



Delaware Tree Stewards Pilot Program Evaluation: Findings and Recommendations

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Prepared by the University of Maryland Environmental Finance Center
for the Delaware Forest Service



**ENVIRONMENTAL
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Summary

In 2020, the Delaware Forest Service (DFS) launched the pilot Delaware Tree Stewards program, which offered training for volunteers on tree science, planting, and care. To inform future iterations of the program, DFS conducted an evaluation of the pilot phase in summer 2023, with support from the University of Maryland Environmental Finance Center (UMD EFC). Based on findings from this evaluation, which consisted of a survey, focus group, partners strategy session, and a review of program material, UMD EFC makes the following recommendations to maximize the reach and effectiveness of the Tree Stewards program moving forward. More detail is contained in the [Recommendations](#) section.

1. Continue the Delaware Tree Stewards program. Pilot program participants expressed overwhelmingly positive responses to the Tree Stewards curriculum and training, as well as a desire to enroll in follow-up courses and engage in ongoing volunteer efforts. Potential program partners, including nonprofit organizations and allied efforts, such as the Delaware Master Naturalist program, expressed an interest in supporting future phases of the program through a variety of means. This support for the program from both participants and partners – combined with Delaware’s ambitious tree planting goals, which can be expected to increase the demand for engaged tree volunteers – make a strong argument for dedicating resources to continue this program.

2. Convene an advisory group to guide program design and delivery, especially during the transition from pilot phase to permanent program. As the Tree Stewards program transitions from pilot phase to sustained program, DFS would be well served by tapping into the insights of organizations in the state and region who have expertise in volunteer engagement, environmental stewardship, and related fields. An initial set of strong candidates for such an advisory group have already been identified and engaged through the Partners Strategy Session. By convening a Tree Stewards Advisory Group for a specified period of time, DFS can leverage expertise and networks that will support the program’s future success.

2. Pursue stronger integration with allied partners in order to create ongoing and diversified engagement opportunities for Tree Stewards. Strategic partnerships with allied nonprofit organizations and community groups offers several promising opportunities, including (1) recruiting organizations to facilitate Tree Stewards training courses and/or provide follow-up engagement of Stewards, (2) communicating across allied organizations about volunteer and training opportunities statewide, (3) diversifying the range of engagement options available to Tree Stewards, (4) fostering the development of sub-networks of Tree Stewards who can support one another, especially in targeted geographies, and (5) leveraging opportunities for organizations to co-deliver advanced training courses.

4. Provide additional field experience opportunities as well as project management training and resources. As the Tree Stewards curriculum and training components are refined, two key pieces of participant feedback should be incorporated: (1) a desire for more on-the-ground training and field experience opportunities (non-mandatory) in both planting and maintenance techniques, and (2) a need for additional training and/or support in project management skills. These would help Tree Stewards feel more sufficiently prepared to lead and/or conduct their own planting and maintenance projects.

5. Build flexibility into the program’s content and delivery to meet the varying needs and interests of program participants. Program participants come with diverse backgrounds and goals. The Program should accommodate this diversity, not only in its delivery methods (offering training opportunities both in-person and virtual, for example), but also in its marketing material and curriculum.

Background

With support from the US Forest Service, in 2020 the Delaware Forest Service (DFS) piloted a Delaware Tree Stewards program, which was designed to engage volunteers in tree planting and care by offering training on tree science, tree maintenance, and tree planting project development. Through the Program, DFS Urban and Community Forestry offered a four-part training and certification course. Three rounds of training were offered in winter 2020, spring 2021, and spring 2023. More than 100 Delaware residents participated in these trainings.

To determine what worked well in the pilot phase as well as what improvements could enhance future iterations of the program, in summer 2023 DFS conducted a program evaluation with assistance from the University of Maryland Environmental Finance Center (UMD EFC). This consisted of three components:

- **Survey of pilot program participants:** In collaboration with DFS, UMD EFC developed and issued an online survey to gather feedback about the program's participants, curriculum, delivery format, future training topics, and related elements.
- **Focus group session with program participants:** UMD EFC convened a virtual 90-minute focus group with a self-selected subset of program participants to gather more in-depth feedback about their experiences.
- **Partners strategy session:** UMD EFC convened a virtual 90-minute strategy session with representatives from potential program partners, identified by DFS as likely candidates to support the program moving forward. This session aimed to identify not only future partners but also strategies to improve the program.

Based on findings from these three elements, UMD EFC prepared a set of high-level recommendations (contained in the [Recommendations](#) section of this report) for DFS to incorporate program evaluation findings and maximize the reach and effectiveness of future phases of the Delaware Tree Stewards program.

Survey Findings

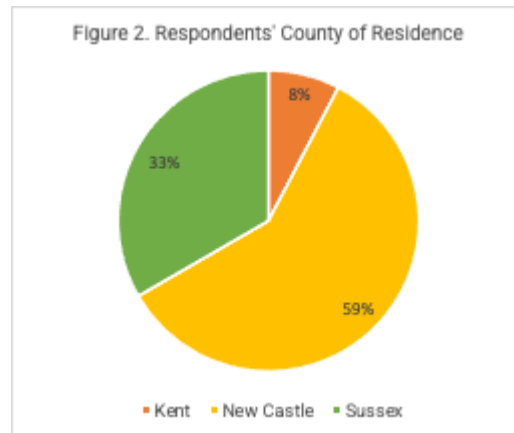
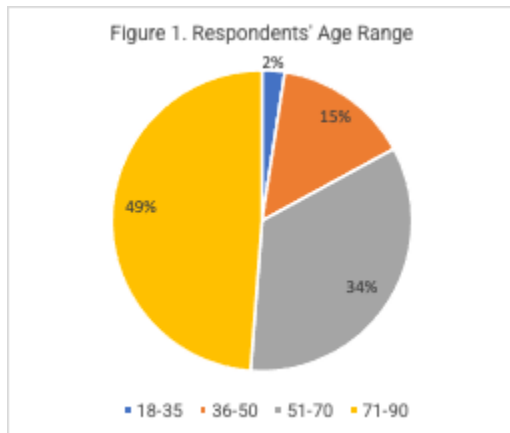
In collaboration with DFS, UMD EFC designed a ten-minute online survey. This survey was issued via email to individuals who registered for and/or participated in Delaware Tree Stewards trainings, whether they completed the series or not. It was also shared with a set of *potential* program participants as identified by DFS. More than 250 individuals were invited to complete the survey. Fifty-three responses were received.

The following set of questions were displayed to all survey respondents.

Demographic information

The survey included optional questions about respondents' age and place of residence. Of the 77% of respondents who chose to answer the question, more than 80% were over the age of 50. Nearly half (49%) of respondents were between the ages of 71 and 90.

Respondents came from all three counties, with the majority (59%) from New Castle County (and of those, more than half live in Wilmington). About a third of respondents were from Sussex County (more than half from Lewes), and just three respondents were from Kent County. One respondent lives in Pennsylvania.



How did you hear about the Delaware Tree Stewards program? (check all that apply)

Presented with a list of options on how they heard about the program, just under a quarter of respondents (22%) selected "Delaware Forest Service Urban and Community Forestry email campaign." This was followed by "word of mouth" (17%) and "Delaware Center for Horticulture" (15%), with just a few responses each for "Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay," "press release," and "web search." No one selected "flyers" or "Delaware Tree Stewards social media pages." The greatest percentage of respondents (30%) selected "other," with individual write-in responses of:

- DE Master Naturalist
- State Rep Charles Postles' office
- Master Naturalis emails
- Sussex County Master Gardeners
- Property manager
- Delaware Master Naturalist
- Delaware Forest Service Urban and Community Forestry group
- Terri Tipping at White Clay Creek State Park
- Saw email

- School
- I don't remember
- Email newsletter from Rep. Danny Shory
- Local supplier
- Master Gardener link
- A note to Master Gardeners
- Delaware's House Republic Caucus
- I really can't remember! Maybe an email from the state of Delaware

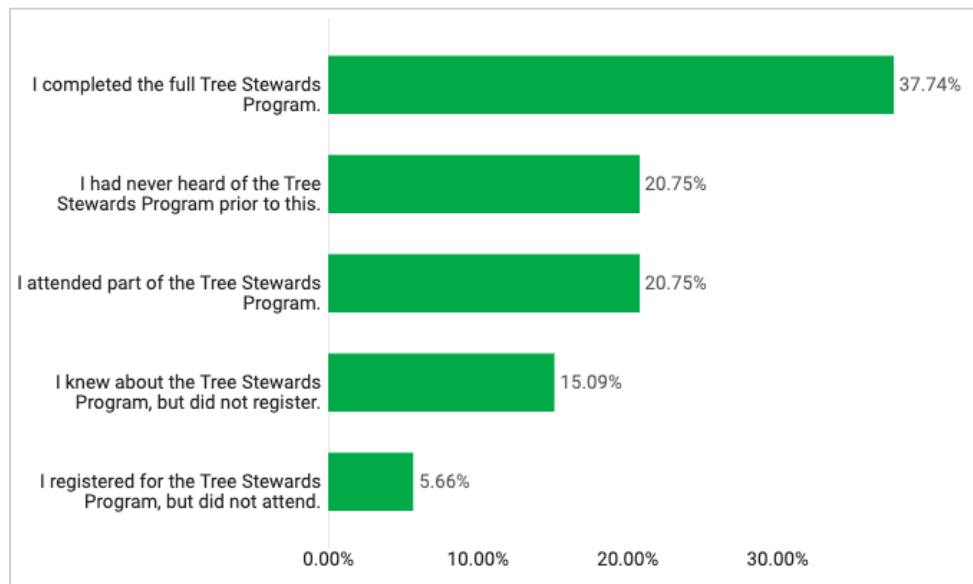
Based on the marketing material you encountered, how well do you feel you understood the goals of the Delaware Tree Stewards program?

Overall, participants felt they understood the program's goals based on the marketing material they encountered. Nearly half (48%) of respondents reported understanding the program goals "well," with 17% of respondents reporting "extremely well." A quarter (26%) understood the goals "a little." Just one respondent indicated they understood the goals "not at all," and 6% of respondents selected "neutral."

How did you engage with the Delaware Tree Stewards program?

Most respondents completed all or part of the Tree Stewards pilot program (38% and 21% respectively). A small number (three individuals) registered for the training but did not attend, and an additional eight individuals knew about the training but did not register. Twenty-one percent (21%) of respondents had never heard of the program prior to receiving the survey. These respondents were shown subsequent questions related to their interest in future trainings, rather than questions about the pilot program.

Figure 3. How respondents engaged with the Delaware Tree Stewards program



The twelve respondents who indicated that they did not complete the Tree Stewards program were subsequently asked "**Why didn't you complete the Tree Stewards program?**" Half selected "My availability and/or schedule changed." Two individuals selected "After further consideration, the training wasn't what I was looking for." No one selected "I found a different training program that better aligned with my needs" or "I decided it was too much of a time commitment." Four individuals selected "other" and wrote:

- I was out of the state for the in person day. I participated live for the first two sessions and took the other two through the saved videos on YouTube.
- I attended and/or watched all the zoom classes. I couldn't attend the field experience.

- Final in person was too far / too early.
- Did not attend the final session downstate. Waiting for NCC field day event.

These same twelve respondents were asked **“Would you still be interested in the Tree Stewards program?”** The majority (67%) answered “yes,” with 8% answering “maybe” and 25% answering “no.”

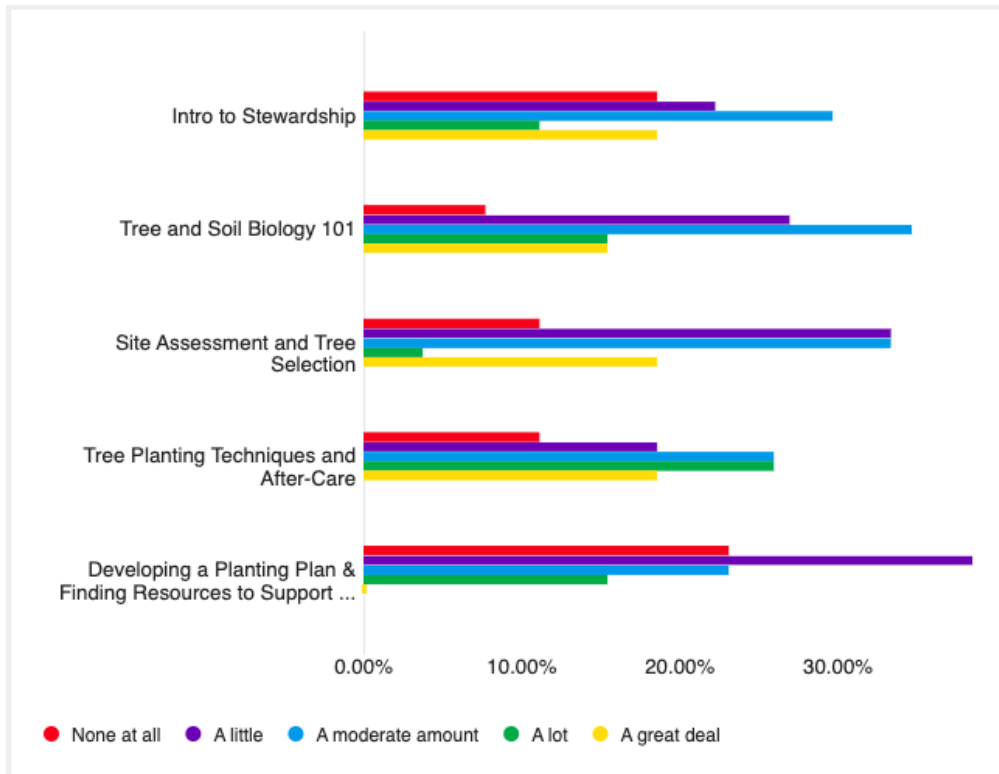
Participants who had indicated that they did not register for the program (eight individuals) were asked **“Why didn’t you register for the Tree Stewards program?”** Half selected “it didn’t fit with my availability and/or schedule” and a quarter selected “I couldn’t make the time commitment.” Two individuals selected “other” and wrote: “I am much interested in tree-related training programs but couldn’t make it at that time” and “not sure if we qualified.” When asked **“Are you interested in tree-related training programs?”** seven replied “yes,” four “maybe,” and zero replied “no.”

The following set of questions were displayed to individuals who had completed part or all of the Tree Stewards training.

How much of the Tree Stewards content was already familiar to you?

Respondents indicated varying levels of familiarity with content presented in each of the five training sessions: Intro to Stewardship, Tree and Soil Biology 101, Site Assessment and Tree Selection, Tree Planting Techniques and After-Care, and Developing a Planting Plan and Finding Resources to Support Delaware Tree Stewards Work. These results suggest that, overall, the pilot training curriculum was designed with an appropriate level of assumed knowledge.

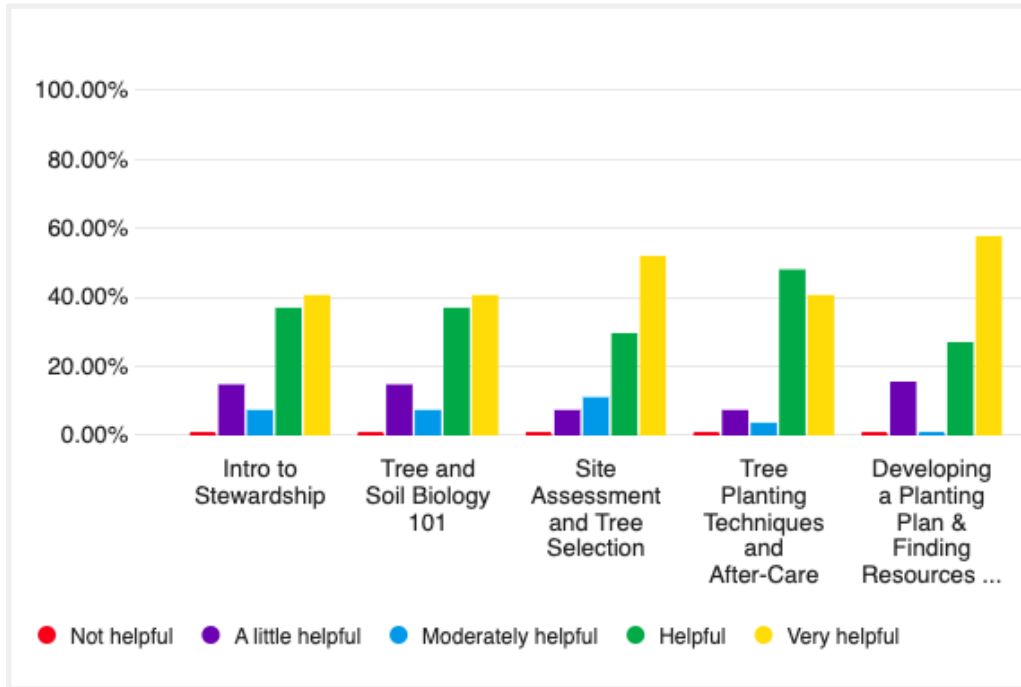
Figure 4. How much of the Tree Stewards content was already familiar to respondents



How helpful did you find the following sessions?

Respondents found the training sessions to be helpful overall, with at least 77% of respondents selecting “helpful” or “very helpful” for each session.

Figure 5. How helpful respondents found Tree Stewards training sessions



What were your key takeaways from the training?

Respondents supplied the following responses to this optional open-text question.

Even though I plant natives, I can't just put them in the ground and let nature take care of everything. Trees need water - and lots of it apparently.
Tree Stewards can be likened to a master gardener with a concentration on trees. The role the tree stewards perform is essential to drawing attention to several factors. Tree maintenance can be a small task each person can play to assist their community in being climate smart. Tree stewardship provides a first level outreach to the public. On a larger scale tree stewards can usher in community support for the Chesapeake Bay Foundation.
This was a learning experience for me, I am involved in other volunteer activities that prevent me from partaking in any Delaware Tree Stewards program.
I was very pleased with the presentations, instructor was well organized, concise, provided lots of good information. It was very convenient to have had the training available over zoom.
The date for the in-person was not provided at the beginning of training and was a "surprise" towards end. I had an engagement that I would not have signed up for it I had known the Tree Stewards date in advance. I was disappointed not to be able to attend the field day.
A thoughtful, deliberate approach from tree/site selection until establishment is critical as is the need to replace the canopies lost to development over the past decades.
My key take away was that this program was not targeting my needs and that I was not a good fit for the program. I am a 75 year old steward of a 5.5 acre mature Delaware Piedmont forest plot in the White Clay Creek valley of northwest Delaware. I have a lot of trees to tend, invasives to battle,

diseases, blights, and bores to combat plus seedlings to plant and protect from browsers, lots of exclosures to maintain... so I'm not your guy for road trips to spread mulch... sorry guys, my dance card is full. I want to be better at what I'm trying to do in my piece of paradise. My sense is you are looking to build a team to go out into the world and do very valuable work. I wholeheartedly support you in that endeavor and wish I was available to do it. May the Force be with you.
Good reference materials. Good presentation and pacing. I appreciated the information about site selection and the idea of community projects.
I only started the intro-section, but when the presenter informed the attendees that he would break us into small group to chat and to get to know each other, I left the presentation. I did not feel like chitchatting at all, and the whole program was not of interest any longer.
Delaware Forest is a great source of info. Delaware Forest will partner/assist with tree maintenance.
A better understanding of planting and care
It's very good, comprehensive, interesting.
For me, it was a great review of what I know from my Master Gardener training.
Being able to ask questions about tree care and how to be better at it.
Importance of site selection, especially as relevant to topographical considerations.
No volcanos, don't plant too deep
More insight into tree biology
The need for advocacy for tree stewardship was most evident.
Assessments & planning are key to successful tree plantings.
The information confirmed what I had studied before. That was an important takeaway.
That everyone should have to take this course to lessen about how important trees are and how to care for them

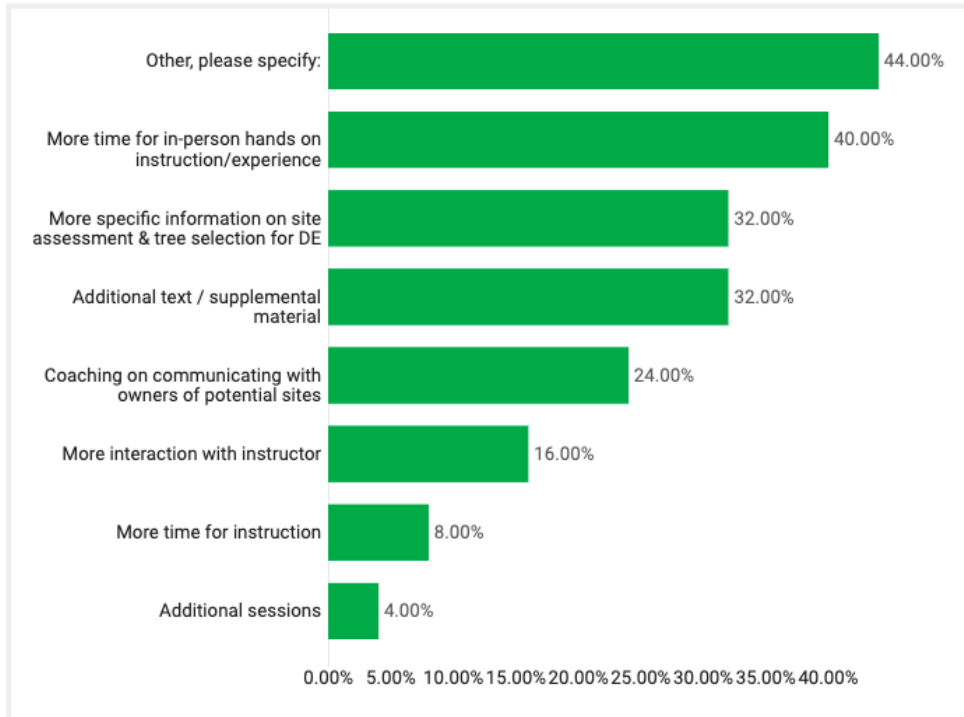
Please let us know your overall experience with the Tree Stewards training program.

Respondents indicated high overall satisfaction with various elements of the training program. Seventy-six percent (76%) “agree” or “strongly agree” with the statement “I was satisfied with the delivery of the Tree Stewards training content (e.g., virtual platform, timing, etc.).” Eighty-nine percent (89%) of respondents “agree” or “strongly agree” with the statement “I was satisfied with the quality of the instructors.” More than 80% of respondents found the Tree Stewards training to be a valuable use of their time and would recommend the training to others. No respondents selected “strongly disagree” for any of the provided statements.

What would have benefited your learning experience? (check all that apply)

Presented with a list of options, respondents indicated that the following would have improved their learning experience: “more time for in-person, hands-on instruction / experience” (40%); “more specific information on site assessment and tree selection for DE” (32%); “additional text / supplemental material” (32%); and “coaching on communicating with owners of potential sites” (24%). In addition, respondents submitted these text entries for “other:” “goals;” “field trip to a site project and info on why/how it was selected and the trees selected for it;” “approaching business and local governments – a lobbying toolkit;” and “not making attendees do small talk.” See Figure 6 on the following page.

Figure 6. What would have benefited respondents' learning experience



In addition to the above, what aspects of the program could be improved?

Respondents submitted the following responses to this optional open-text question.

Perhaps a little more time for questions.
Follow up communication. As it was during COVID, there was little opportunity for much follow up, hands on or otherwise. I don't know if that is now a part of the program. I'd like to make more connections within my community.
Coordination between work to be performed and the time and weather conditions on the day of service.
More follow up educational materials
I cannot think of anything that needed to be added to the training program. I was unable to attend the hands on session, the only suggestion I would have is to have hands on sessions in all three counties.
Date of field day not announced at beginning of training.
Too much new information, little opportunity to absorb it, no opportunity to engage
I prefer that lectures remain lectures, and not turned into social interactions in small online groups.
Opportunities to observe actual site planning.
There could be two or more field opportunities to attend.
Some more dates for potential in-person training
This was a very general course. If we try to promote it, there may be a lot of questions that we can't answer because they weren't taught or explained.
Ways to get the message out. Dealing with budgeting issues (arguments). Even among tree lovers, there can be sharp disagreements. How to conduct further research on issues. Some tree 'experts' are working with outdated presumptions; things don't always work 'by the book'. How to recognize when it's time to change books.

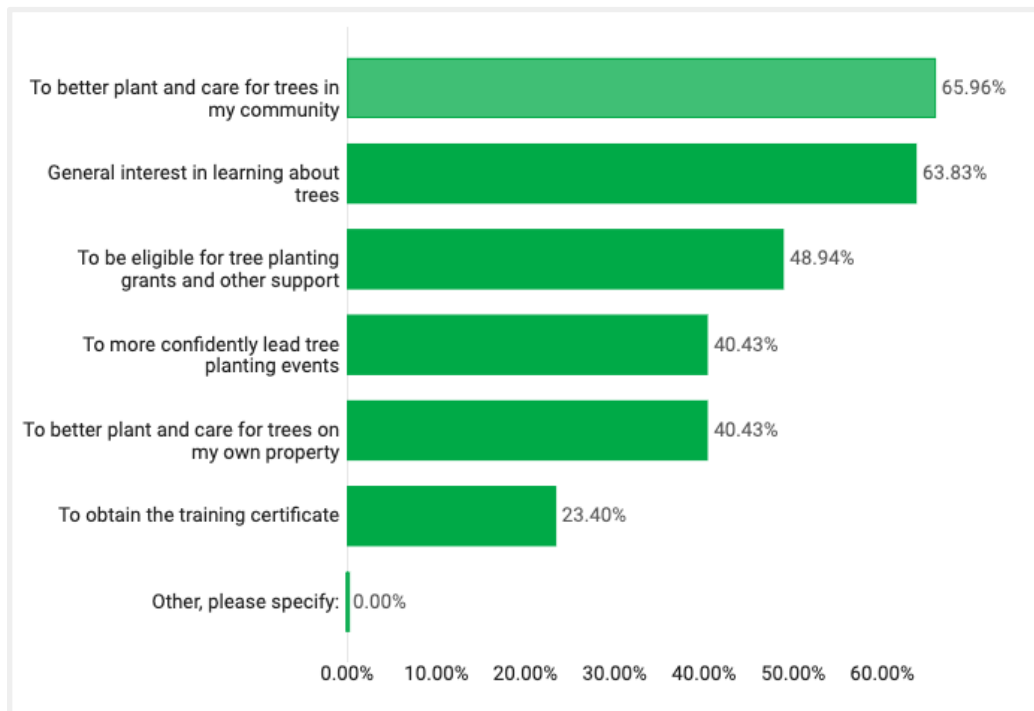
The selection of day and time in relation to the weather of the day of the event with the activities planned for the day given consideration.
There was no content regarding the existing DE tree cover mapping program & access to existing maps. Would like more information about NCC planting projects underway & project manager contact info.
I have taken the tree tenders classes in Pennsylvania also. Both programs ask for volunteer projects at the end of the learning session. For me the most difficult part was engaging in a project. Though volunteer opportunities have been offered, many are a ways to travel or conflict with my own schedule.
More advertising and marketing to the general public

The following set of questions were displayed to all individuals who had indicated they would be interested in tree-related trainings, whether or not they completed the initial training.

What best describes the reasons you would sign up for future tree-related training? (check all that apply)

The leading reasons respondents chose for participating in future tree trainings were “to better plant and care for trees in my community” (66%) and “general interest in learning about trees” (64%). These were followed by a desire to be eligible for tree planting grants or support (49%); to more confidently lead planting events (40%); and to better plant and care for plants on their own property (40%).

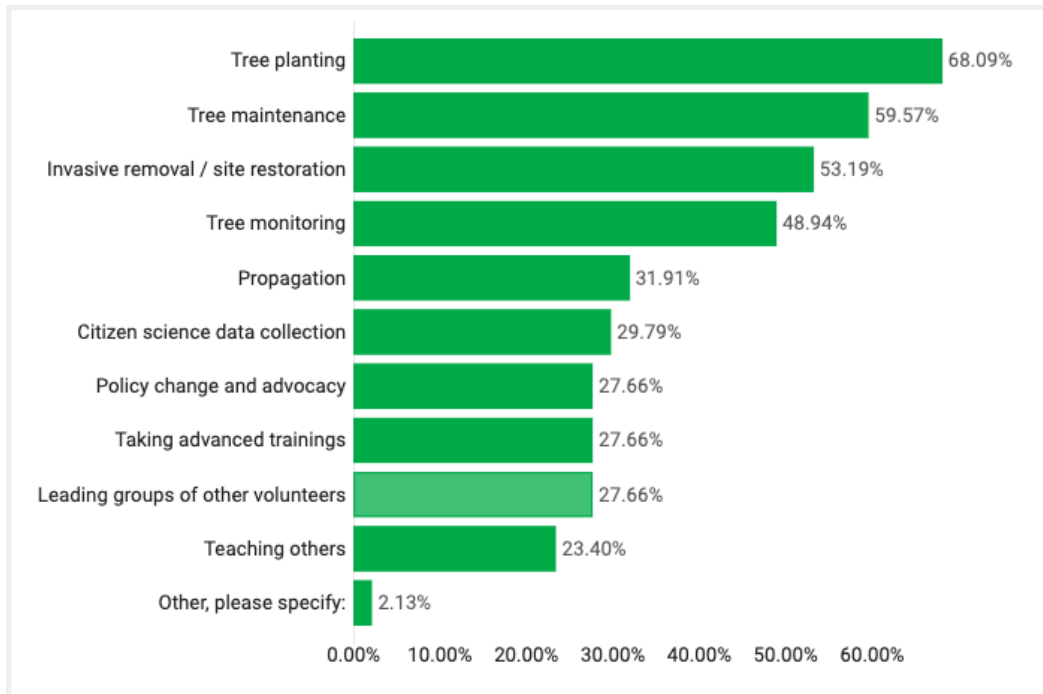
Figure 7. Reasons respondents would sign up for future tree-related training



What kinds of stewardship activities would you be most interested in? (check all that apply)

Respondents are primarily interested in tree planting and maintenance (68% and 60% respectively), followed closely by “invasives removal and site restoration” (53%) and “tree monitoring” (49%). Strong interest was also expressed for “propagation” (32%), “citizen science data collection” (30%), “policy change and advocacy” (28%), and “taking advanced trainings” (28%). One respondent entered a response for “other”: “coordination of event.” See Figure 8 on the following page.

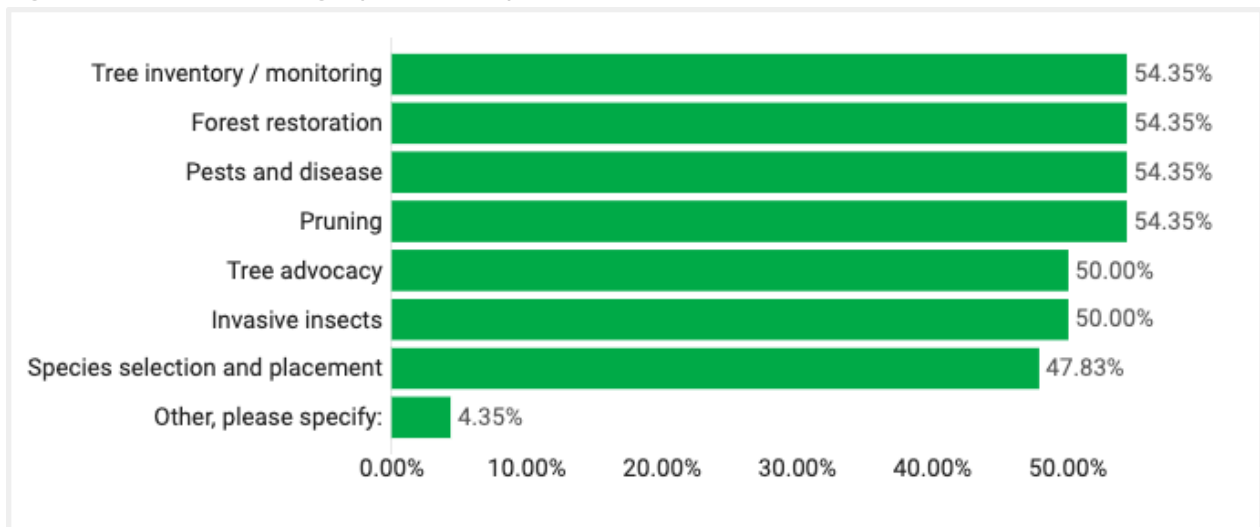
Figure 8. Stewardship activities that respondents would be interested in



What kinds of advanced training topics would you be most interested in? (check all that apply)

Respondents indicated a strong interest in the suggested advanced training topics, selecting an average of 3.5 topics per respondent (more than one response was permitted). Two “other” entries were entered: “tree planting and conservation” and “treating invasive trees / plants.”

Figure 9. Advanced training topics that respondents would be most interested in



What times would be most convenient for participating in future training courses? (check all that apply)
 Respondents indicated a very strong preference for weekdays over weekends, with weekday evenings earning the top vote (almost 40%).

Day and time	# of votes	% of votes
Weekdays; during the day	25	37.9%
Weekdays; during the evening	26	39.4%
Weekends; during the day	11	16.7%
Weekends; during the evening	4	6%

What format do you most prefer for future training courses?

Respondents indicated a strong preference for training sessions to be delivered in a mix of formats, both virtual and in-person (75%). An additional 16% preferred all-virtual and 1% preferred all in-person.

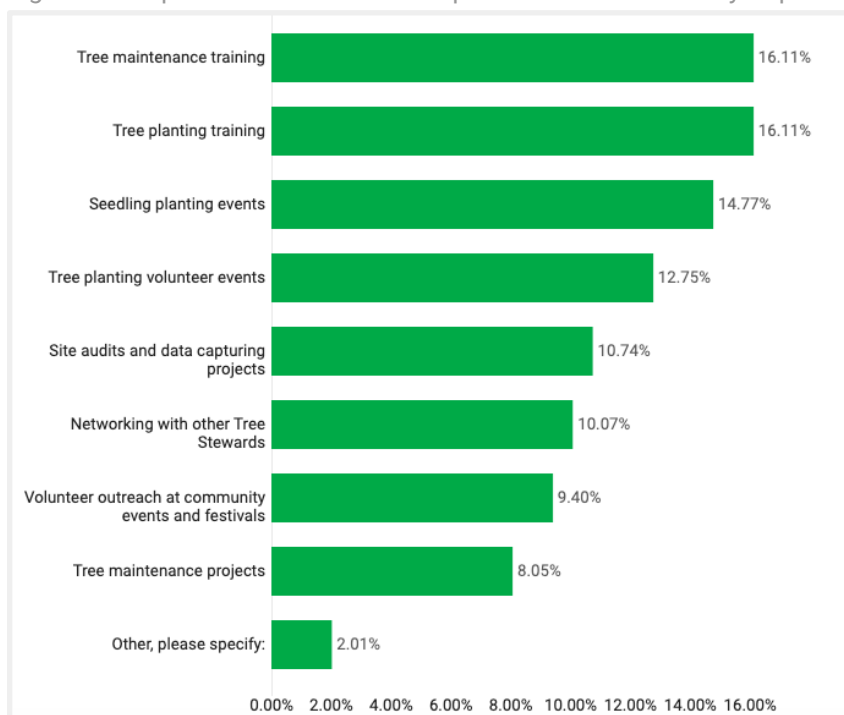
What locations in Delaware would you be willing to travel to for in-person courses or hands-on training?

Respondents were mixed in terms of which count(ies) they would be willing to travel to. Corresponding to the geographic spread of participants, the greatest number of votes was received for New Castle County (46%), followed by Sussex County (30%) and Kent County (24%).

What kinds of in-person activities are you most likely to participate in?

Respondents indicated they would most likely participate in tree maintenance and planting training (top choices were variations on these: “tree maintenance training” (16%), “tree planting training” (16%), “seedling planting events” (15%), “tree planting volunteer events” (13%)). These were followed by “site audits and data capturing projects” (11%) and “networking with other Tree Stewards” (10%). Note: This question was intended to offer respondents the opportunity to check all that apply, but due to a technical error, respondents could only select one option. These results should be interpreted as representing respondents’ first choice.

Figure 10. In-person activities that respondents are most likely to participate in



Have you ever implemented a tree planting or maintenance project?

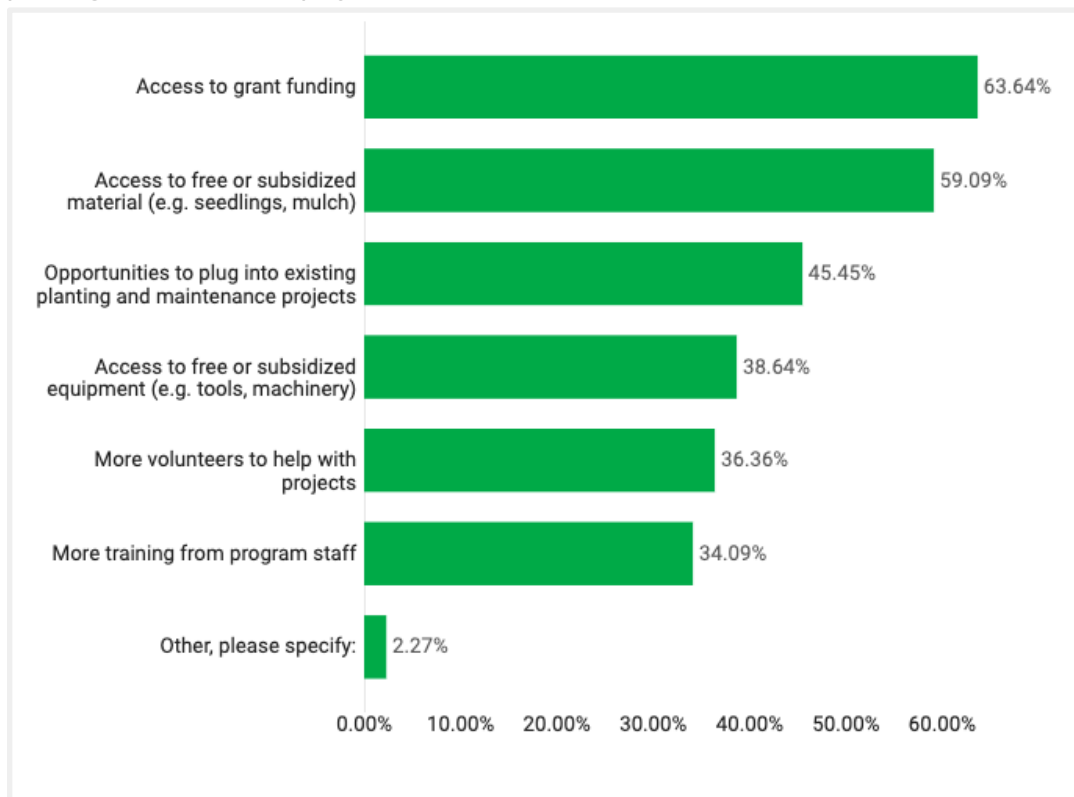
The majority of respondents (63%) answered “yes” or “in progress.” Of those who answered yes/in progress *and* had completed the Tree Stewards training, half (50%) indicated that the project(s) occurred before the Tree Stewards training, and half (50%) indicated that the project(s) occurred during or after the training. Those who answered “after” were asked to describe the implementation project, and they provided the following responses:

I worked with a Parks superintendent on site selection, tree selection, ordering, creating the plan/layout, site prep and installation of 60 2 gallon trees and shrubs.
Have been working to restore a local state park by leading a group in removing invasive plants and planting native species.
A native tree planting in my community.
Participated on June 25 in Kent County.
2023 DFS Tree Grant Project.
We got pine trees and planted them in a vacant double lot in our development!
Several years ago my suburban church received a grant to remove non-native invasive tree species and replace them with more suitable natives. As part of the grant a member of our congregation became certified as a tree steward. I’m now at a different, more urban church.
Helped manage tree grant planting.
I have been involved with tree planting for my entire adult life. Most recently (last 15 years, I have been very involved in maintaining 35 acres of community open space, removing invasives, identifying and removing tree hazards and planning a variety of new trees. In fall of 2011 we had an urban tree grant and planted 25 new trees. All have survived and are growing well.
Planting of trees for a windbreaker on personal property. Planting and care of personal fruit ornamental trees on personal property.
Assisted an Eagle Scout in implementing a small tree and shrub planting at my place of work.
Several: Developing a border around a farm pond; helping neighbors to select trees for their yard; selecting trees for our own property, including an 'empty' urban lot.
Small tree and shrub plantings for private company. Mainly near stormwater areas.
Tree for Every Delawarean Initiative (TEDI) Kick-Off Event Other Partner TEDI Related Plantings.
Tree planting on U of D Wilmington Campus.
In my job at a park I have planted trees for conservation projects on my own and with volunteers. I have not been able to participate in volunteer planting projects since my training because of time or distance constraints.
Removal of Bradbury pears and planting of native replacement trees.

What type of support would you need or want in order to implement future tree planting or maintenance projects? (check all that apply)

When asked what support participants would need in order to implement more projects, the number one answer was “access to grant funding” (64%), followed by “free or subsidized material (e.g. seedlings, mulch)” (59%). Participants also wanted “opportunities to plug into existing planting and maintenance projects” (45%). See Figure 11 on the following page.

Figure 11. Type of support that respondents would need or want in order to implement future tree planting or maintenance projects



Are you aware that Delaware has a Mobile Tree Planting Unit that offers tree planting equipment (shovels, rakes, hand tools, loppers, pruners, smart water cans, wheelbarrows, etc.) for volunteer tree planting events?

While 13% of respondents have used the Mobile Tree Planting Unit before, the majority of respondents (80%) were not aware of this resource. Those who answered “no” were asked ***“Are you interested in learning more about the Mobile Tree Planting Unit?”*** Seventy percent (70%) answered “yes”; with 14% answering “maybe” and 3% answering “no.”

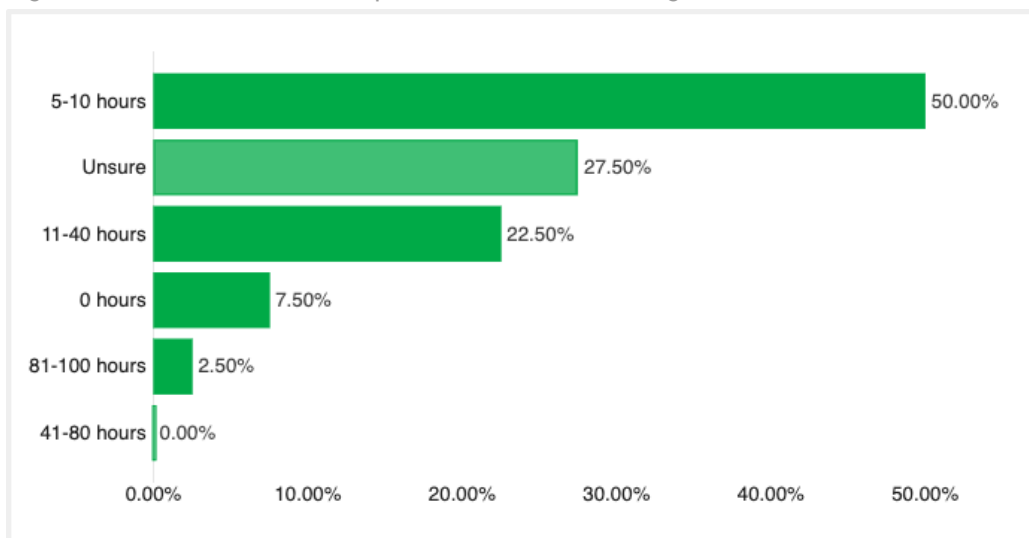
If there were a fee to participate in the Tree Stewards program, how much would you be willing to pay?

When asked how much they would be willing to pay for the Tree Stewards program, respondents indicated uncertainty, with “unsure” comprising 35% of responses. This was followed by 30% for “\$1.00 - \$30.00,” 23% for “\$31.00 - \$60.00” and smaller numbers for higher price ranges. Eighteen percent (18%) of responses were “\$0.00.”

If there were an annual mandatory volunteer time commitment associated with the Tree Stewards program, how many hours would you be willing to commit?

When asked how many hours (if any) participants would be willing to commit in annual volunteer service, respondents indicated a preference for “5-10 hours” (50%). About half that many response selections (28%) were “unsure.” See Figure 12 on the following page.

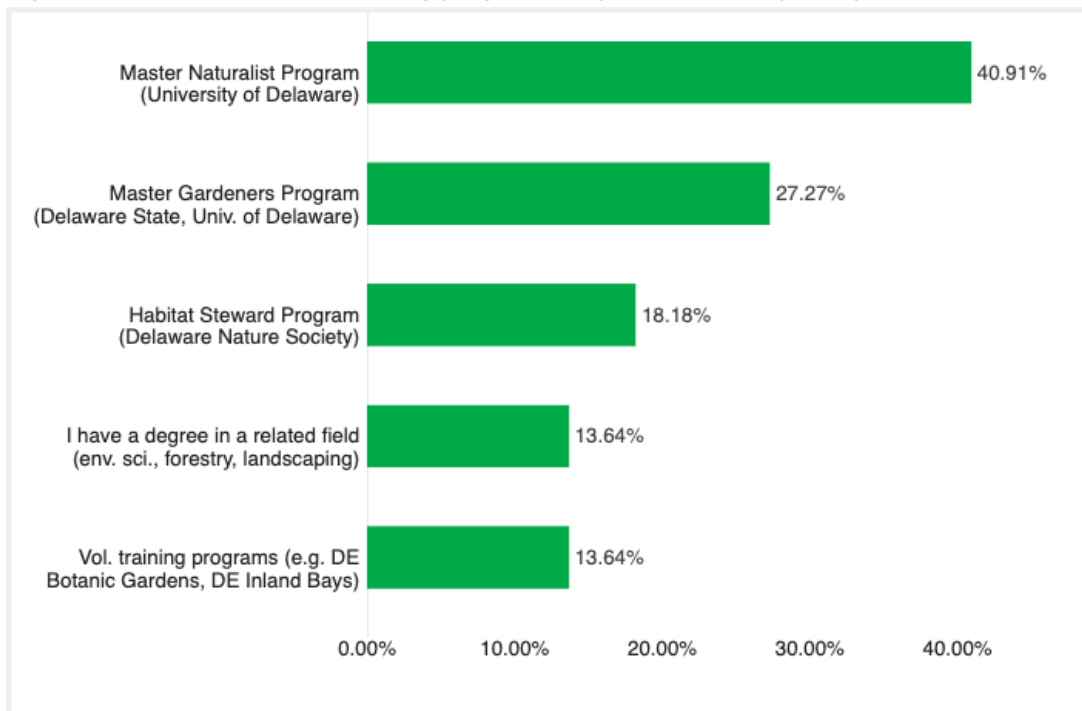
Figure 12. Number of hours respondents would be willing to commit to Tree Stewards volunteering



Have you ever participated in any other tree-related training programs? (check all that apply)

The final question asked about respondents' participation in other tree-related training programs. The greatest number of responses was for "Master Naturalist Program (University of Delaware)," with 41% of respondents indicating participation in that program. This was followed by "Master Gardeners Program (Delaware State, University of Delaware)" (27%). Smaller numbers were reported for "Habitat Steward Program (Delaware Nature Society)" (18%), "I have a degree in a related field" (14%), and "Volunteer training programs (e.g. Delaware Botanic Gardens, Delaware Inland Bays)" (14%).

Figure 13. Other tree-related training programs respondents have participated in



Focus Group Session Summary

On August 24, 2023, UMD EFC convened a focus group session designed to gather more in-depth feedback regarding pilot program participants' experience with the program, as well as input to guide future phases of the program. The session consisted of five individuals who volunteered to participate in the session via the program survey described above. They had all completed the full training course, although several individuals had not yet completed the field component. By chance, all members were residents of New Castle County. DFS staff also participated in the session.

Following is a summary of the session discussion, with questions posed to participants included in **bold italics** and participants' responses presented in their own words. Individuals' names have been replaced with generic identifiers to preserve anonymity.

What did you get out of this program? What was missing?

Participant 1: I really enjoyed the class. I had also recently completed the Master Gardener class. The follow up for that (to be certified) is in person field experience, 40 hours of service. I have a couple comments: I'm hoping there are other opportunities to do the planting. I'm unclear whether you have to do any field experience with Tree Stewards. I used to teach biology. The Tree Stewards course was at a good level – not just intro. Each session was well thought out and comprehensive. What was missing for me: more opportunities for field service.

Participant 2: I also really liked it. I originally registered for Zoom, wasn't sure I would be able to attend the in-person ones. The dates happened to work for me, but if it was a different time of year I would have liked a variety of Zoom vs in person sessions. The Zoom class did more biology and I really enjoyed that. But the in person one allowed me to go up to DFS and ask questions. I liked that part. They brought different tools for pruning, etc. Would have liked more resource books – examples of good reference books that I could flip through. But I loved them both. There was only one opportunity for field work – I happened to be able to attend it. But it would have been helpful to have more dates available.

Participant 3: I agree with Participant 1 and Participant 2. More field opportunities would have been helpful. But the classes were really dynamic, lots of pictures and examples – really great.

Participant 4: The four sessions were really good. I really liked the site assessment, data collection / metrics, being thoughtful about tree selections. In general, I would have liked more information on the current state of Delaware's forests. Links to publicly available maps. I'm looking for active projects in New Castle County especially the White Clay Watershe). I'm looking for more content from the DFS about this region of Delaware.

Participant 5: I enjoyed the class. I thought the walkthrough to point out example trees (DE Center for Horticulture) was especially good; I took note of that and took pictures. Pictures are really helpful; seeing a tree in person is even better. Helpful to have notes about different specimens to have as a reference for myself and others.

Participant 2: To add to that: on the field day, when we walked around and identified trees and asked questions about them ("is that normal?"), that was the most fun and helpful part of the field day

Have you participated in other volunteer training programs with tree elements? Was there something distinct in the way the Delaware Tree Stewards program was advertised that made you want to join? Anything unique that you got out of this program?

Participant 5: The Master Gardener training included a number of things about trees. University of Delaware Botanical Gardens has a butterfly walk and a lot of trees identified there; that's a helpful resource. I also have participated in the Gardeners Advice Program in which Master Gardeners go out to homeowners and share advice.

Participant 1: Master Naturalist. I also have pesticide certification in the forestry category which covered tree diseases and treatment fairly well.

Participant 4: DE Nature Society's Wildlife Habitat Stewardship program.

Participant 3: Talking about opportunities for more field work, what about a partnership with DCH to do a planting in the fall. Friends of Wilmington Park are doing a planting in the Brandywine and they need help – good opportunity for more field work.

DFS: Yes, we want to partner with DCH. We'll also have another maintenance day for folks that didn't get to do that part, so you can get your certification. We'll also try to find a New Castle park to do the planting in.

Participant 1: I heard about it from a group of people who I worked with – some people had taken the course (but also not been able to do the field experience). I thought it was pretty equivalent to the Master Naturalist training. I felt the Tree Steward lectures were pretty good and high quality.

We want to ask about project implementation, as equipping volunteers to implement projects is one of the goals of this program. Now that you have taken the training, what might you be missing in order to implement projects? What extra support might you need?

Participant 5: Getting funding to plant a few street trees. How do I estimate how much that would cost to remove a dead tree, dig the hole, and then get the available tree. I know DCH is planning a fall tree sale. If I were to get people interested in planting a few trees, I'd still need to know how to get help with hole digging and removing trees. Any suggestions on how to estimate those costs, finding the people who would be involved (maybe DCH is an organizer for that kind of thing) would be helpful. A place in Edgemoore used to take yard waste. Probably still do.

DFS: You can contact a few local nurseries. We recommend contacting DCH or DFS for tree species suggestion; we'll come out and look and make a recommendation based on the site conditions, whether the soil is sand or clay, etc. DFS is working on a seedling grow out station; it's up and running. We are getting some trees that we could provide for you. Don't know where we would take dead trees or tree debris. We can look into that for you. DFS can put out a social media blast to see if we can get some volunteers.

Participant 1: What I could use help with is: If I have a project idea, in a park or community area, how do I get permission to do it? Who are the contacts? For example, at a certain park in Newark, there are nice park benches with no shade trees. This would be a great spot for trees

DFS: We have a good relationship with New Castle County staff. We can also lend our Mobile Tree Unit.

Participant 1: Also, *money*. Help finding small grants to purchase trees. Equipment and volunteers you can usually borrow, but we need funds to actually purchase the trees – or a database of grantors we might look into.

Participant 2: When I signed up for the class, I just wanted to learn about trees. I didn't realize that implementation was the impetus. Now I realize there are grants available, but it seems you have to be on public land or in an HOA. I don't live in a city; there's no public land in my neighborhood. I'd be willing to work on a project if there was a list of areas where trees are needed. That would be a good way for me to get into leading a project.

Participant 3: There's a corner near me that's empty. I assume it's public. If I want to host a planting event there, how can I learn if that's public land and can I apply for a grant to purchase trees to plant there?

DFS: New Castle County has a land use and planning section. Contact them and find out if that lot is public or private and who owns it – they'll direct you to who to speak with and you can talk to them about whether it's okay to plant in that area. And if it's not available, they might be able to give you info on where to plant instead. As far as money goes, DFS is trying to launch a Tree Stewards mini-grant where community members can apply for a small grant to plant trees in their community.

Participant 4: I want to join Participant 2's comment about finding projects to volunteer for. I'd like to volunteer in this area but I don't know who would have a list of active projects.

DFS: Contact New Castle County Parks and Rec. They do some planting events. DCH and Delaware Wildlands also do these events, and DFS will tell you about events we have going on.

[For DFS] Is there a peer-to-peer network within the program, or established office hours where Tree Stewards can do this quick flash of questions to get some direct assistance?

DFS: We did create a Facebook page with our first cohort. There wasn't a lot of activity. But we can send a link if that's a place you'd all like to connect.

Do you feel equipped leading your own events or helping others get involved?

Participant 2: Helping others 100%; leading others 78%.

Participant 4: I'm the same as Participant 2.

Participant 1: I feel pretty comfortable leading an event. I do volunteer events for my job. I would want some support from DFS for the first one to make sure I'm doing it right. But I feel comfortable.

Participant 3: I'm very confident volunteering at others' events; leading my own is another thing. Maybe the confidence will come with experience. I'm definitely willing to help with something to get that experience.

DFS: DFS is here to help you with your first event.

Participant 5: The part that's daunting about leading an event is trying to get all the resources lined up and what order to do things in, all the prep work. Is this the right spot, what tree, how to fund it – all the advanced thought and planning is the hard part. I want to plan some things for the fall or spring and need a framework to move forward.

What about a checklist for how to organize a volunteer event (here's what you need to do, here's what not to forget) – would you find that helpful?

DFS: Yes, that would be a helpful tool and DFS can help with this, including geographically-based checklists.

Participant 3 and Participant 5: Heartily agree.

How about template outreach materials to recruit volunteers, like customizable flyers – would that be helpful?

Participant 2 and Participant 5: Yes! Any kind of toolkit templates would be helpful.

What about a mentorship type program? So you could shadow someone until you feel more comfortable with the logistics of planting an event?

Multiple participants: Yes!

DFS: Could do a little team planning or a huddle for the spring planting event.

We have a set of questions about deeper engagement. One of the main goals of the Tree Stewards program is to equip volunteers to be successful in advocating for trees, planting trees, and maintaining trees – in part because DFS does not have the staff capacity to meet all these needs. We want to know – how can we pick up where we left off in equipping you, especially since we now have more funding coming in. More training? Advanced training? Hands-on events? Funding?

Participant 3: Advanced trainings, especially on managing pests. Would like to dive deeper into this than the 101 training did.

Participant 2: I'm really interested in diagnosing problems with trees and treating them. More on pruning appropriately. Also, I have a property in VA on a lake. If you want to plant native plants near the water in that area, there's an organization that will send out a team of volunteers to your property to make some suggestions. We might need a little more training to do this – but this could be a role for Tree Stewards volunteers.

Participant 1: Advocacy is a role of Tree Stewards and I'd like to know more about this. Are there laws or policies we should be aware of? And on a bigger, state scale, how can we get involved on the advocacy side on promoting healthy forests and trees, that sort of thing.

Participant 4: I'd be interested in learning more about wildlife habitat relative to the tree lists mentioned in the class. Not as much mentioned about trees' value for the animal kingdom. More training on the benefits of trees related to wildlife.

DFS is trying to discern how involved volunteers could be in additional efforts, above and beyond what may have been described in the pilot training program (planting and maintenance). Examples might include conducting tree audits, participating on tree boards, etc. We want to get a sense for – what is your appetite to participate in such things? And if you are interested, what would you need in order to get involved?

Participant 2: What about a sort of “speakers bureau”? If an HOA wanted someone to come out and speak about trees, or go to fairs or conferences where DFS wants a booth to spread the word. We could do that if DFS doesn't have the staff to do it.

Participant 5: I'd be interested in these things too. Also the tree surveys and citizen science kinds of things. Working with schools – approaching school groups to talk about planting trees and maybe do a planting project.

DFS: That's a wonderful idea. We have partnered with schools to do planting events. We'll have to work on some ways to get certified Tree Stewards involved in tree plantings. And re: the speakers and outreach help, would love to find ways to plug Stewards in here too.

Participant 1: I love citizen science – forest value habitat assessments, tree surveys, etc. I love doing those kinds of things and would be happy to do that.

Participant 4: Would love to do citizen science and GIS mapping exercises.

Anything else you'd like to share with us?

Participant 3: Thank you for being so proactive with follow-up.

If you were going to recruit a friend or neighbor to participate in the program, what's your elevator pitch? What are the benefits of the program in your words?

Participant 2: I actually gave one about a week and a half ago. There was a neighborhood near here that was devastated by the straight-wind event. I told a friend, there's this great program you can go through that will give you training on how to restore the trees you lost, what trees to select, and how to maintain them so they're healthy – and there may be opportunities for grant funding to help pay for it.

Participant 1: I might talk to people I know who like to bird. Birds need so many caterpillars – and we need the trees to provide those. And wouldn't it be great to learn about planting native trees.

Participant 3: I think it's important to get word out about keystone species and the importance of them in our ecosystems and in supporting wildlife. We need to continue to make a little noise out there.

Participant 5: Sometimes it seems overwhelming. We hear a lot about climate change and the devastating changes to our environment. You start thinking, what can one person do? Well, one person can learn about trees and help care for them and nurture them. Every tree helps us by providing habitat and shade, providing beauty and oxygen and clean air. If you can help even one tree, it's a great start. And it's a good feeling to accomplish something other than sitting on the couch wringing your hands.

Participant 4: The course gave me a better appreciation for some of the complexities of planning and assessing tree projects. As a beekeeper I understand the value of native trees and how much pollen and

nectar they provide to our pollinators. I could talk to beekeepers – there are resources out there for planting, if they're adjacent to public spaces. I wasn't aware of these resources before. I was happy to get the connections made through this course.

Partners Strategy Session Summary

UMD EFC and DFS convened a virtual 90-minute Partners Strategy Session on August 30, 2023. This session was invitation-only, with participants identified by DFS as key potential partners for future phases of the program. This session aimed to identify next steps for incorporating participant feedback into the program, as well as elements necessary to maximize the reach and effectiveness of the program.

Representatives from the following organizations were invited to participate. Organizations represented at the session are indicated in bold asterisk.

- **Alliance for Chesapeake Bay***
- **Delaware Center for the Inland Bays***
- **City of Lewes***
- City of Newark
- Delaware Botanic Gardens
- Delaware Center for Horticulture
- **Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control***
- **Delaware Forest Service***
- **Delaware Wildlands***
- Delmarva Power
- Delaware Nursery & Landscape Association
- Nanticoke Watershed Alliance
- **New Castle County Parks***
- Tree for Every Delawarean
- **The Nature Conservancy***
- **United States Forest Service***
- **University of Delaware Cooperative Extension – Master Naturalist program***

The session agenda was as follows:

- Introductions – all (10 min)
- Pilot program overview and plans for future phases – Delaware Forest Service (10 min)
- Program evaluation findings (survey and focus group feedback) – UMD EFC (20 min)
- Discussion: Strategies for ensuring success in future Tree Stewards rounds – all, led by UMD EFC (40 min)
- Next steps, 10 min

Following is a summary of the discussion portion of the session, with questions posed to participants included in ***bold italics*** and participants' responses presented in their own words (using organization names rather than individuals' names).

Now that you have heard some of the participant feedback received to date, and based on your understanding of the program, how can future iterations of the program maximize reach and impact? Specifically:

- How can we design a program to meet varying needs (e.g. some people wanting more field experience and some not able to commit to that; some wanting just to learn and some to get very involved; etc)? *Should* we try to meet these various goals?
- If the goal of the program is to lead volunteer events, how do you build out project skills? What might exist within this partner network and what would need to be better developed?
- How can this training support those communities that haven't been well engaged in previous efforts?

University of Delaware (UD) Cooperative Extension: Regarding the challenge of designing a flexible program that meets multiple needs, we run into this issue with our Master Naturalist program. We get around this by providing a minimum of four field experiences that volunteers must attend, but we offer more so people can choose to do more if desired. These can be topic-specific or location-specific.

Regarding the program and project management skills, this is a need for us too. In my program, people don't feel confident enough that they can LEAD projects. Perhaps we could collaborate on an advanced training where we focus on those.

The Nature Conservancy (TNC): We run a community-science program that has a requirement that all volunteers are trained in data collection (which is in the field) but we also offer opportunities related to data management, data analysis etc (which can be done from home.) I love the idea of creating data around Tree Stewards that people can then volunteer to manage remotely if they can't do field work. Also, once you have long-time volunteers, they can aspire to do a "Train the Trainer" status. I always rely on my experienced volunteers to train and mentor other volunteers.

Delaware Center for the Inland Bays (CIB): It takes a considerable amount of time to make a successful, flexible program involving volunteers. It will take more time than a regular research project to create a successful volunteer training program. In all my programs, the volunteers are required to complete an annual training. Sometimes we have changed the program or there is new data. Or we just have people refresh. I also reach out to ask for volunteers to be team leaders; I offer to help but ask them to run it.

Do you have a volunteer training program that you are running? Is it statewide or a specific geography? Do you require capstone? Is it open to everyone or a specific demographic? Do you cover technical skills and/or soft skills?

TNC: It's really hard to design a flexible training program – it's almost two training programs at once. Need more focus on building small groups in areas where people can trust and rely on each other.

Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay (ACB): We developed the Maryland Tree Stewards program. It's on the same grant as the Tree Stewards one. For that program, we knew we wanted to partner with other groups, so we reached out to watershed groups who are already active and already have volunteers. We provide the training and they manage the volunteers. All we do is provide technical support, questions, etc. It seems to be working.

UMD EFC: Are there groups in Delaware that are similar to this?

DFS: Yes. If any of the partners are aware of locations where we could hold the planting events, we are looking for places around the state.

UD Cooperative Extension: I am happy to do this. I do all of my field training offsite at different locations.

CIB: Tree Stewards can fill a need for people who are not just passionate about trees but also knowledgeable about trees. We do plantings, but we need people to help with our events and make them more exciting – Tree Stewards could fill this. From a volunteer recruitment perspective, this would be really helpful.

City of Lewes: I'm the tree commissioner for Lewes. We have thousands of trees. But if we don't keep them pruned they won't survive. If we had some Tree Stewards trained in pruning, I would definitely use them. I'm not sure what volunteers would be willing to do.

TNC: To chime in about possible opportunities, first for offering training, I could potentially help with this. I have a degree in forest biology and all my professional experience is about volunteer training. I don't have an in-person training facility but we do all our training at a great field training site. If you included some citizen science in the program, we'd have a need for that. The National Park runs a volunteer program – I can imagine they'll have a need for citizen science volunteers (tree monitoring, pests etc).

United States Forest Service (USFS): When we first launched the program, we had a lot of buy-in from our Urban Forestry Council. Our hope was to engage the partners to kind of frame the program. The intention was for it to be similar to the VA and PA tree stewards programs. The thought was: we can't reach into every neighborhood. Wouldn't it be great to have an advocate in every community; then they would be able to lead these efforts. That's exactly what we were going for. It did kind of grow and shift – during COVID, everything went online. It was never DFS's intention to be the only source for all the training. It's nice for other groups to offer trainers etc. If everyone has some skin in the game, it's a big investment from around the state.

ACB: Ideally these groups we're working with, we'd want *them* to offer the trainings. We at the Alliance can do the training. But what's hard for us is to do the events. For example, Shore Rivers uses our recorded webinars to train their volunteers.

City of Lewes: After going through the training once, I wouldn't feel I was ready to go out and do pruning on my own, if I didn't have other previous training or knowledge.

UD Cooperative Extension: This is what we experienced too with the Master Naturalist program. Various levels of experience coming into the program. Many are ready to run a program afterward; many are not. This is why we have that advanced training requirement. It takes a long time to do that. It will take a while to be able to get up to that point. That continued training, after the core training – I think this is where the goals of my program and the goals of the Tree Stewards program could really overlap here. I'd love to continue that conversation.

City of Lewes: What's needed to get Tree Stewards up to speed to be competent is follow-up training. I went to just one tree planting experience. More than one tree planting or pruning event is needed and it can't be via slideshow. Follow-up actual experience is what we really need. For HOAs, people need someone who can help get them organized and know what to do.

UD Cooperative Extension: What it sounds like for an action item: Creating some advanced training of project management directly surrounding a tree planting and maintenance project. Making it small enough that people could quasi-lead it while we're going through it. Getting that experience through a small setting, not a huge expensive planting, coming together to create a project management training focused on trees. I would send my people through that so they can get credit for advanced training.

TNC: My big question: is the Tree Stewards program a training program or is it a stewarding program? In the end we want people to be *stewards*. That implies more of an ongoing engagement effort rather than a standalone training. Here's where having local groups to own that relationship-building and ongoing training part. Advanced training would be helpful if it could be hands-on. If more events can be planned around spring or fall, those kinds of things are going to be critical to not just be a training program but also a stewarding program.

How to better reach disadvantaged communities?

TNC: Based on experience I've had based on working with different communities in Wilmington, PARTNERING is huge. Partner with community-based organizations and leaders. Provide financial assistance; help people get access to grant funds. Offer paid opportunities, even a stipend rather than asking for volunteers. And creating jobs for young people including high school students – they're often interested in paid opportunities.

TNC: For this to happen there would need to be a fair amount of time and money. You've got to go to events, go to the community. That might need more outreach from people from DE Tree Stewards. It's very unlikely to get a volunteer to do this.

CIB: There are already groups working in the community. If you bring the expertise, they might be able to bring the volunteers. Also think what is desirable for those communities. They may be less interested in pruning as learning the difference between different species. Also learning their education level and preferred language (even doing some Census research). Have a bilingual presenter or translate core documents.

Would you be willing to engage in future Tree Stewards programming? In what capacity? Some ideas are marketing the program, recruiting volunteers, providing classroom training, hosting in-person training events, serving as a project advisor, etc. Ideas for making such a partnership succeed?

TNC: I would definitely be willing to engage in future programming and potentially in all these capacities that are listed here, or at least most of them. Not sure the best way to go about that or make that happen. A lot of opportunities.

UD Cooperative Extension: I am more than happy to help with marketing, recruitment and help coordinate training opportunities, especially in lower Delaware.

CIB: Yes, recruit participants, provide opportunities & training.

City of Lewes: I am willing to help with coordination, and I could lead some small groups doing maintenance activities in Lewes.

Delaware Wildlands: We could offer the space for folks to come out, opportunity for an outdoor classroom. We have land complexes in every county. I would also help with mentorship and definitely with marketing the program. We can also help develop the resources. We have had a really valuable partnership with Master Naturalists on that.

DNREC: Yes, recruit participants, market the program, provide support to trainers.

How about volunteer opportunities – do you have ideas on how Tree Stewards could support your events, places where volunteers could get involved in your work?

TNC: Maintenance and data collection in riparian buffers.

CIB: We have a docent program at the James Farm. This year I brought in a speaker who is a certified translator. Partnering with the Stewards could mean inviting them to these kinds of trainings. That would be an excellent partnership.

DNREC: We have our riparian forest buffer program. One of our goals is to get our county staff trained. This could be one of those opportunities. We see a need in more people having some comfort on the maintenance side of things in particular. Could also be a recruitment opportunity.

Would anyone be interested in serving as a project advisor? Or learning more about this opportunity?

TNC (first representative): I am interested.

TNC (second representative): I would be interested in being a program advisor as well.

CIB: I would like to see a list of possible responsibilities as a partner.

DNREC: I agree that I would be interested in staying involved in some capacity but not sure what exactly and would like to see a list of responsibilities as a partner to make sure it's a commitment we can make.

TNC: I'm super happy this is happening, even though it is in the early innings. Big opportunity to elevate urban forestry in the state.

Recommendations

Based on the results of the survey, focus group, partners strategy session, and a desktop review of program materials, UMD EFC presents the following recommendations to DFS to enhance the reach and effectiveness of future Tree Stewards programming.

1. Continue the Delaware Tree Stewards program.

Among both program participants and prospective organizational partners, there is strong interest in and support for the Delaware Tree Stewards program. Program participants expressed overwhelmingly positive responses to the Tree Stewards course, with the majority of survey respondents indicating that they would recommend the program to others, enroll in additional and/or advanced training courses, and participate in ongoing volunteer efforts.

Potential program partners – including nonprofit organizations, volunteer programs, universities, and other state agencies – expressed an interest in supporting future phases of the program through a variety of means, including marketing the program, co-delivering content, and engaging Tree Stewards in volunteer stewardship activities.

Given Delaware’s ambitious tree planting and maintenance goals, including the Tree for Every Delawarean Initiative, the need for trained tree volunteers can only be expected to grow. This need, combined with the clear support from participants and partners, makes a strong argument for dedicating resources to continuing this program.

2. Convene an advisory group to guide program design and delivery, especially during the transition from pilot phase to permanent program.

As the Tree Stewards program transitions from pilot phase to sustained program, DFS would be well served by tapping into the insights of organizations in the state and region who have expertise in volunteer engagement, training curricula, environmental stewardship, and related fields. An initial set of strong candidates for such an advisory group have already been identified and engaged through the Partners Strategy Session. By convening a Tree Stewards Advisory Group for a specified period of time, DFS can leverage expertise and networks that will support the program’s future success.

Steps to implementing this recommendation include identifying advisory group invitees, to include participants in the Partners Strategy Session who expressed a possible interest in serving in this capacity (The Nature Conservancy, the Delaware Center for the Inland Bays, DNREC), other allied organizations, and possibly members of similar tree stewardship programs in other states. DFS should draft roles and responsibilities of potential advisory group members, as well as the overall goals and time horizon for the group, to assist with recruitment. DFS may wish to explore whether this group would best function as a standalone convening or if there is value in integrating it into an appropriate pre-existing venue.

3. Pursue stronger integration with allied partners in order to create ongoing and diversified engagement opportunities for Tree Stewards.

A goal of the Tree Stewards program is to equip and empower a cadre of volunteers who actively implement tree planting and maintenance in communities around the state. To achieve this, the program

needs to provide not only *training*, which has an end date, but also *ongoing volunteer engagement*, which can continue indefinitely.

Assuming that ongoing engagement remains a program goal moving forward (a question for the advisory group), DFS should inventory allied community groups and/or nonprofit organizations across Delaware, and then reach out to these partners in order to:

- **Recruit community groups or nonprofit organizations to host Tree Stewards training sessions and/or provide follow-up engagement and networking for Stewards after a training ends.** A promising model is the Maryland’s Tree Stewards program, in which course curriculum is delivered by a regional nonprofit (sometimes live, sometimes recorded) but hosted by local watershed organizations which are the ones to provide wraparound networking and volunteer engagement.
- **Create a process for the network of allied organizations to communicate with one another about volunteer and training opportunities.** This might include contact lists, directories, websites, or shared calendars. It may also include developing sharing messaging and customized outreach toolkits. The goal is to make it easy for all partners to engage one another’s volunteers, for the benefit of both Tree Stewards and the host organizations.
- **Diversify the range of volunteer options available to Tree Stewards.** There is a need among nonprofits – and a desire among participants – for a variety of engagement opportunities beyond tree planting and maintenance. These include advocacy and policy change, citizen science (e.g. data collection, monitoring, inventories), data management, data analysis, speaking opportunities and outreach.
- **Foster the development of geographically-focused sub-networks of Tree Stewards and other volunteers** who can communicate and coordinate on needs, goals, planting and maintenance in their area.
- **Leverage opportunities for organizations to co-deliver trainings to meet shared needs.** This was identified during the Partners Strategy Session as a prime opportunity.

An important prerequisite to this recommendations’ success: To ensure Tree Stewards’ sustained engagement – through any of the means suggested above – DFS will need to ensure it keeps good alumni records.

4. Provide additional field experience opportunities as well as project management training and resources.

Participant feedback showed overwhelmingly positive responses to the course curriculum. However, overall, program graduates did not feel sufficiently prepared to lead and/or conduct their own planting and maintenance projects. Two key needs were identified: (1) more on-the-ground training and field experience opportunities (optional) in both planting and maintenance techniques, and (2) additional training and/or support related to project management skills, delivered to all program participants.

To meet the first need, every Tree Stewards training cohort should be offered multiple, in-person field training opportunities. These should be offered at a variety of locations throughout the state and on a variety of dates, and they should cover both planting and maintenance techniques. Beyond this minimum, the following ideas would further enhance participants’ ability to gain hands-on experience and build their knowledge and confidence:

- Provide mentorship or shadowing opportunities to help newly-certified Tree Stewards gain skills and confidence planning and leading their own events.
- Consider modeling the Master Gardener requirement for a minimum number of field experience hours in order to obtain and retain certification.
- Connect Tree Stewards with other volunteer programs and opportunities throughout the state (as suggested in Recommendation 3, above).

To meet the second need, the Tree Stewards program should incorporate additional training on project management or “soft” skills, such as identifying planting locations, securing permits and permissions, creating project budgets, finding funding, sourcing trees, recruiting volunteers, and leading a planting or maintenance event. Some intro-level coursework on these topics should be integrated into the core Tree Stewards training. More in-depth training may be offered through follow-on or advanced training courses. In addition, DFS should develop (or replicate from other tree stewards programs, with permission) project management toolkits and templates, such as:

- Funding sources / application materials
- Site map template
- Property owner agreement sample
- Species selection list
- Maintenance manuals or guides (pruning, mulching)
- Maintenance plan / schedule template
- Toolkit for permitting and permissions
- Sample volunteer recruitment outreach material (emails, flyers, handouts)
- Checklist for planning a planting event

5. Build flexibility into the program’s content and delivery to meet the varying needs and interests of program participants.

Program evaluation findings clearly show that Tree Steward program participants come to the program from a variety of entry points and with a variety of goals. For example, while many participants expressed a desire for more field work (as described above), other participants noted they have physical limitations that preclude manual labor. Some participants said the program did not allow enough opportunity to network with peers, while others said there was too much time spent on social interaction. Similarly, while many Tree Stewards are motivated by a desire to lead volunteer planting events in their communities, other participants registered out of a desire to build their knowledge and maintain their own property, with no desire for community service.

To successfully meet the needs of the diverse audience drawn to the program, Tree Stewards should aim to build flexibility into the program’s content and delivery. Specifically:

- Keep the core “101” curriculum in place, but offer advanced training opportunities. Findings from the survey and the focus group show a strong appetite for additional courses or lectures that dig into topics such as conducting tree inventories and monitoring, restoring forests, managing pests and disease, pruning, advocacy, and species selection and placement.
- Offer trainings at various times, in various locations, with in-person, virtual and on-demand options.

- Offer non-manual alternatives to field work. This may include desktop data management or analysis (for monitoring or inventories) as well as advocacy efforts.

Equally as important, Tree Stewards marketing and training material should explicitly acknowledge that program participants may have different levels of preexisting knowledge as well as different motivations and goals in taking the course. Embracing this diversity will maximize the potential for all Tree Stewards to accomplish positive change in their respective spheres of influence.