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# Acknowledgements

This manual was developed as part of a research project entitled *Y [ / \ â } \* Á , â c @ Á Š [ & æ | Á Õ [ ç ^ ; } { ^ } c k Á C E Á Ú c ~ â ~ Á [ - Á T ~ } â & â ] æ | Á Õ } ç ä ! [ ] { ^ } c æ | Á X [ [ ~ } c ^ ^ ! á æ } á Á Ú æ ! c } ^ ! • @ ä ] Á Ú ! [ \* ! æ { • Á ä } Á Ó æ } æ á æ È* The project was conducted by Evergreen, a national nonprofit environmental organization with a mandate to bring nature to our cities. For more information, see [www.evergreen.ca](http://www.evergreen.ca).

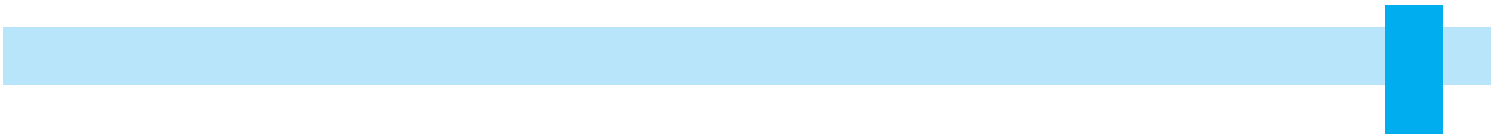
The research project was guided and supported by a national advisory committee. Committee members were from the municipal, nonprofit, and academic sectors. All are involved in municipal environmental stewardship as a part of their work. The following people graciously assisted us with our work over the year, as members of the Advisory Committee:

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Grant Pearsell	City of Edmonton, AB
Tracey Steele	City of Richmond Hill, ON

In addition, we would like to thank Jess Reeves and Dana Bao, who generously volunteered their time and expertise to assist in the research for this project, and Ingrid Wildemann, whose extensive volunteer effort was crucial in data analysis.

Finally, our deep appreciation goes to the environmental volunteers and municipal staff members in Calgary, Alberta; Waterloo, Ontario; and Winnipeg, Manitoba who responded to our questionnaire and participated in our focus group sessions. This manual is based on their extensive expertise and experience, which they took the time to share with us. Any errors or omissions are our own.







## Calgary

Calgary is Canada's third-largest and fastest-growing city, with a population of one million. Environmental volunteer programs are managed within the city by the Parks Department, through the Public Education and Program Services division. Community associations and other groups also take on environmental projects, which may be supported by staff liaisons in the Community and Neighbourhood Services Department or by local councillors.

We spoke with volunteers from many community associations who had taken on projects in their parks, boulevards, and green spaces, and also with some of the municipal staff who run the volunteer programs listed below.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[www.calgary.ca](http://www.calgary.ca)

## Waterloo

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

We spoke with volunteers from community groups, advisory committees, and volunteer programs, and with city staff from four departments who work together to deliver these programs.

**Partners in Parks:** Volunteers assist in the maintenance and care of community green spaces.

**Clean-up & Planting Events:** Volunteers participate in events such as the 20 Minute Makeover, Sunoco Earth Day, Tim Horton's Community Cleanup.

**Waterloo Citizens' Environmental Advisory Committee:** Volunteers on the citizens' advisory committee to city council help to keep the city's work consistent with its Environment First Policy.

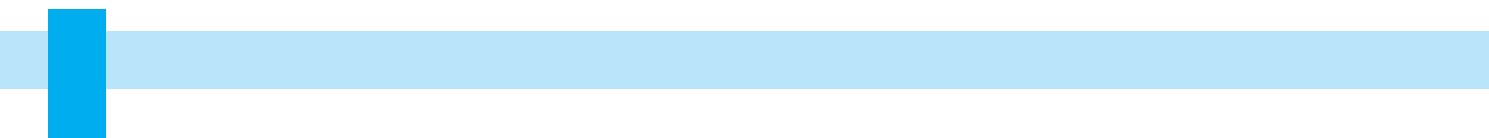
**Laurel Creek Citizen's Committee:**

Volunteers protect, rehabilitate, and enhance the waterway system and work as a resource to the city.

**Trails Advisory Committee:** Volunteers advise council about the planning, development, and promotion of trails, . ñ









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## Getting started

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

1. **Q•Á^ [ ~ /Á , [ / \Áâ }Ác@^Áâ / [æâÁ& [ { { ~ }äc ^Áâ }c^ / ^•cÁ**  
**à^ ^ [ }áÁ ^ [ ~ /Á [ , }Á±àæ& \ ^æ / áqÑ** The municipality is more likely to sign onto your project if it meets a clear need in your community and has (or is likely to gain) strong, widespread support among citizens.
2. **Æ / ^Á [ c@^ / Á [ / \*æ } á : æcâ [ ] •Áæ / / ^æâ ^Áâ } Ç [ / Ç ^ áÑ** Find out about other groups in your community that are actively involved in stewardship and what they've already done.
3. **Q • ÁcÁæÁ { ~ } ä&ä ]æ / Á & [ ] & ^ / }Ñ** Try to put yourself in the municipality's shoes, and ask yourself why they should work with you on this project. Familiarize yourself with your cask your

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## Principles of success

Every community is unique, and each municipality

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## Key challenges and best practices

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This section of the manual discusses the challenges identified by the voluntary sector participants in our focus groups and includes the tips and stories they



## Foster a sense of place

Neighbours and other community members may already have a sense of ownership and responsibility for your greening site. For example, a Winnipeg staff member noted that harnessing this feeling of ownership and responsibility by engaging directly with neighbours and users of your site. They may make the best volunteers and spokespeople for your cause! You can also nurture this sense of place by ensuring that your sites are easy to access and well maintained.

## 2. Municipal politics and bureaucracies

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

### Why municipal politics matter

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

## Understanding the bureaucracy

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

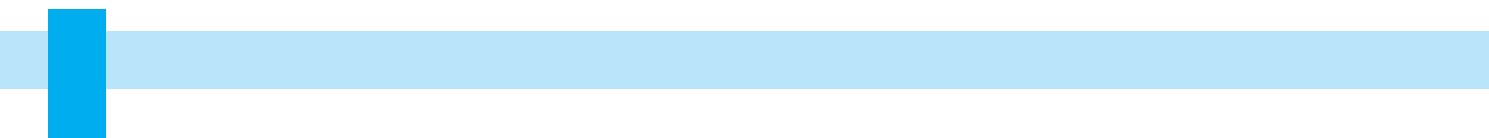
### Working within the bureaucracy: Municipal staff perspectives

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

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



- In a public/nonprofit partnership, the buck usually stops at the municipality. Staff need to be wary of projects or actions that may make the city liable if something goes wrong.
- Municipal staff positions typically have very clear terms of reference, and employees are rarely given leeway to stray from their job descriptions. At the same time, those job descriptions tend to be packed with responsibilities. As a result, your staff contacts are likely to be overextended and may not be in a position to help out in the way they would like.
- Municipal staff don't have the resources to run with every good idea that comes across their desks. Sometimes, a project needs to be put on the back burner, or be refocused to fit with the available time and money. Keep this in mind when you pitch your idea to a staff contact, and try to use the city's participation to leverage resources from other sources.
- Odds are that your staff contact finds the bureaucracy as frustrating as you do!
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- **Winnipeg** It is vitally important that your municipality has a strong, clear environmental or stewardship policy in place, and that you're aware of how to use the policy to advance your cause. Good policy is an advantage because it offers your municipal partners a clear mandate to meet environmental goals, and empowers them to dedicate resources – financial and otherwise – to community greening projects. A staff member in Winnipeg shared this story:

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

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

### Working with unions

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

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### 3. Volunteer management

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

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

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

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

- Each stage of this process can be recorded in a simple intake form that is kept on file. A staff member from Waterloo described the effect of such a process:

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Here are some tips on volunteer recognition.

- Develop a volunteer recognition strategy for each project or program and build it into the workplan or funding proposal. Otherwise, you may find yourself short of the time and money necessary to really make recognition happen.
- The importance of the personal touch doesn't stop once you've recruited your volunteers. A volunteer in Waterloo had this suggestion:  
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- Volunteers often get involved in a project because of a real sense of caring for the environment but decide to move on because they haven't been given interesting, engaging tasks. Make an effort to find out about your volunteers' motivations, and offer tasks and responsibilities that tap into their passion for the environment. As a staff member in Winnipeg noted:

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- We all feel more motivated when we can see that our efforts are contributing to success. Try to come up with recognition strategies that demonstrate and celebrate tangible progress. This may include using 'before' and 'after' photographs of your site, celebrating volunteers' achievements in the local paper, or following up with volunteers in subsequent seasons to show them how the naturalization process is going.
- If you've been working in the voluntary sector for long, you may be familiar with this scenario, described by a volunteer leader in Winnipeg:  
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à^Á~][ ]!c^áÉ+ Those few super-volunteers – folks who consistently go above and beyond the call of duty – are particularly vulnerable to feelings of overwork, under-appreciation, and burnout. Try to be aware of who these people are, how much work they're doing, and how you can recognize their efforts. One of the best ways of recognizing super-volunteers is to designate other volunteers as their support people. Not only does this lighten the super-volunteers' load, but it can also serve to incubate future leaders and protect your project from foundering when the super-volunteers move on.



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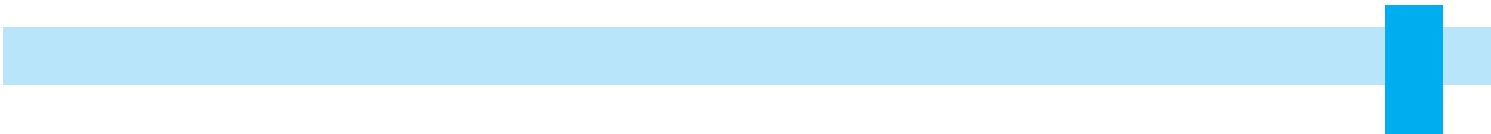


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If you're already working with your municipality, talk to them about how they can help. Municipal staff are often in a better position to offer in-kind support than funding, but don't assume that they'll be able to deliver everything on your wish list.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

- Mulch
- Water trucks
- Loaned shovels and tools
- Seedlings
- Printing and photocopying
- Use of city land
- Storage sheds
- Signage
- Building materials
- Gloves
- Ref
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Given these challenges, many environmental volunteer programs and projects go unevaluated, and their successes go undocumented. For hard-working volunteers, this leads to a sense of futility and, ultimately, burnout. As one volunteer in Waterloo noted, "When it comes to municipal initiatives such as Adopt-a-Park,

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**Measurable or quantitative indicators of success**

The following are examples of measurable or quantitative measures of success:

- number of trees, shrubs, or wildflowers planted;
- number of kilometers of trail maintained;
- number of acres or square metres naturalized or protected;
- number of volunteers involved;
- number of park users, hikers on the trail, or gardeners;
- tonnes of garbage or number of bags of invasive species removed;
- number of phone inquiries about your work;
- how much money was saved; and
- number of new partnerships that resulted.

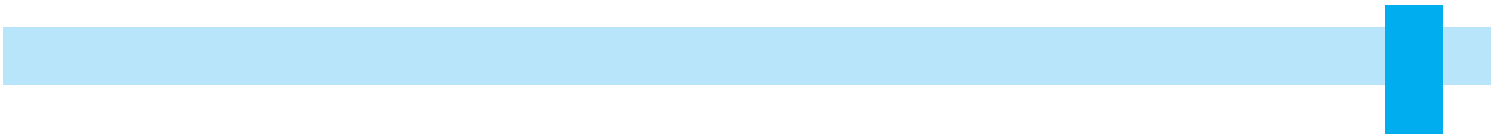
**Experiential or qualitative indicators of success**

The following are examples of experiential or qualitative measures of success:

- Your program has become a model for the work of others.
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- Ó^/à/æc^Á • { æ||Áçã&c [ /ã^•K When you're up against climate change, air pollution, or urban sprawl, a one-day tree-planting event or mulching bee can seem like a small contribution. But every small step brings you closer to your goal. By celebrating and documenting each small success, you show your supporters how your work fits into the big picture, and you demonstrate to volunteers how valuable their time and effort is. One volunteer offered this encouragement:

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

1. What types of municipal environmental volunteer and partnership programs and practices are in use in Canada's large and mid-sized urban municipalities?
2. What level of satisfaction/benefit is experienced by volunteers and community partners engaged by municipal environmental volunteer programs?
3. What are the principal limiting and enabling factors affecting the success of municipal environmental volunteer programs – from the perspectives of both municipalities and voluntary organizations?
4. What is the status and potential of knowledge-sharing and networking among municipalities in the development of effective municipal environmental volunteer programs?

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

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

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

## Focus groups

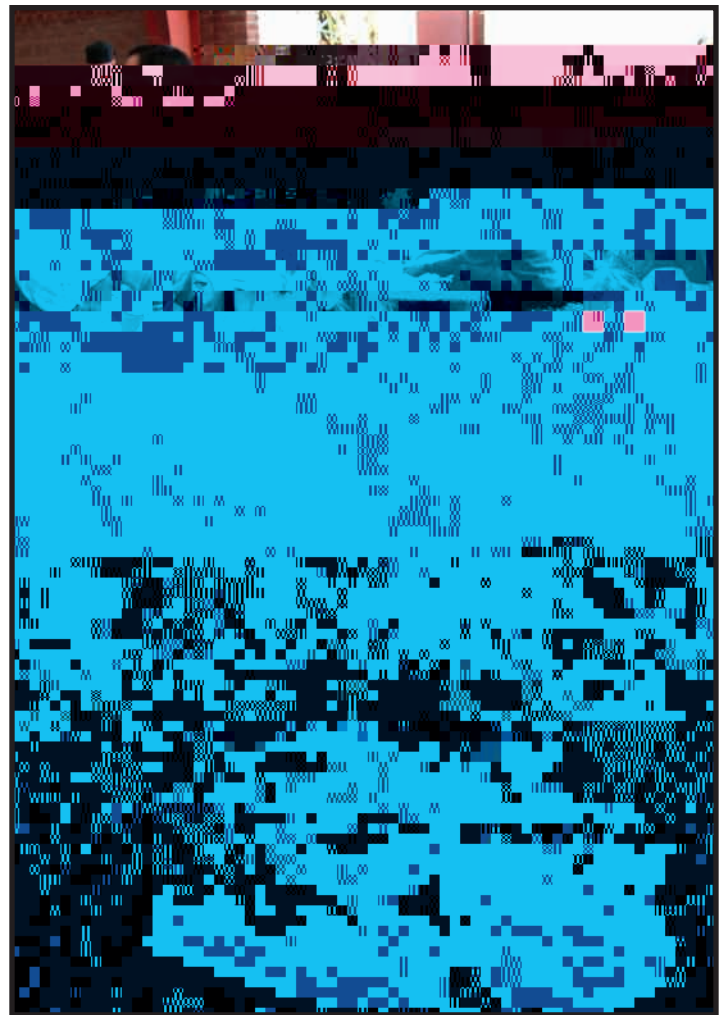
We carried out two focus groups in each municipality, the first with municipal employees and the second with volunteers. Group size ranged from three to nine people, and participants were recruited through Evergreen and municipal networks and by the recommendations of questionnaire respondents. Participants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

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

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

## Data analysis

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



Evergreen





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# NOTES

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