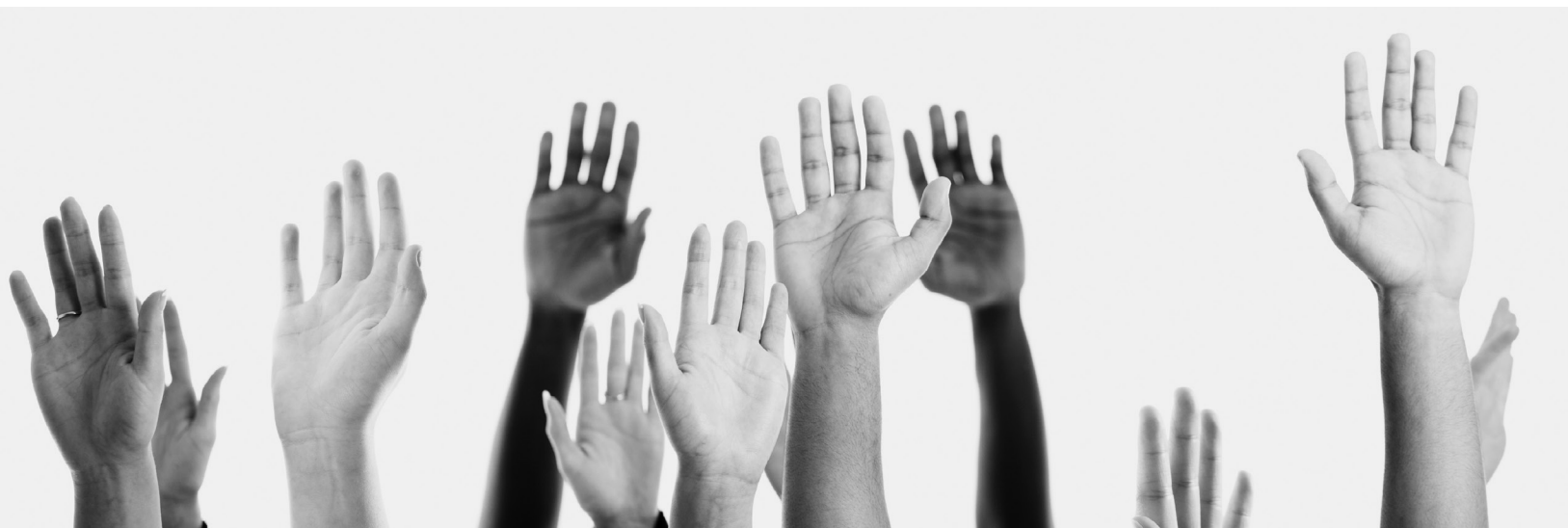




How to Work with Volunteers — Effectively

TREE CITY USA®
BULLETIN

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***T**here is no substitute for systematic, continuous community tree care programs that are adequately funded by local governments. But rarely is there enough money to do all that is needed to plant trees or to care for those we have. Volunteers can help fill the gap. From planting crews to fundraisers, volunteers can supplement the work of professionals, strengthen social bonds within the community, and provide advocacy and support for tree programs.*

“We promise not to waste your time.” This was welcome reassurance in a letter of invitation to participate as a volunteer in a new project. In fact, the concept behind the statement is probably central to the success of working with volunteers.

Each year Americans contribute more than 7 billion hours of time to good causes, including tree programs. In most cases, volunteers are already busy people, and in all cases, they have hearts of gold and a sincere desire to make the world a better place in which to live. These people deserve our thanks — and they deserve careful attention so the best possible use is made of their time and talents.

In community forestry, volunteers have served on tree boards for decades, planted millions of trees, spent untold hours pruning small trees, raised large sums of money, and contributed in other ways too numerous to list. Of the many lessons that have emerged from this experience, perhaps the most essential is that when volunteers are well-organized and guided by skilled leaders, the result is mutual satisfaction for both the individual and community officials.

Unfortunately, too often the happy marriage between volunteers and managers soon goes sour. In some cases, volunteers find that they are really not needed. Standing around on a cold, spring morning with more people than trees to be planted is nobody’s definition of a good use of time. Neither is sitting in on a poorly conducted meeting that goes on and on, dominated by a few outspoken individuals or producing little more than the need to schedule another meeting.

Then, too, there are professionals who have been let down by volunteers. Many have watched initial enthusiasm wither away when the fun wears off. Others have been promised equipment, supplies, or donations that don’t materialize. And then there is the matter of long-term care of a project site or trees that have been planted. Many urban foresters have found that volunteers show little interest in watering, pruning, stake removal or the other care a young tree needs in the years following planting. If crews are not able to handle the additional workload, the trees suffer and the project may even fail.

When well-managed — and when not expected to substitute for the professional workforce that is the backbone of larger communities — volunteers are a valuable resource. When not managed effectively, or when city officials view volunteers as a way to avoid financial responsibility for trees, volunteers can actually be detrimental to community forestry. The pages that follow contain suggestions that should help nourish a positive, beneficial relationship both within volunteer groups and between volunteers and the professionals with whom they work on behalf of trees.



Arbor Day Foundation
100 Arbor Avenue • Nebraska City, NE 68410

Avoiding Start-Up Pitfalls

Every volunteer program begins differently. It may be a spontaneous project, such as neighbors dealing with the aftermath of a severe storm, or it may be a lone individual trying desperately to interest others in turning a vision into reality. In community forestry, the most common situation is the attempt to start an organization such as a tree board, neighborhood association, or tree-planting team.

How to start depends so much on circumstances that it is difficult to offer general guidelines. However, proverbial hindsight does clearly point out some common problems. When planning to start a volunteer organization or project, this checklist may help you navigate past the pitfalls to success.

✓ RECRUIT ONE OR TWO KEY PEOPLE

Every volunteer group needs at least one or two key people. Call them “spark plugs,” “workhorses,” or by some other name, the fact is that they are the individuals who will work hardest, stay longest, and determine success or failure of the effort. Do not go to square one before identifying these people and privately enlisting their help.

✓ WATCH FOR KEY DETRACTORS

At the other end of the spectrum, there will usually be key detractors. Try to think of who these may be and contact them before your project is made public. Attempt to win their support through involvement, or at least neutralize their opposition through flattery, making sure they are well informed, or just about whatever else the situation requires.

✓ MAKE YOUR FIRST MEETING EXCEPTIONAL

Make sure your first meeting is especially well-planned. It is deadly to gather a group, then ask, “Now, what should we do?” Be prepared with a solid idea for action, or at least be ready to clearly outline the need that can be met by the group.

✓ HAVE AN AGENDA

Make sure your agenda includes approximate times to spend on each item. Stick to it. The group will be amazed!

✓ USE FINESSE

This is especially important for implementing the above two points. Be reasonably structured and prepared, but also allow enough latitude and time for others to contribute ideas and feel involved from the start. In other words, provide a solid framework, then let the group fill in around it.

✓ DEVELOP GOOD MEETING SKILLS

Conducting a good meeting and steering a volunteer group requires skills. These are learnable skills, but they do take effort. “How to Make Meetings Work” by Michael Doyle and David Straus is an old classic, but there are many other publications and websites that can also help.

✓ THINK PARTNERSHIPS

This will avoid wasteful duplication, prevent opposition, and add muscle to your effort. Target an individual with each government or private organization that should be involved. Invite him/her to the first meeting and stay in close contact thereafter.

✓ CLOSE YOUR MEETING EFFECTIVELY

Close your first meeting with agreement on follow-up, specific assignments, and the time and date for the next meeting. When possible, also end with a little fun — refreshments, entertainment, or giveaways, for example.

THE CONFESSION OF A CITY FORESTER

It was a crisp, cloudless autumn day — the perfect Saturday morning to launch our community’s first street tree inventory. Ten volunteers had shown up at my earlier training session, so I thought all was in order. Imagine my surprise when 50 people showed up that morning, ranging from scouts to the elderly! Virtually all were ill-prepared for inventory work, including doing even the simplest of tasks such as correctly reading a diameter tape. The day turned into a nightmare and, not surprisingly, only three to five people showed up on subsequent weekends.

Like most nightmares, this one scared me half to death. It also scared our city attorney who was quite concerned about the lack of training and safety equipment such as traffic vests. For me, it was clearly self-examination time!

That experience taught me a valuable lesson that I put into practice the second time around — be prepared. My first mistake was not making it clear in my initial publicity that the training workshop and advance sign-up was required in order to help with the field work. The announcement also should have mentioned bringing a lunch and something to drink, or, as I did on later projects, that these important items would be provided. From that first experience I also learned to:

- Not overestimate the technical knowledge and abilities of volunteers and to spend more time explaining why we do a particular project.
- Map out specific blocks for each team to inventory, and make sure enough roving supervisors are available to help and to check on the accuracy of data.
- Use simple equipment such as Biltmore sticks instead of clinometers.
- Make printed material available explaining the project, not only for the volunteers, but for the volunteers to give to curious residents and pedestrians.
- Continuously and publicly recognize the service of my volunteers.

That Saturday nightmare did not sour me on volunteerism. It taught me a valuable lesson that enabled me to now use volunteers very effectively in many aspects of my community forestry program.

– Mike Bowman,
City Forester (Retired)
Lewiston, Idaho

Understanding Volunteers

In a study of tree-care volunteers in Chicago, Lynne Westphal of the U.S. Forest Service's North Central Forest Experiment Station asked rhetorically, "What drives people to spend their spare time outdoors in all kinds of weather spreading compost, digging in the mud, and risking their backs hauling mulch? And why trees? Why not volunteer at the local hospital or to help the symphonic orchestra?"

The answer she found will not surprise many veterans of community forestry. Simply, these people love trees.

Under the microscope of social science research, volunteers in Westphal's study — and probably true of volunteers elsewhere — revealed a passion for trees that borders on religious devotion. These people said they value community trees most for such reasons as bringing nature closer to people, being aesthetically pleasing and good for the environment, providing shade, and providing spiritual benefits.

Importantly, Westphal also found differences among the values held by the volunteers she studied. For example, older volunteers and those who owned homes tended to focus more on the practical values of trees. They also recognized that city trees can present problems such as dropping debris or clogging sewers.

By recognizing both the sincere passion that is common among community forestry volunteers and the differences between individuals within the army of tree lovers, it is possible to more efficiently manage volunteer efforts and provide satisfaction to the participants. Here is a checklist of other differences found among volunteers and presented by G. Greger and E. Yandle in "Volunteer Program Training Guide (Oregon State University Extension Service)." These are six factors that motivate people to volunteer. In each case, suggestions have been added by Dr. William McLaughlin of the University of Idaho about what community forestry assignments might work best with people in each motivation category. By getting to know a new volunteer, it usually does not take long to identify which of these motivations is at work. Remember, however, as with any other personality trait, more than one of these factors are probably influencing most individuals.

RECOGNITION

These volunteers have a need to be recognized for the good work they do. They are concerned about status and prestige and do well at projects that have high visibility and lots of public relations value. It is also important that the projects have well-defined outputs rather than vague or ongoing results. Tasks to which these individuals respond best include helping with newsworthy events or projects that result in tangible rewards (plaques, citations, etc.), and being part of an elite group that makes decisions.



ASSIGNMENTS:

- ✓ Ceremonial tree plantings.
- ✓ Organizing or taking part in an Arbor Day ceremony.

- ✓ Being on a TV or radio talk show.
- ✓ Representing the city at Tree City USA award events.
- ✓ Authoring bylined articles for newspapers and magazines.
- ✓ Being the liaison with government or elected officials, or with corporate officers.

ALTRUISM/PUBLIC DUTY

The general good or public interest is the primary concern with these volunteers. They tend to be idealistic and place a high premium on fairness, just decisions, and learning. Tasks best suited to this group include getting all elements of the community involved in projects, addressing community-wide goals, dealing with conflicting values, and learning about government and its operations.



ASSIGNMENTS:

- ✓ Planning and coordinating large tree-planting events.
- ✓ Organizing Arbor Day or Tree City USA award ceremonies.
- ✓ Serving on tree boards and/or liaison positions with city council, planning and zoning, or other units of government.
- ✓ Serving on beautification and appearance committees.
- ✓ Developing or improving ordinances.
- ✓ Conducting surveys to define community desires, goals, etc.
- ✓ Planning and conducting programs with schools or other organizations.
- ✓ Promoting urban forestry with other groups.

AFFILIATION

These individuals need social contacts. They enjoy working with others and making new friends. Being liked is a major concern and they feel a need for the support of other people in whatever they do. They want to feel at home in a group and to be a real part of it. Solo tasks are not for them, but they do well with intense tasks that can result in gaining support from other organizations. In short, social interaction is very important.



ASSIGNMENTS:

- ✓ Participating in tree-planting projects.
- ✓ Planning and conducting social events.
- ✓ Conducting workshops.
- ✓ Selling T-shirts, trees, memberships, etc.
- ✓ Developing organizational identity through logos and media promotions.
- ✓ Being in charge of volunteer recognition or awards events.
- ✓ Serving as liaison with service clubs.

Continued...

Understanding Volunteers (continued)

ACHIEVEMENT

Achievement, or the desire to pursue excellence, drives these individuals. They are concerned about performing with perfection and being innovative. They are also likely to be more competitive than others. Achievement-oriented volunteers need challenging tasks, constant feedback on performance, and the opportunity to learn and do new things.



ASSIGNMENTS:

- ✓ Serving as liaison with local utilities to resolve conflicts involving trees and aesthetics.
- ✓ Monitoring insect/disease conditions.
- ✓ Providing leadership in hazard tree reduction projects.
- ✓ Keeping track and seeking improvement of planting survival.
- ✓ Serving as neighborhood tree warden for monitoring problems, doing minor pruning, etc.
- ✓ Representing the tree board at training sessions or conferences.

POWER

These volunteers desire to have influence. Possessing authority is important and they like to be involved in decisions. They often feel the need to be in control of others, such as directing fellow volunteers. They enjoy planning and making decisions about programs or events, and they prefer to be able to deal directly with community political leaders.



ASSIGNMENTS:

- ✓ Serving as committee chair.
- ✓ Being a board member with decision-making powers.
- ✓ Directing tree planting on-site.
- ✓ Developing position statements or proposals for decision-makers.
- ✓ Serving as liaison with political figures.
- ✓ Helping to enforce ordinance provisions.

PRESERVATION

Environmental responsibility is utmost on the minds of these volunteers. They are concerned with changes in the environment and always seek to make sure that any projects or programs in the community are in accord with what is best for the environment. These individuals are likely to be very concerned about the quality of development in the community. They also excel at teaching others about the environment and will be interested in any efforts they believe directly benefit environmental quality.



ASSIGNMENTS:

- ✓ Developing public education materials and programs.
- ✓ Teaching children's programs.
- ✓ Speaking at service clubs.
- ✓ Working on planting, tree maintenance, and habitat improvement projects.
- ✓ Helping to write and enforce ordinances.
- ✓ Serving as liaison with the parks commission.
- ✓ Managing natural areas.
- ✓ Fundraising.

WHEN THE JOB IS NOT GETTING DONE

When assigned tasks are not being completed by some members of a group, morale among the productive workers can quickly deteriorate. To meet the challenge and correct the problem, try these methods:

- ✓ Discuss the problem privately with the offender and ask his/her cooperation in correcting the problem.
- ✓ Set up a job matrix on a bulletin board with tasks, meeting attendance, etc., across the top and volunteers' names down the side. Place marks as appropriate. This will be visible to everyone and will put pressure on non-participants if their status in the group means anything to them.
- ✓ Bring in a respected professional or the head of a successful sister organization to evaluate your program. Have him or her present the results to the group, concluding with open discussion and a listing of ways to correct the problems.
- ✓ Use incentives for participation such as appropriate books or other prizes, trips, plaques, and similar awards.



Five Steps to Successful Volunteer Management

Awareness of some basic management techniques will go far toward making volunteerism a satisfying experience. This, in turn, will contribute to a longer period of volunteer service, a higher level of productivity and quality, and more benefits to the community. Leaders and coordinators of volunteers at all levels should consider these steps as a way to assure good working relationships with volunteers.

1. RECRUIT EFFECTIVELY

There is nothing like an adequate number of helpers to make a task seem easier.

This may mean asking for help from other organizations for specific projects. Local service clubs have a history of helping with park and tree projects. Adequate numbers are also necessary to assure the continuity of any program or organization as people move away or leave for other reasons. This makes recruiting an ongoing effort, and it presents the opportunity to bring in new ideas, new strengths, and a wider network of contacts. These benefits are enhanced even further when a special effort is made to assure diversity of age, sex, and ethnic backgrounds.

Successful recruiting usually results from:

- Including member recruitment as part of the year's plan of work.
- Making an additional plan specifically for how recruiting will be done.
- Using a flier, poster, or other graphic material to portray current projects as interesting, exciting, and worthwhile. It also helps to describe how the volunteer benefits from the experience. Ask local media to help by providing free air time or print space.
- Personally asking individuals who you know could contribute. Have others in your group do likewise. Most people who do not volunteer were never asked.
- Following up promptly when someone expresses interest.

...it is important to publicly thank individuals for faithful participation and special achievements.

2. PROVIDE DIRECTION

Most volunteers want direction. There are many ways to provide guidance, including using agendas at meetings and assigning specific, doable tasks complete with deadlines and a clear idea about the expected outcome or product. Another technique that is sometimes helpful is the use of position descriptions. Use a separate description for each position such as "board member," "secretary," "council president," etc. The elements of each should include:

- Title.
- General responsibilities.
- Approximate amount of time required.
- Qualifications.
- Specific tasks and activities.

In all cases, potential volunteers should receive a copy before accepting a position.

3. PROVIDE ORIENTATION AND TRAINING

All newcomers should receive a manual or packet of information about the organization and some individual attention from the leader or other longtime member. When several people join, an orientation session may be a good idea. Either way, orientation should include:

- The history, goals, and mission of the organization.
- All important policies.
- The chain of command and directory of who's who.
- Instruction for tasks or duties (with reading materials and/or videos, if necessary).

All members should regularly be given opportunities to attend workshops, conferences, and other educational programs. Another way to assure personal growth and continuing education is to provide subscriptions to pertinent publications and sponsor attendance at workshops and conferences, such as the Arbor Day Foundation's annual Partners in Community Forestry Conference.

4. SUPERVISE

An important part of successful volunteer management is trust and delegation of duties. Avoid what masters of volunteer management Andy and Katie Lipkis refer to as "the one-person-tree-machine syndrome." Volunteers are usually capable people, and they want to help. After spelling out their responsibilities in accordance with the position description, step back and let the person share the workload. Communicate regularly with each volunteer, providing positive feedback as well as suggestions when needed. Be sure to explain how their tasks and projects fit into the overall management of the community forest. Under worse-case situations, especially if assignments are not being done, it may be necessary to ask the volunteer to resign.

5. THANK!

Experts call this "recognition," and some volunteers need it more than others. But in all cases, it is important to publicly thank individuals for faithful participation and special achievements. Do this often and sincerely. Phony statements or undeserved recognition are worse than none at all. Instead, when recognition is due, vary it according to circumstances and what the individual will appreciate most. This can range from a handwritten note from the leader to a formal plaque or other tangible award.

Most importantly, publicize the recognition through newsletters and local media. This not only provides a sense of satisfaction to the awardee, but is a good way to build a positive image for your group and encourage others to join or participate more fully.

Volunteer...or Find a Volunteer at the Volunteer Center

Arbor Day Foundation's Volunteer Center makes it easy to match up volunteer opportunities with individuals willing to help plant trees, prune, or do other work that benefits our environment.

TO LIST VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

If your organization is in need of volunteer help, simply go to <http://www.arbordaynow.org/volunteer.cfm> and click on "I'm Looking for Volunteers." Complete a simple registration form and soon your openings for volunteers will be posted on the Arbor Day Foundation's website and its partner's site, VolunteerMatch. Both are seen by millions of viewers.

TO FIND VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

If you are looking for a way to become more involved in community forestry or other environmental causes, the Volunteer Center is a good place to start. Visit the site shown above and click on "I'm a Volunteer." You will be asked to register on your first visit. After that, the site allows you to search for opportunities by location, personal interests, or key words. It can also be used to keep track of your volunteer hours, and you can receive notices about organizations that post openings related to your interests.

SOME WAYS VOLUNTEERS HAVE BEEN USED IN TREE CITY USA AND TREE CAMPUS USA COMMUNITIES:

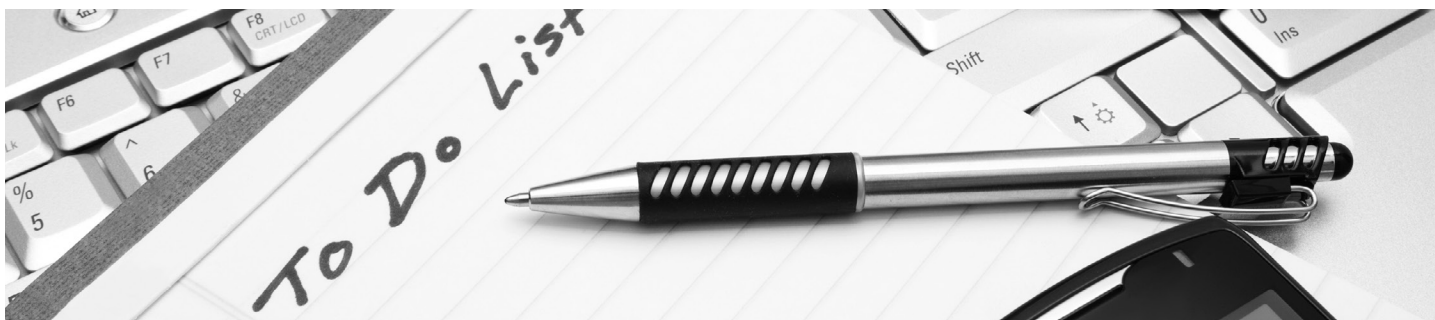
- ✓ Photographers to collect photos of street trees.
- ✓ Videographers to cover events.
- ✓ Social media experts to promote events.
- ✓ Monitors for tree health or insect/disease invasions.
- ✓ Volunteer recruiters and coordinators.
- ✓ Tree inventory workers.
- ✓ Arbor Day and other event planners and coordinators.
- ✓ Educators to visit schools.
- ✓ Writers to create "fun sheets," make historical records, or do media features.
- ✓ And, of course, planting trees.



Not All Tasks are Suitable for Volunteers

A common concern in urban and community forestry is how volunteers can best serve and what is best handled by professional foresters and arborists. The answers depend largely on community size, availability of municipal and private sector professionals, and the skill levels of volunteers. However, in most cases there are more than enough tree program needs for everyone to be productively involved. Here is a general guide to what functions might best be served by volunteers and professionals.

VOLUNTEERS WORK WELL	VOLUNTEERS WORK WITH CONSIDERABLE TRAINING	BETTER LEFT TO PROFESSIONALS
Planting trees	Coordinating planting projects	Selecting appropriate trees to order and writing specifications
	Pruning young trees (from the ground)	Pruning large trees (from ladders or using ropes)
		Pruning near any utilities
	Gathering/updating inventory data	Planning an inventory and data management system
Watering trees		Fertilizing
Mulching		Aerating
Distributing literature	Assisting in publication planning and design	Preparing educational content
Sponsoring landscape and other contests	Wildlife habitat improvement	Designing habitat improvement
Creating and staffing fair booths	Instructing in workshops on basics of tree care	Conducting advanced workshops and training instructors
Helping with fundraising projects	Assisting with budget presentations and proposal preparation	Developing annual budgets and special proposals
		Tree and stump removals
Monitoring, reporting, and preventing vandalism	Monitoring insects and diseases	Controlling insects and disease
	Routine hazard tree inspection surveys	Hazard tree evaluations and prescriptions for action
Advocating ordinance or planning and zoning reform		Providing advice on building or excavating near trees
		Cabling, bracing, and lightning protection installation
Cleaning tree wells and removing stakes		Removing overgrown tree grates



Other Sources of Information

COMPLETE SET OF TREE CITY USA BULLETINS

An excellent way to bring new volunteers up to speed on urban and community forestry is to provide them with a complete set of Tree City USA Bulletins. The set includes all issues along with attractive 3-ring binders for storage. Available for \$99 from the Arbor Day Foundation.

THE TWO BEST BOOKS

Of the many useful references on how to do a better job of working with volunteers, here are two that are “must” books for anyone in community forestry:

“A HANDBOOK FOR TREE BOARD MEMBERS”

This helpful book from the Arbor Day Foundation is designed to prepare all new or prospective tree board members for a productive, fulfilling volunteer role in their communities. Easy to read and well-illustrated, topics range from what is expected of a tree board member to some of the basic technical elements of managing community trees. Publication was made possible by a grant from the USDA Forest Service, with the goal being to reach every tree board member in the nation. Gratis copies were distributed to all state urban and community forestry coordinators. Additional copies are available at the nominal price of \$2.95 each, 25 for \$59, or 50 for \$99 from:

Arbor Day Foundation
100 Arbor Avenue
Nebraska City, NE 68410

“THE SIMPLE ACT OF PLANTING A TREE”

BY ANDY & KATIE LIPKIS

This book is actually more about organizing and supporting volunteers to plant trees than it is about the technical aspects of planting, and rightfully so. Technical problems pale next to the challenges of fundraising and managing armies of eager tree planters and maintainers. No other publication of its kind provides such rich detail or is written in such an entertaining style. Available for sale by TreePeople or free online from this organization at www.treepeople.org/treepeople-publications.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For quick links to additional information about working with volunteers, please visit arborday.org/bulletins.

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