



## ASSESSMENT OF P-PATCH TRUST

Services and Resources

University of Washington Sociology  
August 2009

August 2009

**REPORT AUTHORS AND RESEARCHERS (in alphabetical order)**

Jessica Benson  
Colleen Bryan  
Lionel Candido  
James Howell  
Joseph Manke  
Nykelia Massingale  
Derek Pedersen  
Andrew Schneider  
Felecia Shue

**SUPERVISOR and Co-AUTHOR**

Nika Kabiri, Doctoral Instructor

**CONTENTS**

Introduction..... 4

Methods..... 5

    Surveys..... 5

    Interviews..... 7

Findings..... 10

    Survey Findings..... 10

    Interview Findings..... 14

Conclusion..... 17

    Recommendations for Trust..... 17

    Recommendations for Future Research..... 19

August 2009

## INTRODUCTION

The P-Patch Trust (“Trust”) has requested our assistance in conducting research in their gardens to determine answers to the following three questions: first, whether the P-Patch gardeners are aware that the Trust exists; second, what knowledge level the gardeners have of the Trust; and finally, what the gardeners’ think of the Trust. We have also been asked to find out if the P-Patch gardeners have any suggestions that might help the Trust identify weaknesses and/or improve upon their current services.

To begin our research, we asked the following two questions: Are the gardeners aware of the resources being offered by the Trust, and do the gardeners feel that the Trust is fulfilling its role (i.e., making gardeners aware of services/resources offered by the Trust and being effective in implementing those services)? An example of some resources provided by the Trust are an option for gardeners to have their plot fee paid if they cannot afford it, ensuring gardeners are keeping their plots maintained, acquiring land for new P-Patches, opening lines of communication between the city and gardeners, coordinating work parties, managing community areas of the gardens, recording mandatory volunteer work hours, fund raising, and community outreach. In order to gather the necessary data to answer these questions, we chose to conduct a survey of the P-Patch gardeners, along with individual and focus group interviews.

Answering the questions on behalf of the Trust was a first step in identifying the level of awareness and opinions that the gardeners held of the Trust. Our objective was to first determine whether the gardeners clearly understood the Trust’s services. Next, we wanted to see if they utilized said services. Finally, we wanted to know whether the services were of any value (helpful or useful) to the gardeners.

Clarifying and answering these questions through our research will ideally help the Trust to better assess how knowledgeable P-Patch gardeners are of its organization. Use of this information may help to improve services and facilitate communication between the Trust and the gardeners.

This report will begin with the methods we utilized in conducting our research. Our survey will be discussed, including a general explanation of the use of surveys and their advantages/disadvantages. Next, both group and individual interviews will be discussed, followed by a discussion of the reasoning behind our use of these instruments. The report then goes on to explain how and why the group and individual interviews were utilized. Findings are then presented for both the survey and the group/individual interviews. This is followed by a summary of the findings and recommendations for the P-Patch Trust. The report concludes with recommendations for future research.

## METHODS

To choose the correct method(s), we considered not only how to best answer our research question but also what sources of information we had at our disposal. A mixed-methods approach proved most suitable given our goals and our constraints. Specifically, we relied on surveys, complemented by in-depth one-on-one and group interviews. In this section, we discuss how we used these methods to conduct our research.

### Surveys

One of the methods we decided upon for collecting data was to conduct a survey. It was appropriate for our research because a survey represents the best possible method for collecting a large amount of data in a short amount of time. Given this particular research project, time was a major factor in our decision. Since we had 9 total weeks, a short amount of time in most cases, a survey enabled us to maximize our time and collect the most information possible. The large amount of gardeners we could question also enabled a large amount of information to be collected. Since we had access from the trust to all the emails of gardeners, who had email addresses, it was possible to disseminate the survey quickly and at minimal cost. Those who did not have emails listed were contacted via phone and were given the opportunity to take the survey. Given the diversity of this population, a large amount of quantitative information helped us see a better representation of who the gardeners were and how they felt about the trust and their services. Because of this we knew that a survey would be time and cost efficient. We discussed various research methods and decided that a survey would allow us to obtain information that would provide us with large amounts of quantitative data that can be used to provide the client with numerical data about our findings.

#### *The Survey Instrument*

Once a survey research method was chosen we had to design a survey instrument (see attachment). We collectively decided upon a format. By format we mean; order of questions, types of questions, number of questions, wording, types of possible answer choices, and number of possible answer choices. When making the decision of which questions needed to be included in our survey we decided on three topic areas that we felt would be best for answering the research questions. The topics are: personal gardening information, resource/service knowledge, and demographic information of the P-Patch gardeners. Personal gardening information questions were asked in order to give us an idea of the different kinds of gardeners we were questioning and what their personal gardening experiences were. We contend that gathering information about the gardeners experience is important because having data on the amount of time the gardeners have been involved with the P-Patch Program, how often they have participated in the Trust's activities, and identifying the gardeners preferred method of correspondence will aid in answering the research questions. This would also give the Trust a better understanding of their constituents and our sample. We felt that gathering this information about the gardeners would also allow us to make some inferences about why gardeners are or are not as familiar with the Trust and its services as the Trust would like them to be. Resource/service knowledge questions were important because it showed us what the gardeners knew about the trust and how well the gardeners felt the trust was communicating and providing resources to the gardeners. Resource/service knowledge was split up into separate services to identify which services were best and least known. Along with helping to answer our research question, this section also gives the Trust an idea of where they can improve their presence. We asked for demographic information because it

August 2009

gave us an idea of who we were questioning and a picture of who was being represented within the P-Patch gardener population.

Along with our choice of what specific questions to ask in each category, we also had to choose how to ask these questions. We chose primarily closed ended questions. By asking the gardeners as many closed ended questions as possible we could easily observe areas of consensus about their knowledge and opinions' of the Trust. These questions also helped us organize the large amount of information and helped us see the distribution of answers. This also helps future research in recognizing any correlations that may exist between the respondents and their answers. We also chose to include an open ended additional comments section in our survey in order to collect more qualitative data that could help us better answer our research questions. By doing this, we gave the respondents a chance to express any information and opinions that were not covered in the survey.

### ***Conducting the Survey***

We disbursed the survey via e-mail to the gardeners using a service called Survey Monkey, and by phone if the gardener did not have an e-mail listed and was listed as English speaking. It was our belief that these methods of distribution would be the most efficient, yielding the best response rate and the largest sample possible given our time and resource constraints.

Using the list of gardeners that was provided to us by the Trust we created a call list of 307 English speaking gardeners. Those that were not listed as English speaking were not included in the call list due to our time and resource constraints. After creating this list, we gave each gardener an identifying code so that we would be able to track their responses or demographics in the future. The gardeners are coded CL01 through CL307. We also included a section on our call list where the researcher can input the outcome of the phone call. For example if a gardener doesn't answer we would code this outcome NA, or if a gardener does not speak English we would code this outcome NE, or if a gardener completes the survey we would code this S.

Next the 307 gardeners were contacted by telephone. Our initial goal for the first 2 days was to call 150 gardeners; however our first 60 gardeners did not answer their phones, did not speak English, or had changed their numbers. We decided to vary the days and times we called gardeners in order to increase our response rate. We also decided that if a gardener did answer but did not have time to take the phone survey then we would offer them the option of giving us their e-mail address so that they could be included in the online survey. After phoning the entire group of gardeners we were able to gather three samples, and three new e-mail addresses, the majority of gardeners did not answer their phones, many did not speak English, and a significant amount of numbers did not function. We have tracked these outcomes to specific gardeners so that their information can be updated if the Trust so chooses.

Although the phone survey response rate was incredibly low (less than 1%) we do believe that we have gathered relevant information that can help us to compile some possible ideas or suggestions for the Trust; such as updating their phone lists, and verifying/ identifying non English speakers this being that so many of the gardeners who were listed as English speaking did not speak English.

Next, using the professional version of Survey Monkey we created the online Survey. The online survey consisted of three pages, one for the basic gardener info, one to gather information on

August 2009

gardener's knowledge and opinion on services, and one for demographic information. This process was relatively simple and straight forward; we were able to translate the survey seamlessly from our original format to the online format. We did not need to make any changes to the formatting of the survey, and were in fact able to streamline the survey in some places. For example instead of gardeners writing in at which garden their plot is located, respondents to the online survey are able to select their garden from a drop down list thus making the survey more user friendly.

Once the survey was uploaded onto Survey Monkey group members were given the opportunity to make changes and or offer feedback. After collaborating we made the appropriate changes and revisions to the survey. The completed survey was sent to the entire research group in the same way it would be sent to gardeners. This was our method of testing the survey's functionality, ease of use, and reliability. After testing our survey we found it functional, reliable and user friendly.

Before sending out the survey to the gardeners, we sent out a preliminary e-mail message introducing ourselves as researchers, and informing the gardeners that we were working with the P-Patch Trust. We let them know that we would be sending them a web-link to a survey for them to take, and that all personal information would be confidential and that the data would be used to benefit them. After the online survey was finalized and tested, it was disbursed to 2500 gardeners. Many of the e-mail addresses listed were returned as incorrect indicating possible old or canceled e-mail addresses. The online survey was open to take for two weeks and at the end of that time period a final e-mail message was sent informing the gardeners that the survey was now closed; thanking them for their participation.

## Interviews

Interviews are more useful for this project because they are more in-depth than surveys. although surveys can be useful in discovering how a large group of individuals generally feel about a topic; interviews can get to the heart of what gardeners think/ feel and also discover opinions not previously known. We chose to do two types of interviews to obtain information needed to answer the research question, those were individual and focus group. A focus group interview involves multiple participants being interviewed at one time. This is a form of qualitative research in which a group of people are asked about their attitude towards a product, service, concept, etc., which in this case is a service. Questions are asked in an interactive group setting where participants are free to talk with other group members and go off of each others responses. By doing interviews in this way, it allows for group interaction and thought stimulation. The importance of a focus group is that it gives the interviewers a richer/ more in-depth response from the interviewees. This is because interviewees are able to hear other's thoughts and comments on the service in question, which can help refresh their memory to something that had been forgotten or just help clear up the question for them. Therefore, the benefits of a focus group are that the structured group interview will help ensure that the gardeners' answers are not bias in the form of a leader answering for everyone and efficiency will be better in a group format to cut down on time compared to individual interviews. It will also be easier to collect the data, compile it, and analyze it, compared to a more varied format. Our group interviews will have the advantage of consistency and efficiency when conducting the interviews and we will be able to ask more questions in the time allotted. The explanation section of the interviews will give us an advantage when forming recommendations to the Trust.

August 2009

An individual interview consists of a one-on-one in-depth conversation with an individual that the facilitator is trying to obtain information from, which in this case uses the services in question. This technique is used to gather qualitative (non-numerical) information. The importance of an individual interview is that it gives the interviewer much richer and in-depth responses from the interviewee that can't be obtained from a survey alone. The primary benefits of doing an individual interview versus a focus group interview is that they are easier to coordinate. Similar to focus group interviews, the facilitator can get in-depth responses that are being sought. Like a focus group interview, other benefits are that the yes/no questions will give us direct answers and will make it easy to collect the data, compile it, and analyze it. The reason we did individual interviews as opposed to focus group interviews was because of time constraint on scheduling. This is the next best interviewing technique because it still gave us rich/ in-depth responses that we were looking for from gardeners when doing a focus group interview.

### ***The Interview Instrument***

For the focus group interview we used the survey questions as a guide in fashioning our interview questions. We thought that the questions should generally be similar because the survey questions already covered all the important issues we wanted to cover in order to answer the research question, which was if the P-patch gardeners think the Trust is doing their job? From the survey, we already had a list of questions that focused on the Trust and the resources they provide. They asked things such as, "Has your garden received a grant for gardening tools? Do you think these tools are necessary? Are they useful to you? Are there enough tools in your garden?" We followed this procedure with the rest of the resources that the Trust provides for its gardeners, such as the P-Patch Post, financial support, and its advocacy roles, because these such questions are aimed to see if first the gardeners know what resources are available, then whether they are utilizing the resources, and finally whether they thought this was a useful resource provided to them by the Trust.

By using these important questions from the survey, as well as adding more customized and appropriate ones for a group interview, we would be able to get more in-depth responses from the gardeners. This would truly let us capture how and why they feel a certain way about a particular issue at hand. For example, a question that we have included in the group interview asks if the gardeners are aware that the Trust, above all, acts as the gardeners' advocate for the existence, expansion, and improvement of the P-Patch program and if they feel this is being accomplished by the Trust. This question creates an awareness about the Trust's advocacy role and at the same time allows gardeners to express comments on how well of a job the Trust is doing in its advocacy.

Finally, we have also included further questions to pinpoint the gardener's perception of the Trust by having an open ended section that asked questions such as: "Do you have any recommendations for how the Trust can improve any of the services we've discussed?", and if there were any other recommendations for the Trust? This was especially useful when it came to finding patterns in the Trust's strengths and weaknesses from the gardener's perspective. These open ended questions were also useful to provide recommendations to the P-patch Trust after interviews were completed and we had gone through all the in-depth responses that we had gathered from the gardeners.

### ***Conducting the Interviews***

We started our research by calling the 72 site coordinators in hopes that they would provide us with a random selection of gardens to visit. However, this was a challenge because the site coordinators were

---

August 2009

difficult to reach. Once having spoken with the coordinators we were able to reach, we set up as many focus group interviews as possible. Initially only three focus group interviews were successfully scheduled, so we visited gardens at random in groups of four, three, two or in some cases alone. We carried out group interviews with individuals from a variety backgrounds located at different garden sites. When approaching the gardeners, we spoke politely and gave the option of answering our questions while they worked in their patch, or for them to take a break and answer the questions. We gave this option because we did not want to be an inconvenience to their gardening (since some only have a short time to do so), we also wanted to try to make interviews as informal and comfortable as possible. This would relieve any stress associated with being interviewed and would encourage the gardeners to provide honest and complete responses. The interviews often shifted into to a conversation rather than an interview, which was the desired outcome for our research. After visiting twelve gardens we were able to conduct four focus group interviews from six different sites. The focus group interviews consisted of : the first group had three participants, the second group had only two, then the third had six and the final focus group interview had six as well. Each group provided rich and detailed responses thus reinforcing our expectations of focus group interviews. The gardeners' time with the P-Patch gardens ranged from 21 years to March of this year.

Since there was a time constraint scheduling, due to deadlines to administer the focus group interviews, we started visiting gardens without scheduling prior meetings in a hit-or-miss fashion. We again traveled in groups of four, three, two, or alone. There were limited opportunities to conduct focus group interviews with more than one person since nearly all gardeners maintained individual schedules, consequently we conducted individual interviews when group interviews were not possible. We approached the gardeners in the same fashion as the focus groups, giving them a choice of where and when to answer our questions. Again we wanted the interview to be as comfortable and stress free as possible. After visiting twelve gardens we were able to conduct seven individual interviews from six sites. The gardeners in the individual interviews time with the P-Patch gardens ranged, similar to the focus groups, from 21 years to March of this year.

## **FINDINGS**

After compiling data from both the survey and interview phases of our research, we analyzed them to reach our findings. The survey data was analyzed using tools provided by Survey Monkey. The interview data was analyzed by reviewing and summarizing consistencies and differences in interview responses. The findings are discussed below.

### **Survey Findings**

#### ***Description of Participants/Gardeners***

After conducting our survey we had a 20% response rate, or 496 out of 2500 of the gardeners contacted responded to our survey. Of these gardeners 15.3% (74 gardeners) maintain P-Patches at Picardo Farms, 6.8% (33 gardeners) maintain plots at Interbay. The other gardens were represented relatively evenly, although 9 gardens were not represented. These gardeners have been at their gardens for an average of 5 years and 5 months and spend an average of just over 4 hours per week at their gardens. Almost all of these gardeners, 97%, have heard of P-Patch events, and 77.4% reported that they "sometimes" attend these events while 9.8% of gardeners reported "always" attending these events and 11.2% reported "never" attending these events. Of the respondents, 70.7% reported that they were previously aware that the P-Patch Trust is a separate entity from the City of Seattle P-Patch Program while 29.3% were unaware of this distinction. Finally of these gardeners 82% of gardeners responded that they prefer to be contacted by email by the P-Patch Trust, 13.9% that they prefer to be contacted by mail, and 0.6% that they prefer to be contacted by phone.

This sample is relatively representative of the different gardens as only nine of all the gardens surveyed had no respondents, and no one garden contributes an overwhelming majority of the sample. It should be noted however that the gardeners that responded to this email survey still only make up roughly 12% of the total gardener population. This sample is also not entirely representative of the gardener population. It is a sample of opportunity based on response to an email invitation. Thus we can assume that those gardeners that chose to respond are relatively motivated and interested in P-Patch issues. This assumption is supported by the high awareness of garden events. Almost all of these gardeners are aware of events in their garden, and the majority attends these events at least some of the time. They also spend a significant amount of time at their gardens and have been maintaining their gardens for an extended period. Accordingly, our results may not be applicable to gardeners who are new to their patches or who do not spend very much time at their patches weekly. The following results apply only to those gardeners who are involved enough to respond to our invitation and take the time to fill out the survey.

Of our 496 participants, 74.2% were female and 25.8% were male. The average age of participants was 49 years. English is the primary language of 98.5% of participants. The majority of participants identify most closely with a "white" or "Caucasian" ethnicity or cultural group. However there were many different ethnic and cultural groups represented. The most common household income is 50,000 to 100,000. About half of the participants make donations to the P-Patch Trust.

#### ***Knowledge of Resources***

We asked the gardeners if they had heard of several P-Patch Trust resources and services. The following is a summary of gardeners' responses to the question, "have you heard of the following resource?" As researchers we were aware that the Trust was most interested in whether or not the gardeners knew that the Trust acts as an advocate for them and the gardens, and one of the most significant findings of our research was that three-fourths of the respondents reported that they were aware of this prior to our survey. Of all the respondents, 85.3% reported that they had heard about the P-Patch Post, whereas 91.2% of the respondents reported that they had never heard about the liability insurance. Nearly all of the respondents reported that they had heard about garden parties and other organized events that the Trust held. A considerable amount of the gardeners reported having prior knowledge that the P-Patch Trust and the City of Seattle's P-Patch program were separate entities prior to taking our survey. Lastly, we found that nearly as many respondents had not heard about grants for new tools as have not. Also, as many gardeners had knowledge that the Trust provided financial aid as those who did not. For further details please refer to the below table.

**PERCENTAGE OF GARDENERS WHO HAVE HEARD OF P-PATCH SERVICES**

Service:	Percentage that have heard of resource/Service:
P-Patch Post	85.3%
Advocacy for Gardens	75.2%
Gardenship Fund	59.7%
Grants for Tools	46.6%
Fiscal Agent Service	26.4%
Liability Insurance	8.8%

These questions were designed specifically to ascertain whether or not gardeners had simply heard of these services. They were not designed to gather any opinion about the services. It is also possible that gardeners do not have to be aware of some of these services for them to be effective.

***Use of Resources***

We also asked gardeners if they have ever used various P-Patch Trust resources. Many responded that they had not. For example, 94% have not used the Gardenship Fund and 99.8% have not used the liability insurance. When questioned about the P-Patch Post, slightly more than half of the gardeners said that they always read it whereas as roughly 16% said that they have never read it. We also asked if their garden has ever received tools from a P-Patch tool Grant, of the gardeners surveyed a little less than three-fourths of them said that they were unsure whether or not their garden had received grants and one-fourth reported having received tools. Finally we asked the gardeners whether or not they had used the P-Patch Trust as a fiscal agent, from those responses we concluded that the majority of the respondents were unsure whether or not their garden had used this service, whereas less than

August 2009

10% of the respondents reported having used this service. Some of these services are not directly used by gardeners and so it seems appropriate that gardeners simply would not know if, for example, the P-Patch Trust serves as their gardens fiscal agent. For more details, refer to the following table.

**PERCENTAGE OF GARDENERS THAT HAVE USED P-PATCH SERVICES**

<b>Resource/Service</b>	<b>Percentage that have used resource/Service:</b>
P-Patch Post	83.7
Grants for Tools*	25.1
Fiscal Agent Service	8.6
Gardenship Fund	6.0
Liability Insurance	0.2
Advocacy for Gardens**	n/a

\*For these services the majority of respondents were unsure if their garden has taken advantage of the resource/service.

\*\*Fiscal agency service is not directly used by gardeners.

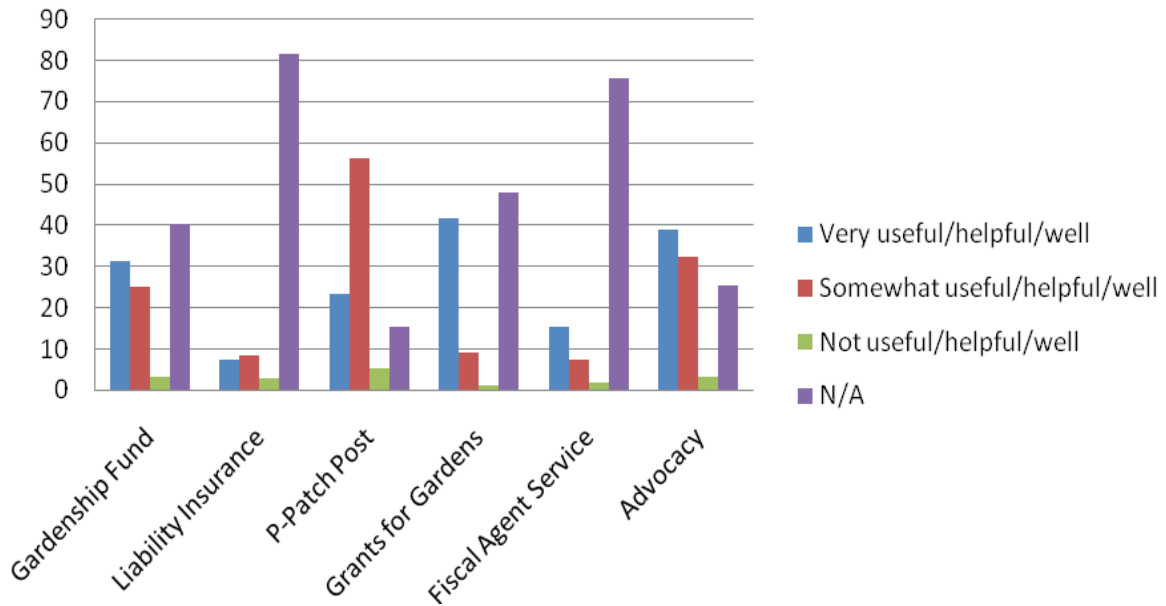
***Evaluation of Resources***

We also gathered data on gardeners’ opinions about the effectiveness of each service. Gardeners were asked whether they found each service very, somewhat, or not at all useful, helpful or well. If they had never heard of the service before this survey, they chose N/A.

Every resource is of some value to the gardeners. When gardeners are aware of the resources they tend to find them useful. Nearly all respondents hadn’t heard of the Liability Insurance and Fiscal Agent Service, therefore making it difficult to determine their opinion. There were four services clearly favored by the respondents: the Gardenship Fund, the P-Patch Post, Grants for Gardens, and the Trust’s Advocacy. A little less than half had not heard of the Gardenship Fund while nearly the rest were split in half between finding it very or somewhat useful. A large majority believe the P-Patch Post is somewhat useful and about a quarter of them find it is very useful. Grants for Gardens is split nearly in half between never having heard of it and finding it quite valuable. Finally, about two-thirds believe that the Trust is doing well in its advocacy efforts. Their decision is split almost evenly between very and somewhat well. Few think it’s not doing well, while the rest (about a quarter) were unaware of this service. See the below graph.

Figure 3

### Evaluation of Services



#### ***Gardener Comments/Suggestions***

We have also reviewed the additional comments and suggestions given by the respondents for the Trust. Many comments were vague, and in order to better quantify the responses, we chose to classify the comments into six categories as follows: "P-Patch Post," "public relations/outreach," "advocacy," "rule enforcement," "administration/updating records," and "other." These broad categories were chosen because most comments fit within these categories, and the outliers would fit into the "other" category. Based on the answers given quite a few of the gardeners were happy with the Trust and the experience it has provided them. Those whom were not happy did discuss some of their concerns but for the most part there was an overall general trend of suggestions that should fall into one of the six categories that we created. Some comments were as follows:

“Overall I’m really pleased with the P-Patch program, although it would be great to understand in more detail the role of the P-Patch trust. The web site could use a revamp to be easier to navigate, more contemporary in design and clearer communications. I would also cut costs by stopping the mailing of the newsletter and posting each issue to the web site (those without computers could opt in for mailings).” –Gardener

“At the annual meetings that take place for each individual P-Patch it would be helpful and interesting to have an in-depth presentation about the trust. I’ve been aware of it for a long time but didn’t know about all of the support it offers.” –Gardener

These are just two detailed responses that we did receive from the gardeners that we were able to successfully place into one of our categories. Detailed responses about the P-Patch Post that we were able to compile included; requests for more gardening tips, having the Post be e-mailed, and including stories of gardeners. Many requested that the Trust’s PR be improved. They wanted to see more

August 2009

presence of the Trust in the gardens and more announcements of services. Respondents also requested stronger rule enforcement, as they have experienced littering, theft and trespassing by the homeless, they want to see a way of reducing this problem. Some reported that they do not receive any information such as the Post and would like to see their records updated as well as policies and procedures to utilizing some of the services that the Trust provides. There was not much that we could gather from the responses and recommendations section of our survey because some of the answers were as follows: "no", "they're doing great", or reiterating some of the questions that were previously asked during the survey. From these types of answers we were not able to conclude information that would be beneficial for the Trust.

## **Interview Findings**

### ***P-Patch Trust Strengths***

For any organization its community ties are important attributes when it comes to establishing its core fundamentals. This is especially true when it comes to the P-Patch Trust since one of its main reasons to start community gardens was to unite the community. Throughout the interviews we noticed a common theme when it came to how gardeners felt about the P-Patch gardens and their communities, and it was that it was one of their biggest strengths. The gardeners feel that having a P-Patch garden builds strong community ties, and they are proud to be part of this network. One lady said, "I love going to work parties and other community events, the garden is a great place to enjoy each others company". It was followed by a man that stated, "I come from a military family and we tend to move around a lot, which is why this garden is our main source of finding friends." People feel this way about their P- Patch garden because it builds a strong relationships formulated around the common interest of gardening, which could have not been said better then by a gardener that said "It brings all of us together around a common interest, which is that we love to garden." One of the biggest reasons why these gardens establish a strong connection with the community is because gardeners feel that community events and garden parties are a positive attribute to the growth and networking of their garden, like stated by this gardener who said, "It's a great way to make friends and have a social life.", and at the same time "benefit the gardeners by giving us guidance and direction when it comes to the garden".

When it came to the resources provided by the P-Patch Trust, the overall consensus was that the resources were all beneficial. Some of the findings were that the Trust helps promote the existence of new gardens and helps with improvements within gardens such as, reinforcement of plot bedding walls, maintaining the proper boundaries of the garden along with general maintenance. The overall up-keeping of the gardens were not only the strong points of the Trust but gardeners also felt that the P-Patch Post is very informative and that it has much valuable information and that most gardeners read it cover to cover, like this gardener that said, "I love reading about what other gardens are up to. It helps all of us out knowing what others are up to so that we can do the same things at our garden. I read it cover to cover." Another resource that is seen as highly beneficial by the gardeners is the grants for tools. This resource is seen as an excellent one because gardeners felt that it's highly important that this resource is offered, especially for those gardens with very few tools. One gardener was so excited and loved this resource so much that she stated, "Oh yes! When the tools came in it was like Christmas, there were more tools that we thought we would ever get!" Another huge resource that the Trust offers is the financial aid program that is seen as a vital necessity for those unable to make the payment of their annual fee. Gardeners feel that this is an excellent service which provides access to healthy foods and "free" food for those families/individuals who are in need, like this disabled elderly

August 2009

woman that receives financial aid who stated, "This is a big source of food for my family, if it was not for the financial help, I would not be able to afford this plot." In addition, some gardeners also suggested that the Trust is doing a good job at managing the gardens' money because they see changes being implemented and feel positive about them.

Overall, the P-Patch Trust has various strong points that fall within the two categories of community ties and the different resources they offer.

### ***P-Patch Trust Weaknesses***

One primary discovery was that gardeners felt that the *P-Patch Post* is overly political. Some gardeners voiced a preference of the inclusion of a children's section to involve children in the gardening, others prefer gardening tips (Northwest specific), and others more success stories from surrounding gardens in the Seattle community.

Many gardeners feel that the *P-Patch Post* should have a paid editor, which they feel would ensure stability in the position and result in a lower turn-over rate. They presume that in exchange for compensation, someone may be able to put more time and energy into producing the *Post*. An ex-editor of the *Post* said, "I would be willing to dedicate more time to the *Post* if there was some sort of compensation." She continued, "...I just have so many other organizations I am involved with and don't have time for this, since it is so time consuming." Furthermore, while having the *Post* as a resource is beneficial, many gardeners did not know that the Trust was responsible for publication of the *Post*.

Some gardeners were unaware that tool grants are available and felt that grant information should be more accessible to the gardeners: "Oh boy, I had no idea we could get grants for things our garden needs! We have many tools that are broken and need replacing, like our hoses always braking and we could use more hoes", or "That sounds like a great service to have, I wish I had known about that before!" Gardeners feel that site coordinators should be better informed of the resources (such as grants and financial aid) and how to access them within their gardens.

Regarding the P-Patch Trust website, the general finding was that it should be more publicized; numerous gardeners had never visited the website because they did not know where to find it, or even that it existed at all. Gardeners also felt that it would be beneficial to include the *Post* on the website to be read at their convenience.

Gardeners feel that the Trust could do a better job of sharing information on where donations funds are used. They said they would be more likely to donate additional money if they knew where the money was going.

Some of the gardens also felt that security needed improvement; they have had issues in the past with vandalism and stolen tools. They have also frequently had produce stolen. One gardener stated "I don't mind sharing produce; my plot produces more than I can eat, but I would like it if people asked and didn't just take." Another stated, "I had a very large cabbage, record size, I wanted to wait and see how big it could get, then one day I came to the garden, and it was gone, I was very disappointed."

The gardeners also expressed a feeling of "isolation" from the Trust, saying that communication from the Trust is noticeably lacking. One gardener elaborated, "...we don't really talk to anyone outside of our garden...we are pretty self sufficient here." Also, specific differences between the Trust and the

August 2009

City were not apparent for many gardeners. "The Trust and the program are different things, I didn't know that?" asked one gardener.

In many cases, gardeners thought they were aware of the financial aid program but didn't actually know what it was, or how to apply for it if needed. "I think the financial aid program is terrific! It's great when homeless people are allowed to garden. They should even be allowed to sell their food for a profit!"

Gardeners felt that information was not always adequately provided by the site coordinators, since the coordinators could not answer some gardeners' questions. According to one gardener, "I had an issue with people picking my crops and when I asked my site coordinator about possibly putting up a fence, she told me that she wasn't sure we could do that." Another said, "Theft has been an issue for awhile now but ever since I put up this sign, 'Feeds low-income disabled family. Please don't take what is planted here', people have been respecting my garden."

## CONCLUSION

Our research yielded results that the P-Patch Trust can use to improve its services. Recommendations based on our findings are provided below. Also provided is a list of recommendations for future research.

### Recommendations for Trust

Information gathered from respondents of both the surveys and interviews revealed that gardeners have a number of specific suggestions regarding improvement of services. Recommendations can also be gleaned from other information provided, such as findings regarding awareness of or weaknesses in Trust services. Suggestions for improvement fall in four general categories: recommendations regarding garden management, policing, the implementation of existing services, and outreach. We recognize that some of these suggestions refer to Program (not Trust) responsibilities. We are reporting them nonetheless, in part because these suggestions were concerns raised by gardeners and in part because the Trust might find some way to remedy what gardeners perceive to be legitimate problems.

#### *Recommendations Regarding Garden Management*

Most suggestions regarding garden management spoke to issues of plot or garden availability. Because the demand for plots is greater than the supply, some found the waiting list much too long. One way to alleviate this problem is to expand the number of gardens, which is already a Trust priority. For example, one gardener noted that the Vine street neighborhood zoning committee was saving money to turn parking lots into P-Patches; this strategy was perceived as a step in the right direction. Some suggested working with the city to acquire mandatory zoning of apartment land: "It would be great if every new building had to set aside land designated for P-patches, that way there will no longer be a wait for gardens."

Others suggested expanding the size of existing gardens so that more people could have plots. One gardener considered the appeal of larger gardens in a different way: "The cruise ships come by and tour the garden, so if it was larger it could become a city attraction." Others proposed that accessibility could be increased by simply re-designating community or public garden spaces as private plots. Specifically, the donation plots in some gardens are considered relatively large and unused; part or all of this space could be given to gardeners on the wait list. Also, some gardens have "community" areas that are kept up collectively by all gardeners. Taking some of these areas and turning them into plots would give more potential P-Patch gardeners the chance to obtain a plot more quickly.

Another way to maximize accessibility to some gardeners is to limit availability to other gardeners, particularly those who have access to plots elsewhere. One suggestion offered by gardeners was to give membership priority to individuals living in apartments with no other opportunity to garden. A less rigid restriction might be to offer smaller plot sizes to those who can garden at home. In any case, offering P-Patch plots to individuals who do not necessarily need them, while denying plots to those who do, appears unfair and inefficient to gardeners who find the wait list too long.

Other recommendations regarding garden management referred to garden maintenance. Gardeners feel the Trust (or program) should do more to keep community areas clean and visually appealing.

August 2009

One way to do this is to do a better job organizing gardeners in each garden to garden and clean shared areas. Another way might be to implement preventative measures to keep gardeners from letting such areas “go,” or to keep the homeless or other passersby from depositing trash in the gardens. Also important is placing signs around the garden, to notify the community that the area is a community garden; this would add to the aesthetic of the garden but also notify strangers that they may not want to treat garden grounds with the laxity that they might a public park.

Having better management of volunteers might be key here. For example, rather than having one site coordinator per garden, each directly accountable to the Program, we recommend appointing one or more persons to manage the volunteer site coordinators, to ensure they are effective in ensuring that gardens are well-maintained. One interviewee told us: “Having been a site coordinator for three years, I understand the amount of work it takes to be a site coordinator, and I think it would be beneficial to every garden to designate one person at the department of neighborhoods for every ten gardens. That way it would be easier to have each garden’s unique needs addressed.”

### ***Recommendations Regarding Policing***

Insufficient policing of the gardens was a primary concern among gardeners. One activity that needs general monitoring and enforcing is donations made to the food bank plot. In at least one garden, poor enforcement of donation requirements has left one or few gardeners contributing more than their share just to ensure that donation quotas are met; this puts an undue burden on these gardeners, who have to compensate for the shirking of others. Theft is also a problem; some gardeners reported that members of the public enter the garden and pick plants.

To alleviate some of these issues, some gardeners recommended that security cameras be placed in the gardens to deter crime or other inappropriate behavior. As one gardener stated: “We need some way to stop the vandalism in our garden; maybe if we had police patrol the area more, or if that’s not possible, have security cameras placed in gardens.” Another suggestion is to require gardeners to wear official badges, to distinguish them from individuals picking plants who are not gardeners. Signs placed around the garden warning individuals to not pick plants or engage in other similar activities might also help in reducing theft or other criminal activities. Finally, it might be preferable to organize watch parties, much like neighborhood watch groups, and not leave policing issues to site coordinators, who are not in the ideal position to manage disputes.

### ***Recommendations Regarding Existing Services***

Some gardeners felt specific changes needed to be made to existing services. First, some felt that the Trust needs to implement some income-based criteria that would prioritize to whom they offer services. For example, gardeners in poorer neighborhoods felt that they do not receive as many services (such as grants) as larger gardens or gardens in better neighborhoods. Some gardeners felt there should be some way to identify gardeners who are in serious need of the financial aid program (because of their lower incomes). There was some concern that gardeners who needed financial aid the most were not getting it.

Also important is to keep site coordinators regularly informed of programs and services so that they can pass this information down to their gardeners. It might be that better communication – between the Program/Trust and the coordinators, as well as between the coordinators and the gardeners – would ensure that all gardeners received information about services. For example, some gardeners

August 2009

were unaware of the grants for tools program. Site coordinators are in the appropriate position to inform gardeners about this service.

Other suggestions regard the P-Patch Post. First, many gardeners felt that an online version of the Post was necessary, so that they could more easily access it, especially if they misplaced the printed version. Posting the Post online would also allow gardeners to opt out of receiving it by mail, saving the Trust money. Also, gardeners prefer regular news updates, preferably via email, between quarterly Post publications. This would keep gardeners more up-to-date.

### ***Recommendations Regarding Outreach***

Finally, gardeners felt that the Trust could do a better job reaching out to existing but also potential gardeners, as well as supporters of the P-Patch program. Specifically, gardeners felt the trust could do better to inform incoming gardeners about the Trust's function, garden policies, and the services the Trust provides to gardeners. One way the Trust can do this is to provide more, and more easily accessible, information on their web site. The web site should have very clear information regarding the specific role of the Trust and how Trust responsibilities differ from or overlap with those of the Program. One recommendation is to include an online tutorial for new gardeners with "how to" tips for obtaining financial aid, grants for tools, etc. An online announcements page for social events at all gardens would also encourage networking between the Trust and the gardens. The Trust should also do more to solicit volunteer help and donations. Of course, in their outreach efforts, the Trust should do its best to include gardeners of all language and ethnic groups.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

---

Our research revealed that there are far more sociological avenues to explore within the organization. Studying them would provide great benefits to the Trust's knowledge of its organization. Therefore future research is recommended. The following paragraphs are a few suggestions.

A study of the site coordinators is recommended. It could include information on their awareness of resources, access to them, and their level of involvement with the gardens. This study would benefit the Trust by determining how the role of site coordinator affects the garden community, and how to strengthen the position.

Another study can explore the differences between garden communities. Gardeners commented on how their garden compared to others. With this study researchers can investigate differences and provide the Trust with valuable data on what makes a garden successful. Methods could include interviews, a survey, and observational study of gardens.

As reported, the P-Patch Post is popular among gardeners and many had suggestions for improvements. An exclusive study of the Post would provide a wealth of information on improvements and additions to its content. Furthermore, the study would find out gardeners' preferred methods of receiving the Post.

Finally, revising the current study to target non-English speaking gardeners (such as translating into other languages, using different methods of contact, etc.) will add important information not represented in the current data. This addition will offer new insight into the results.

August 2009

**APPENDIX A: THE SURVEY INSTRUMENT**