Involving Volunteers in SIP Tree Planting

What is this factsheet about?
- This factsheet examines the involvement of volunteers in a large SIP tree-planting program
- It is one of a series of short factsheets written to aid anyone considering the possibility of integrating tree planting into a SIP

Why does it matter?
- A very large tree-planting program will need to identify planting personnel early in the planning phase
- The choice of personnel affects other aspects such as costs, mortality, and management
- Volunteers constitute a significant asset to planting programs, though their involvement within a SIP context requires planning and care

Is it even possible to involve volunteers?
- Significant successful volunteer tree planting already occurs in both urban and rural contexts
- Volunteers have been instrumental in urban and community programs across the country
- SIP tree planting differs from many existing volunteer programs, since its success must be measured in survival and growth, not simply in numbers planted
- Suitable quality assurance and quality control procedures must be implemented

What are the benefits of using volunteers?
- Benefits to the community:
    - Volunteer labor is usually widely available and somewhat less costly
    - Volunteers bring skills and resources otherwise unavailable or unaffordable
    - Volunteers can use their own networks to locate resources
    - Planting trees promotes community advocacy
- Benefits to the volunteer:
    - Participating in urban tree planting gives a sense of community identity
    - Involvement promotes the feeling of urban forest ownership
- Benefits to the urban forest:
    - Volunteers learn about trees and tree care, and become advocates for urban forestry
    - Volunteers can provide post-planting care to the trees they plant
    - Tree survival is higher when the local community is involved

What are the challenges?
- Challenges to the community:
    - An adequate budget must be provided for volunteer coordinator and staff
    - The project must be made fun and meaningful for volunteers to participate
    - Volunteers must be carefully selected, trained, monitored, and recognized
    - Recruiting and managing volunteers requires special skills, and is time-consuming
- Challenges to the volunteer:
    - Correct techniques are critical to the project's success
    - Volunteers need to meet commitments despite problems that may arise
- Challenges to the forest:
    - Volunteer planters have uneven levels of knowledge, motivation and ability
    - Volunteers can only do hand planting, limiting stock size and planting speed

How can volunteers be found for SIP tree planting?
- Unless a dedicated staff will be created for this purpose, it will be easiest to cooperate with existing well-run volunteer organizations that have experience with planting projects
- Checking online volunteer services such as SERVEnet, ActionWithoutBorders or VolunteerMatch may suggest strategies, contacts and resources
- National groups such as The Alliance for Community Trees, National Arbor Day Foundation, and Plant-It 2020 may be able to help
- The office of the State Urban Forestry Coordinators may have contacts with knowledgeable, experienced volunteer organizations that would be potentially interested in such a project
- Community examples abound: Sacramento Tree Foundation, TreePeople, Trees Forever, TreeFolks, TreemendousMiami, Trees Atlanta, TreesNY, Openlands Project, TreeTrust and The Park People
- Many local institutions such as natural area groups (e.g., Chesapeake Bay Foundation), parks (e.g., Allegheny Park) and schools (e.g., Dade County), also have tree-planting volunteers
- Volunteers interested in and trained for planting work can be recruited from local organizations such as Master Gardeners and Garden Clubs, found in nearly every state.
- Potential cooperators also include outdoor volunteer groups working in rural forestry
- Evaluate volunteer organizations in the critical categories:
  - Planning and organization
  - Recruitment and selection
  - Orientation and training
  - Supervision and education
  - Recognition and motivation
- Because SIP tree planting is a large project with state-wide significance, only experienced and successful volunteer organizations should be invited to join the project

How would activating the volunteer component actually work?
- Set the target number for volunteer planting
  - Calculate approximate number of trees that need to be planted
  - Assign planting numbers to the various planting groups being used
- Contact appropriate volunteer agencies
  - Communicate mission and stress significance
  - Explain target planting number and quality requirements
  - Request cooperation and commitment
  - Offer salary, training, and computer support
- Establish quality-assurance and quality-control procedures
  - Quality assurance
    - Volunteer screening
    - Training:
      - Site analysis
      - Tree-handling
      - Responsibility
  - Quality control
    - Setup a suitable database and provide training
    - Require simple but accurate records
    - Sample actual sites for correct planting
- Plan feedback, thanks and celebration for organizations and volunteers

Where can I find more help?
- Consult guides such as The Simple Act of Planting a Tree or Community Tree Planting Guide
- Explore resource collections such as that of the Rural Information Center