

## **Needs in the Field and Potential Niches**

The table below lists the needs reported by external focus group members and APGA survey participants. These needs are matched with potential niches the Center could fill to satisfy these needs. A niche is defined as the types of services an organization provides to fulfill the needs of constituent groups (Gibble 1998, 68). These needs and niches are discussed in greater detail below for this study. The needs are as follows: capable new employees, training, diversity, leadership, research, sustainability, identity, funding, visibility, and audience.

### **Needs in the Field and Potential Niches According to External Focus Group, Interview, and APGA Survey Participants.**

<b>Need</b>	<b>Niche</b>
<i>New Employees</i>	Support academic programs to train students as skilled, innovative problem solvers
<i>Training</i>	Provide professional development programs
<i>Diversity</i>	Recruit and engage minority students
<i>Leadership</i>	Train students as leaders; provide leadership training to professionals; provide leadership through scholarship
<i>Research</i>	Conduct, distribute, and organize public horticulture research
<i>Funding</i>	Provide training to professionals; organize educational resources related to funding
<i>Visibility</i>	Promote public gardens through all media channels; facilitate collaboration between public gardens
<i>Audience</i>	Conduct research on audience needs
<i>Identity</i>	Professionalize gardening; conduct research; unite with other representative organizations

### **Capable New Employees**

Many participants cited that workers coming into new positions in public horticulture lack either practical horticulture skills or life skills. As one external focus group participant put it, “We need students to come out of programs... with those hands-on skills. They often come with good communications skills and good life skills, but they lack the practical experience,” (efg2). DeMarie noted that there is a shortage of “enthusiastic and technically competent” support staff to manage collections at public gardens (1997, 31). Conversely, other participants thought that students lacked communication skills. One focus

group participant contended, “They may know horticulture, but they don’t know how to write for the internet or write for a magazine or teach children or plan adult programs,” (efg3). Several participants cited the need for “critical thinkers” (efg3; ei1; ei2; ei4; ei5) and “educated problem solvers who are hands-on workers,” (efg3; ei1 ei4; ei5). As a whole, participants thought finding qualified staff was challenging. One interviewee stated,

From the standpoint of someone managing public horticultural sites, [I need] curatorial level staff; staff who understand plants, design, how to interact with people, how to do plant records, and are high level trustworthy employees who have a good deal of experience as they enter into the field (ei5).

### ***Potential niche***

Some focus group and interview participants expressed that by providing students an interdisciplinary education and innovative methods for learning including real-world projects and internships, the Center could produce capable new employees. APGA survey participants agreed, further suggesting linking students to the professional world through APGA.

## **Training**

Professional development training, through all external data collection tools, emerged as a significant need in the field. Participants contend, not only do existing workers need to be better trained, more training opportunities need to be made available to public horticultural professionals. One focus group participant stated, “Our organization spoke with both directors and staff members... there was a need for training for employees, and that there are not enough training opportunities out there.” An interview participant agreed, contending, “Right now, at all levels, we need more training... You think, this person made it through college, and we are going to pay them fifty or sixty thousand per year, but they don’t know anything,” (ei3).

### ***Potential niche***

Some focus group, interview, and APGA survey participants suggested that the proposed Center could satisfy this need by providing short courses, seminars, and workshops to

public horticultural professionals. These educational opportunities could be focused at the leadership of organizations, and provide them a means “to progress in what they are doing, whether it be supervisory training, leadership training, management issues, or keeping up with technology,” (ie3). Additionally, the training could be directed at middle management or front line staff. It could provide “courses on design, pruning... management of conservatory, pest management... plant records,” (ie3). Many participants suggested that this training could be a partnership between the Center and APGA.

### **Diversity**

Participants from all external data collection methods determined that the field of public horticulture needs to diversify its workforce. One external focus group participant summed up a shared opinion by saying “the field is all white people,” (efg3).

### ***Potential niche***

Some focus group and APGA survey participants suggested that by recruiting and engaging minority students and promoting career opportunities in public horticulture, the Center could assist in this diversification.

### **Leadership**

Participants from all external data collection methods agreed that the field is in need of leaders at all levels. One interviewee contended that “the need for creative, dynamic, and intelligent leadership, period, hands down,” (ie4) is the most pressing need in the field. Another interviewee agreed, stating, “There is not good leadership in public horticulture. In addition to that fact, there aren’t people that have good management skills,” (ie3). The data suggest that there is a need to identify leaders in the field as well as provide leadership training for individuals already in the professional realm. Many participants stated that the LGP is training students for future leadership positions in the field, “but the need still exists,” (ifg3). Thus, “It could fill the gap in programming for leadership in public gardens. I would be hesitant to say that because there are a couple of other programs out there... None of them have filled their

potential yet,” (efg3). Conversely, others thought the leadership approach should be avoided. As one participant indicated, “If you want to focus on something different than what is already being done, I wouldn’t focus on leadership. There are a lot of leadership programs out there,” (efg3).

Some participants were concerned that the field itself is in dire need of leadership. Without visionaries, public horticulture’s destiny may be stagnation. One participant stated the following:

Public horticulture is not targeted in any way at the future. The important part about having leaders is having visionaries. If you have visionaries that are any good, they see into the future, and they help take a movement into the future (ei3).

### ***Potential niche***

Some focus group, interview, and APGA survey participants suggested that the Center could help satisfy the need for leadership in the field by training students for leadership and management positions and by providing professional development training to existing leaders and managers in the field.

## **Research**

A need exists for research that forwards the profession and informs the public and the government. An external focus group participant stated,

It would be wonderful if we could understand what the impact of public horticulture is on the world... if we could go to Congress and say, if you do public horticulture or public gardening, you can expect this kind of return on your investment (efg3).

Few educational institutions are conducting research, and those that are generally are not actively promoting it. The LGP, the Cornell Graduate Program in Public Garden Management, and the Center for Urban Horticulture at the University of Washington were cited as existing sources of research for this field

### ***Potential niche***

Focus group, interview, and APGA survey participants thought the Center could conduct, publish, and distribute research and act as a clearinghouse and promotion vehicle for other research in the field.

### **Sustainability**

Some external participants remarked that the field needs to advance by broadening its currently limited focus. Some external interview participants remarked that the field is currently “stuck” on the issues of native plants and conservation. As one explained, “[there is a] focus on a very limited definition of sustainability, ecology, and conservation... those foci are not wrong, but they are not balanced with other things as part of a holistic package,” (ei4). Furthermore, “Public horticulture and urban horticulture will become more critical as our efforts to create sustainable landscapes and conserve water and energy becomes a major issue and has huge political implications,” (efg3). Robertson (1996, 18) contends that public gardens often present “biodiversity” as “saving the rainforest,” and that a more comprehensive picture of sustainable biodiversity on a local and global must be promoted.

### ***Potential niche***

Some focus group, interview, and APGA survey participants suggested that the Center could help promote these issues as important foci of public horticulture. Alternately, the Center could have as its main focus promoting public horticulture as a vehicle for sustainability. An external interviewee stated the following: “We need leadership and management in public horticulture that can help us achieve, to use horticulture as a management system to achieve a sustainable environment...,” (ei3).

### **Identity**

Some external interview participants noted that public horticulture lacks an identity. This could be due to its limited focus, as well as the lack of an articulated definition or vision. Additionally, it may be influenced by the lack of communication among the various fields within horticulture. As one external focus group participant stated, “I have been surprised by how fragmented the various horticultural disciplines are. In other words, there is no voice for horticulture. There are so many organizations that claim to represent or are representing horticulture,” (ifg3). Additionally, public gardens themselves may also potentially lack individual identities. As one participant mentioned, “There are so many gardens that look so alike and seem to be doing the same things that there is a lack of specific identity in a lot of public gardens,” (efg1).

### ***Potential niche***

Some focus group and interview participants suggested that the Center could facilitate conversation between existing horticultural representative organizations. Thus,

A great opportunity exists to bring all of those organizations to the table and talk about, what is the future of horticulture and how can that Center bring those groups together to have a common voice related to horticulture (ifg3).

## **Funding**

The issue of limited funding in public horticulture emerged repeatedly in external data collection tools. The data suggest, “funding is a real priority for botanical institutions,” (efg3). This claim is consistent with the literature. Lauby contends, public gardens “are in a fight for their financial lives,” because of scarce government funding, competition from other cultural institutions, and inexperience in marketing, advertising, and development strategy (1996, 14-17).

### ***Potential niche***

Participants suggested that the Center could aid in helping public horticultural institutions establish sustainable financial resources by acting as a clearinghouse of funding

opportunities, conducting fundraising research, and providing courses and resources on fund development for professionals.

### **Visibility**

Some external interview participants and APGA survey participants identified increased visibility as a need of the field.

#### ***Potential niche***

The Center could increase visibility and public interest by advocating public gardens through media, technology, and government, and by facilitating collaborations between public gardens and organizations.

### **Audience**

Many external participants mentioned that the current audience of public horticulture needs to be diversified. A focus group member stated, “I am concerned with who the future audience is going to be,” (efg3). This trend has been identified in the literature. In fact, a recent issue of *The Public Garden* was entitled “Reaching New Audiences.” In this issue, Bradley discussed the importance of targeting the increasing ethnic populations in urban communities with specific services, programs, and advertising efforts (18-19).

#### ***Potential niche***

The Center could facilitate audience diversification by conducting research on audience needs and seeking out underrepresented audiences.