities. Municipal staff members who participated in our research talked about some of the key challenges that come with working within the bureaucracy. These include the following:

- *Unsupportive council:* If Council hasn't thrown its support behind a project, municipal staff are often not in a position to move it forward.

- *Liability concerns:* In a public/nonprofit partnership, the buck usually stops at the municipality. Staff need to be wary of projects or actions that may make the city liable if something goes wrong.

- *Restrictive job descriptions and too many responsibilities:* Municipal staff positions typically have very clear terms of reference, and employees are rarely given leeway to stray from their job descriptions. At the same time, those job descriptions tend to be packed with responsibilities. As a result, your staff contacts are likely to be overextended and may not be in a position to help out in the way they would like.

- *Limited resources:* Municipal staff don't have the resources to run with every good idea that comes across their desks. Sometimes, a project needs to be put on the back burner, or be refocused to fit with the available time and money. Keep this in mind when you pitch your idea to a staff contact, and try to use the city's participation to leverage resources from other sources.

- *Negotiating the bureaucracy:* Odds are that your staff contact finds the bureaucracy as frustrating as you do!

- *Lack of continuity:* Municipalities tend to be in a constant state of flux. Whether it's downsizing, restructuring, amalgamating, or annexing, there's usually change afoot. This, combined with frequent staff turnover, short employment contracts, and possible change of leadership with each municipal election, creates a constant challenge for staff who are involved in long-term stewardship projects.

Key strategies

Here are some strategies for dealing with municipal bureaucracies.

- *Build strong relationships with staff:* It is crucial that you find a supportive staff member to be your principal liaison with the municipality. In the best-case scenario, this person can be your key to city hall, help you navigate the bureaucracy, and support your projects from his or her position within the municipality. One volunteer described this relationship in this way: *"We have our community and neighbourhood services liaison who is quite wonderful and is always happy to look into things for us. And, actually, she's looked into and found me the right person to talk to totally outside her scope. . .. I've said things to her not thinking it matters to her at all, and she said, 'Oh, I can look into that.' You know, two days later I get an e-mail saying, 'This is the person you have to talk to.'"* If you don't have this kind of supportive relationship with your staff contact, keep looking. Talk to other staff members in related departments, find out who is in a good position to support your work, and build your relationships from there.

- *Establish your credibility:* Designate a credible, knowledgeable spokesperson to be your liaison with the municipality. Municipal staff are often juggling competing demands for their time, and they need to be assured that you and your organization are professional and have expertise. Once you can demonstrate your credibility, staff will be better able to help you navigate the bureaucracy to find the people and resources you need to get your project going. One volunteer described her experience with a municipal staff committee: *"The person who you may be*

stonewalling with all of a sudden – or maybe gradually – recognizes that you actually know what you're talking about, and you're not having a patronizing or condescending conversation anymore, but you're sharing your perspective and they're coming from their perspective."

Behave bigger than you are

By projecting a professional, credible image, even a small volunteer-based greening group can gain an audience with decision-makers at city hall. One volunteer described his group's attendance at high-level meetings this way: *"We fake it 'till we make it. People think we've got this big office building somewhere and, you know, we're pretty small."*

- *Be patient and persistent:* Patience and persistence are key to dealing with the politics and bureaucratic structures of municipalities. Because of complex policies and procedures, each decision takes consideration and time. What seems, from your perspective, to be a simple issue may require extensive consultation and debate within the municipality before being resolved. Remember: adversarial persistence might get you labeled a troublemaker, while respectful persistence is likely to win respect in return.

- *Get to know the bureaucracy:* It may take patience, but getting to know your municipal bureaucratic structure will pay off in the long term. Use your contacts in local government to find out which departments, advisory committees, and individuals may have responsibility for some facet of your project and how their roles fit together. As one volunteer put it, seek out the "make it happen" people on staff and build alliances with them.

Another volunteer said, *"I think it all depends on what you know about how the city works and, you know, when you get through to the right person, then you shouldn't give up."*

- *Get political:* Pay attention to the hot topics being discussed in council meetings and the corridors of city hall, and time your requests to be consistent with current political thinking. As one environmental volunteer noted, *"If what you're doing is what's currently in vogue with the city, you'll get lots of support."* Remember, too, that councilors are obliged to listen to their constituents' concerns and are always interested in being associated with a 'good news' story. If you use education and public awareness campaigns to influence public opinion on green space protection, naturalization, or habitat restoration, your organization's stewardship work will become more politically attractive. Finally, don't underestimate the power of personal contact and networking. Get in touch with your councilors, talk with them to understand their priorities, and invite them to your stewardship events.

Persistence and political savvy

A volunteer in Winnipeg shared this story about how persistence, coupled with some savvy political leveraging, helped his organization win its year-long campaign to have a public dock installed. As a celebration of Canadian Rivers Day, this organization planned a very successful public boating event. When the celebration attracted 130 prospective participants with over 60 boats, along with extensive media coverage, event organizers contacted their mayor and local councilors. The dock was successfully installed in time for the event.

- *Use policy as a tool:* It is vitally important that your municipality has a strong, clear environmental or stewardship policy in place, and that you're aware of how to use the policy to advance your cause. Good policy is an advantage because it offers your municipal partners a clear mandate to meet environmental goals, and empowers them to dedicate resources – financial and otherwise – to community greening projects. A staff member in Winnipeg shared this story:

> *"In 1991, the first Plan Winnipeg came into existence: Towards 2010. And in this plan . . . the citizens of Winnipeg had spoken. There was a whole section in Chapter 3 called "Environmental Stewardship." And [within the City bureaucracy], Chapter 3 gave me my weapon to initiate change and to start to tell people that we needed to change, and nature was important, and natural areas were important. [This] was sort of the beginning of initiating of change. And then things started to happen."*

As one staff member in Waterloo put it, a strong policy can also offer the "green light" for you or your community group to get involved, propose new projects, and push the municipality to achieve more. The policy can act as a framework for your municipality's engagement with environmental volunteers and stewardship groups – one that transcends the changeable political climate and remains in effect when individual staff members come and go.

If you have a good relationship with your municipal partners, or if you sit on a citizen committee that advises staff and councilors, you may be in a position to influence policy development. Where possible, advocate for policy that makes specific allowances for community liaison staff and that addresses the need for partnerships with the voluntary sector.

Working with unions

Unionized municipal employees often have legitimate concerns about the expanding role of environmental volunteers in park maintenance, stewardship, and development. Clear, respectful communication and a little diplomacy can go a long way toward establishing a good relationship with local unions. Here are a few tips:

- Write up job descriptions to show that your volunteers will be doing work that is outside the scope of unionized employees' responsibilities.
- Make it clear in your group's relevant documents (e.g., mission statements, volunteer handbooks, etc.) that volunteers complement and enhance the work of city employees rather than making it redundant.
- If there are concerns that the volunteer program is going to make extra work for employees, illustrate the benefits of volunteerism by calculating the value of volunteers' contribution (using a standard hourly rate) and highlighting the success of projects in which city staff and volunteers work together.
- Be respectful of staff concerns. Get to know key members of the union to better understand their position and to share your perspective.

3. Volunteer management

For volunteer groups and municipalities alike, effective volunteer management is crucial to project and program success. There is, of course, no single approach that will work perfectly in all municipalities. Some municipalities simply tap into their Volunteer Services Department's well-established processes; others develop a system that is specific to environmental volunteers or manage volunteers more flexibly and informally.

One thing is clear, however. One size does *not* fit all when it comes to municipal volunteer program management. A program that successfully handles sports and recreation volunteers, social services volunteers, and emergency response volunteers may not be well suited to the management of environmental volunteers. Environmental volunteers are often results-oriented, willing to contribute many hours to a project that they're interested in, and feel a sense of ownership of the initiative. Moreover, environmental projects tend to be holistic and multi-disciplinary, with needs and goals that change over the long term. These characteristics demand a volunteer management approach that is flexible, responsive, and able to meet the needs of both one-time volunteers and 'super volunteers.'

In this section, we discuss what works, what doesn't, and where the key challenges lie when it comes to effective municipal volunteer engagement.

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The tips and advice in this section can help you encourage your municipality to adopt more responsive and effective practices for dealing with volunteers and voluntary stewardship groups. If you'd like information on how to manage your own volunteers more effectively, check out Evergreen's guide, *Hands for Nature: A Volunteer Management Handbook*, available at www.evergreen.ca.

Volunteer recruitment systems

Recruiting volunteers well takes dedication, time, and ingenuity. Even small, ad hoc voluntary organizations often feel the need to establish a consistent recruitment or intake system. Whether your local government is recruiting individual stewardship volunteers, partnering with voluntary-sector environmental organizations, or working with clubs, teams, and corporations on volunteer events, having a standard recruitment system in place can benefit all involved.

- *Consistency is key:* A standard procedure to welcome and place prospective volunteers can save staff from re-inventing the wheel each time a new volunteer walks through the door. A typical process might look like this:

    - The volunteer contacts a designated recruiter by phone or email.
    - A staff member conducts a simple intake interview, during which the volunteer's interests, skills, and availability are noted, his or her rights and responsibilities as a volunteer are discussed, and possible placements are reviewed. Usually, a suitable placement can be agreed upon during this interview.

- The volunteer is offered an orientation session to introduce him or her to the workplace or site, and to other staff and volunteers. By now, the volunteer should know whom to report to, how to log volunteer hours and tasks, and what kinds of support are available to him or her.

- Each stage of this process can be recorded in a simple intake form that is kept on file. A staff member from Waterloo described the effect of such a process: *"We recently had a volunteer come in and she was placed in a position in one week. With a simple e-mail and a drop-in appointment, she was ready to go because of the infrastructure we already have in place."*

- *Be flexible and keep it simple:* A good volunteer recruitment system can provide a clear framework or roadmap for volunteer involvement without being overly prescriptive about the volunteer's role and responsibilities. If municipal volunteers are allowed and encouraged to take ownership of the project, run with new ideas, and work at their own pace, they are likely to stick around longer, and become more involved over time. To allow for this possibility, some volunteer position descriptions should be kept deliberately simple, outlining only the most basic terms of volunteer involvement, and leaving the rest to be developed in concert with the volunteer. One volunteer had this advice: *"If someone volunteers and [what they offer] doesn't sound like something that you want, find out how, between the two of you, you can come up with something that works for both groups."*

- *Use the personal touch:* Try to have a personal conversation or phone call as part of your volunteer intake process. A City of Calgary staff member notes, *"[Staff] meet all their volunteers. No one gets signed up without them meeting them."* This kind of personal contact is the most meaningful way to welcome volunteers and fill them in about your work. A volunteer in Calgary emphasized this point: *"It's that kind of networking – whether it's in the community association, on the block with your neighbours, with younger parents at the schools. That's really critical for building not just the volunteer base, but also building the momentum."*

Volunteer retention and recognition

Your city may already have a great system for welcoming and keeping track of volunteers, but will they stay involved for the long haul of a stewardship project? Volunteer recognition is of paramount importance to retention, and goes well beyond a simple gift or thank-you ceremony at the end of a project. To maintain interest and commitment, volunteers need to feel supported throughout the process of project planning, development, and implementation. A volunteer in Winnipeg had this insight:

"When you get groups of people together, have people who will keep an eye on things. You know, bring the shy ones in so that everybody's motivated in the same direction and they feel that they've been recognized. Because nothing stops things quicker than if somebody feels that they're not being heard or their contribution is not being valued. Then they start digging in their heels and quietly sabotaging – maybe without even meaning to."

Here are some tips on volunteer recognition.

- *Build recognition into workplans:* Develop a volunteer recognition strategy for each project or program and build it into the workplan or funding proposal. Otherwise, you may find yourself short of the time and money necessary to really make recognition happen.

- *Use personal contact:* The importance of the personal touch doesn't stop once you've recruited your volunteers. A volunteer in Waterloo had this suggestion: *"If you had somebody who could . . . make a personal phone call to each one of the people. . .. It's those kinds of personal links that make people come back."*

- *Tap into volunteers' passion:* Volunteers often get involved in a project because of a real sense of caring for the environment but decide to move on because they haven't been given interesting, engaging tasks. Make an effort to find out about your volunteers' motivations, and offer tasks and responsibilities that tap into their passion for the environment. As a staff member in Winnipeg noted:

    "They have a longer lifespan on these [projects] when they become involved and steward a creek, or they care about a forest or something like that. They have a much longer lifespan than the average, regular volunteer because of the passion and the caring. That's what got them to the table in the first place."

- *Show progress and celebrate success:* We all feel more motivated when we can see that our efforts are contributing to success. Try to come up with recognition strategies that demonstrate and celebrate tangible progress. This may include using 'before' and 'after' photographs of your site, celebrating volunteers' achievements in the local paper, or following up with volunteers in subsequent seasons to show them how the naturalization process is going.

- *Know your super-volunteers:* If you've been working in the voluntary sector for long, you may be familiar with this scenario, described by a volunteer leader in Winnipeg: *"There will always be a few key people – probably two, but maybe three – that are doing everything, like 98% of the work. And those are the two or three that need to be supported."* Those few super-volunteers – folks who consistently go above and beyond the call of duty – are particularly vulnerable to feelings of overwork, under-appreciation, and burnout. Try to be aware of who these people are, how much work they're doing, and how you can recognize their efforts. One of the best ways of recognizing super-volunteers is to designate other volunteers as their support people. Not only does this lighten the super-volunteers' load, but it can also serve to incubate future leaders and protect your project from foundering when the super-volunteers move on.

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Succession management

Succession management is a key challenge for volunteer-driven projects undertaken in partnership with a municipality. These projects are often dominated by a few very passionate individuals who bring initial energy and success to the project but can rarely sustain that energy in the long term. If these leaders burn out, move on, or decide to decrease their involvement, the city and the other volunteers are often left with more responsibility than they had bargained for. Here are some tips for effective succession management.

- *Groom future leaders:* Suggest to promising new volunteers that they take on more responsibility or take ownership of particular elements of a project. Encourage your super-volunteers to delegate some of their responsibility so that new volunteers can gain the experience they'll need to carry the project forward in the future. When it comes to large, multi-stakeholder greening initiatives, this advice can be applied at the organizational level: encourage smaller stewardship groups to increase their involvement over time, so that they'll be ready to step in if the lead organization loses interest or moves on.

- *Set and re-set goals:* Stewardship projects sometimes lose momentum once the original goals are met and the initial excitement of getting started wears off. Make it part of your workplan to revisit your goals and objectives frequently and to establish new goals for each phase of the project.

- *Establish formal systems for succession:* Some greening initiatives lend themselves to more systematic ways of managing succession. For example, the Environmental Advisory Committee in Waterloo stipulates that members are allowed only three terms of up to three years. This helps ensure that new ideas and perspectives are regularly brought to the table. If succession management is a challenge for your group, try developing new terms of reference or a set of guidelines for your advisory committee or board. These new terms might stipulate a maximum term for particular positions, or could simply formalize a mentoring system to help ensure that longstanding members' experience is being passed along.

4. Money, materials, and practical know-how

As anyone working with a stewardship group knows, the success of a project often hinges on the practicalities of securing a budget, finding the necessary material and equipment (e.g., seedlings, water, and mulch), and having the know-how to get started. Here are some tips and advice on how to get the right tools and resources, practical skills and expertise, and money for your project.

Tools and resources

If money is tight, finding the tools and other materials you need for a greening project can be a real challenge. As one volunteer put it: *"One of my biggest headaches on the project is getting mulch! It takes up a lot of time behind the scenes."* It can also be challenging to find good sources of seedlings, tools, storage space and water.

If you're already working with your municipality, talk to them about how they can help. Municipal staff are often in a better position to offer in-kind support than funding, but don't assume that they'll be able to deliver everything on your wish list. Here are some typical in-kind offerings from municipalities:

- Mulch
- Water trucks
- Loaned shovels and tools
- Seedlings
- Printing and photocopying
- Use of city land
- Storage sheds
- Signage
- Building materials
- Gloves
- Refreshments
- Meeting space

Practical skills and expertise

Once you've gained access to all the supplies you need, the next challenge is learning to use them efficiently, effectively, and professionally. The kind of 'know-how' you'll need to tap into ranges from basic writing and concept-development skills to technical and professional expertise in ecology, horticulture, fundraising, or volunteer management. It also includes the ability to make scarce resources go further, as noted by one volunteer, *"When you've got zero funding, you're resourceful!"* Here are a few sources of practical skills and expertise.

- *Local universities, colleges, and trade or professional associations:* Local colleges and universities are a great source of expertise in everything from horticulture to landscape architecture. In many cases, you'll be able to find a skilled student who's interested in some hands-on experience, and willing to offer his or her time as a volunteer. Faculty members, too, may be interested in working with your organization on a research project, or might simply be willing to train your volunteers in a specialized skill-set.

- *Other nonprofit organizations:* Well-established nonprofit groups often have professional fundraisers, volunteer managers, writers, and editors on staff. For a modest honorarium, such people may be able to offer specific advice, or conduct a half-day workshop to help build your group's capacity.

- *Helping organizations:* A number of nonprofit groups in Canada extend support to environmental initiatives and organizations in the form of seminars and courses, speakers series, fact sheets and research publications, and case-by-case advice. Evergreen is one of these – offering workshops, manuals, research and advice on urban greening initiatives. Other such organizations are listed in Appendix B.

- *Your own members:* You may be surprised by the skills and expertise that already exist in your organization. Canvas your members, including your board of directors, to find out what kind of know-how you already have at your fingertips.

Money

Not surprisingly, money typically poses the greatest challenge to environmental projects. For volunteer stewardship groups, the grant-seeking process can be burdensome and time-consuming. Operating and maintenance costs – as crucial as they are – are notoriously difficult to fund, and many groups struggle to achieve sustainability on projects that have partial or sporadic funding. Here are a some tips and tricks for overcoming some of these challenges.

- *"If there's somebody that can help you write the grants – the first couple – that's a real stress-reducer:"* Grant seeking may seem daunting at first, but once you've got a few applications under your belt, the process will start to go more smoothly. Experienced volunteers or professional fundraisers from other organizations may be willing to offer their time and expertise to help get you started. If you have allies at city hall, they might be able to review and critique your proposal before it's submitted – particularly if the municipality is mentioned as a project partner or supporter.

- *Find the starting piece of the funding puzzle:* Participants in our Calgary focus group compared fundraising to a complicated jigsaw puzzle: finding the starting piece is the greatest challenge. After that, you can show that you have matched funding for new grants, and each new piece of funding will be marginally easier to secure. A partnership, or even a simple endorsement, from your local government can help you find that 'starting piece' by demonstrating to prospective funders that your project already has support and is likely to be a sound investment.

Evergreen common grounds grants

Evergreen's Common Grounds program, in partnership with The Home Depot Canada, Wal-Mart Canada, and Unilever Canada, offers grants to community groups doing environmental stewardship work across Canada. For more information on eligibility, application procedure and deadlines, check out Common Grounds on our website at www.evergreen.ca.

- *"Private money is HUGE . . . because private money makes the politicians listen:"* As hard-won as it may be, the money you raise from individuals, charitable foundations, and corporations can help you leverage further support – including support from your municipal government. Like you, municipalities are under pressure to seek new sources of funding and do more with tight budgets, often by partnering with nonprofit organizations. Remember that your ability to access third-party dollars makes you an attractive community partner. It can also strengthen your voice in setting the green agenda at city hall.

Need more information?

Evergreen's *Keeping it Green: A Citizen's Guide to Urban Land Protection in Canada* has advice on getting incorporated and gaining charitable status and includes an entire chapter devoted to fundraising. Check it out at www.evergreen.ca.

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5. Evaluating success

Most people who are involved in community greening efforts are familiar with the struggle to incorporate meaningful evaluation mechanisms into stewardship initiatives. Too often – and despite best intentions – evaluation gets swept aside in the final, hectic, stages of a project. In the midst of reporting, rushing to meet deadlines and getting plants in the ground before the season ends, who has time or resources to dedicate to a reflective process? In addition to sheer lack of time, focus group participants also talked about the lack of clear goals against which to measure success as a key challenge, and the difficulty of measuring and reporting on progress that is often incremental, intangible, and qualitative in nature.

Given these challenges, many environmental volunteer programs and projects go unevaluated, and their successes go undocumented. For hard-working volunteers, this leads to a sense of futility and, ultimately, burnout. As one volunteer in Waterloo noted, *"We make small, small progress, but how do you measure it? I wish we could do more and we could see the results, but they're such small advances that it's really hard to say it's successful."* When it comes to municipal initiatives such as Adopt-a-Park, shoreline clean-ups, or community naturalization, lack of follow-up and evaluation can be a lost opportunity to secure the support of elected officials and, by extension, a budget to continue or expand the program.

Here are some tips for overcoming the challenges associated with evaluation.

- *Plan for evaluation:* Every project plan should include time, money, and a basic framework for evaluation. This could be as simple as arranging to return to a planting site to monitor plant survival rates in subsequent seasons or gathering informal feedback from volunteers.

- *Set both short- and long-term goals:* Evaluation is easier if there are clear short-term and long-term goals and objectives by which to evaluate success. For example, if your long-term goal is the establishment of a thriving community garden, your short-term goals may be to involve a local seniors' group, recruit a team of volunteer garden stewards, and hold your first annual harvest festival. Remember to recognize and celebrate the achievement of each short-term goal and re-assess your goals periodically as circumstances and community needs change.

- *Use both quantitative and qualitative measures of success:* Measurable or quantitative indicators of success such as the number of trees you planted or volunteers you recruited are valuable reporting points. They can help demonstrate to your partners and funders that your program is worthy of continued support. But don't underestimate the value of stories, anecdotes, and personal experiences. These qualitative assessments show how your work is affecting people's lives and can be tremendously compelling. Environmental volunteers in Winnipeg shared these ideas:

    "The amount of people coming to the workshops is one of our ways of looking [at success]. [Also] how many people stop me on the street or when I happen to be at another event. When I'm out and about and somebody says, 'Oh, tell me more about those ... potatoes?' or 'You got any recipes?' or 'How's that garden going over there at Pritchard Park, did you get the youth to come in?'"

    "How I measure success when building trails is – we're on the trail often – is how many people are going by. And there's more every time we're out there. There's more and more people going by using it. So that's our success."

    "I also gauge [success] by complaints: 'Hey, there's a tree that fell down across the path!' They don't call the city. They don't call their councilor. [They call us instead]. I get them to call the councilor just so the councilor knows it needs to get done, and then we do it. But that tells me a little bit of an indicator."

Measurable or quantitative indicators of success	Experiential or qualitative indicators of success
The following are examples of measurable or quantitative measures of success: • number of trees, shrubs, or wildflowers planted; • number of kilometers of trail maintained; • number of acres or square metres naturalized or protected; • number of volunteers involved; • number of park users, hikers on the trail, or gardeners; • tonnes of garbage or number of bags of invasive species removed; • number of phone inquiries about your work; • how much money was saved; and • number of new partnerships that resulted.	The following are examples of experiential or qualitative measures of success: • Your program has become a model for the work of others. • Volunteers and supporters seek you out to make a contribution. • Volunteers are enthusiastic, committed, and feel that they are making a difference. • Attitudes about or level of awareness of your issues have improved. • People's behaviour has changed as a result of your work (e.g., people use the trail more often, leave less litter in the park, or use fewer pesticides). • Your municipality, your organization, or the people involved in your project have developed a good reputation.

In the city of Calgary, staff evaluate the benefits of volunteer involvement in Parks Volunteer Programs by calculating the dollar value of all volunteer labour. Based on a dollars-per-hour pay scale, at the rate it would cost the city to hire someone to do the volunteers' work, they calculate the annual value of environmental volunteers to the Parks Department. Here's a sample of their figures, showing the progressive success of their programs over the last 15 years.

	1991	1995	2000	2005
Number of Volunteers	1714	3787	5111	6145
Number of Volunteer Hours	23,000	35,500	41,457	65,523
Annual Program Budget	$129,858	$157,848	$343,726	$480,019
Number of Adopted Sites	465	665	696	759
Volunteer Value per Hour	$13.68	$14.89	$16.75	$ 16.75
Total Volunteer Value ($)	$314,640	$528,595	$694,408	$1,103,766

- *Celebrate small victories:* When you're up against climate change, air pollution, or urban sprawl, a one-day tree-planting event or mulching bee can seem like a small contribution. But every small step brings you closer to your goal. By celebrating and documenting each small success, you show your supporters how your work fits into the big picture, and you demonstrate to volunteers how valuable their time and effort is. One volunteer offered this encouragement:

> *"When something is going to be a success, the steps that you make at the beginning are baby steps, and when you're at the end, it's giant leaps. Boof! It [success] piles on. But you've got to see to it that you do the baby steps and then it all falls into place. And usually people give up when they're still doing baby steps."*

Peter Thomson

Summary and conclusions

In Evergreen's 15 years of experience, we have witnessed a surge in the popularity of environmental volunteering and public/nonprofit partnerships for green space. Citizens and voluntary organizations are taking on a leadership role, often partnering with their municipality to ensure that their cities and towns are green, healthy, and livable for future generations. This project was a valuable opportunity for Evergreen to witness the passion, depth of commitment, and genuine goodwill that typifies municipal and voluntary efforts to collaborate on greening issues. Your work as an environmental volunteer is part of this exciting movement. Whether you are new to working with local government, or you're simply looking to strengthen a well-established relationship, we hope that the insights and advice offered in this manual have helped you work more productively and collaboratively with your municipality.

As a next step, we strongly encourage you to consult the websites of other organizations and municipalities – including the three municipalities we've profiled – and make personal contacts there to gain a better sense of what's already working in other places. Using these models as inspiration, you and your municipal partners will be well-equipped to develop your own, home-grown solutions to help ensure a green future for your town or city.

Advice. . . In their own words

At the end of each focus group, we asked one final question of participants: "What advice would you have for others in your field?" Here's a sample of their responses.
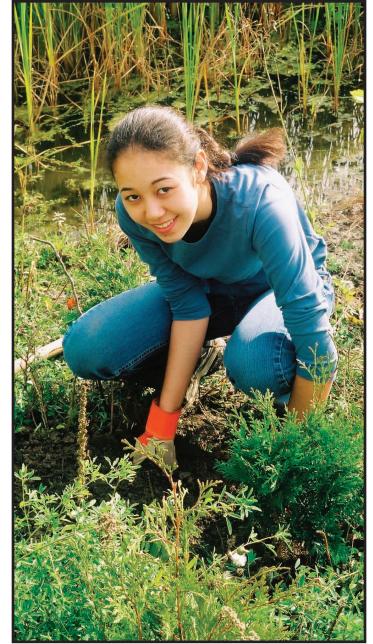
"You can start at the bottom [of the bureaucratic hierarchy] if you like. I usually start at the top. Skip the whole lot and go to the top."

"Understand what your partners are interested in. The framing, the shifting, the partnering, the collaboration is much better than the butting of heads and the fighting to get the money out of their pockets."

"I think sometimes ignorance is bliss. When you're naive you can get a lot done. You just go and you go and you go and don't realize it's going to be so hard, I won't try."

"You've got to think big. You can't think small. Don't know your place."

"Write a letter to the editor. One out of three will get in. Sign it from your group. You get recognized by it. Make it a positive spin, but definitely show there's something wrong with this. That gets a lot of attention."

Meghan Kearns

Evergreen

Evergreen

Evergreen

Appendix A: The project: Methods and approach

The overarching goal of our research was to strengthen the ability of voluntary stewardship groups and municipal governments to work together to benefit the broader community. To that end, we posed the following research questions.

1. What types of municipal environmental volunteer and partnership programs and practices are in use in Canada's large and mid-sized urban municipalities?

2. What level of satisfaction/benefit is experienced by volunteers and community partners engaged by municipal environmental volunteer programs?

3. What are the principal limiting and enabling factors affecting the success of municipal environmental volunteer programs – from the perspectives of both municipalities and voluntary organizations?

4. What is the status and potential of knowledge-sharing and networking among municipalities in the development of effective municipal environmental volunteer programs?

We employed a three-step qualitative research process to address these questions. We carried out web-based *reviews* of programs offered in key communities across the country (as described on their municipal websites). In three exemplary communities (Calgary AB, Waterloo ON, Winnipeg MB), we followed up with qualitative *questionnaires* about programs and people's experiences of them. These questionnaires informed *focus groups*, which we carried out with volunteers and with staff in each

community. Detailed information about each of these stages is provided below.

Review of programs

Based on Evergreen's existing knowledge of municipal environmental stewardship programs across the country, and with the advice of our national advisory committee, we selected seven communities across the country whose programs and policies we profiled in a web-based review of their programs.

- St. John's NL
- Halifax NS
- Montreal QC
- Winnipeg MB
- Waterloo ON
- Surrey BC
- Calgary AB

The information we gathered from municipal websites was sent to contact people within each municipality to verify that we had the most accurate and up-to-date information about their programs.

Using the profiles from these online reviews, and in order to capture a wide variety of successful programs, municipal, and geographic contexts in our research, we chose three municipalities to be the focus of our in-depth questionnaires and focus groups. These municipalities were: Calgary AB, Waterloo ON, and Winnipeg MB.

Questionnaires

We sent questionnaires to one key municipal employee and two or three key people from the voluntary sector in each community. The purpose of the questionnaires was to ensure that our understanding of the programs and relationships in each community was well developed and to provide

a foundation for questions in the focus groups. Questions about successes and challenges, key features of programs, and the nature of city-volunteer relationships were included. In some cases, municipal employees contacted their colleagues to gather complete information.

Focus groups

We carried out two focus groups in each municipality, the first with municipal employees and the second with volunteers. Group size ranged from three to nine people, and participants were recruited through Evergreen and municipal networks and by the recommendations of questionnaire respondents. Participants were sent information about the focus group process and the purpose of the project in advance of the meeting. Each group met for about two hours.

An interview guide was developed for the focus groups to ensure some standardization of the questions and topics covered in each. The guide used a modified standardized approach where the questions were organized into a funnel pattern, beginning with very broad questions and moving to more specific questions. In our case, broad topical questions ("How successful are your programs?") were used more uniformly across the groups, while specific questions ("How do you measure the success of your programs?") served as prompts for the conversation as necessary. We added additional specific questions to each set of focus groups based on the data from the questionnaires. In all cases, the interview guide served merely as a set of reminders for the facilitator. The conversation in the focus group was encouraged to be as casual and informal as possible, while still ensuring that all topics were covered and that all had a turn to speak.

Conversations in the focus groups were recorded when permission was granted to do so; extensive notes were taken when permission to record was not granted. In every focus group, the facilitator was accompanied by a volunteer or Evergreen staff member to help with note taking and other research tasks. The transcribed recordings formed the basis of the data for this manual.

Data analysis

Data analysis was carried out by two people independently, for verification purposes. After each person had individually analyzed all of the transcripts, the coding was compared and themes were developed. These themes and key ideas formed the basis of this manual.

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Appendix B: Further resources and contacts

Evergreen resources

All of these resources – and more – are available to download free from www.evergreen.ca. Printed copies can be requested from our Toronto or Vancouver offices for a nominal fee.

Evergreen. (2000). *No plot is too small: A community's guide to restoring public landscapes*. Toronto: Evergreen.

Evergreen. (2001). *Urban naturalization in Canada: A policy and program guidebook*. Toronto: Evergreen.

Evergreen. (2003). *Hands for nature: A volunteer management handbook*. Toronto: Evergreen.

Evergreen. (2005). *Keeping it green: A citizen's guide to urban land protection in Canada*. Toronto: Evergreen.

Lindsay, Lois. (2006). *Family volunteering: A natural for environmental stewardship organizations; Best practices booklet*. Toronto: Imagine Canada.

Lindsay, Lois. (2006). *Family volunteering in environmental stewardship initiatives: Research report*. Toronto: Imagine Canada.

Information on Evergreen Grants is also available at www.evergreen.ca. Grants are available for community and school groups working in public green spaces, riparian zones, and school grounds.

Volunteerism and community group resources can be found on the following websites:

www.nonprofitscan.ca
This site houses Canada's largest online library relating to the charitable and nonprofit sector.

www.imaginecanada.ca
Imagine Canada – centre for the charitable and nonprofit sector in Canada, with information about volunteering and organizational management.

www.volunteercanada.ca
Volunteer Canada maintains a website with information about volunteering in Canada, as well as listings of local volunteer centres across the country. Find your local volunteer centre here.

www.charityvillage.ca
Charity Village maintains a large online database of information for the nonprofit sector.

Municipal websites are often excellent sources of information about programs that have already been successfully implemented. We've listed the three municipalities from this manual, but there are many more successful programs out there.

www.calgary.ca
City of Calgary

www.waterloo.ca
City of Waterloo

www.winnipeg.ca
City of Winnipeg

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Knowledge Development Centre