



FRIENDS OF TREES / REI VOLUNTEER SURVEY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

Friends of Trees (FoT) applied for and received a \$10,000 grant from REI in late 2012 to learn more about volunteers at Friends of Trees planting events, how they hear about Friends of Trees and what their experiences at our events are like. A 25-question survey was developed to learn about volunteer demographics, motivations and experiences, as well as to provide opportunities for other open-ended questions related to their experiences. Volunteers received an invitation to participate as part of the follow-up thank you email sent on Monday to all Saturday event planters and it was available to all visitors to the Friends of Trees website.

GOALS

We desired to collect information regarding how our volunteers are hearing about our events (and, specifically, whether or not current REI strategies are working to generate volunteers to partner groups).

One major goal of this survey was to identify potential blind spots about the organization and the volunteer experience at our planting events. As we expand our programming in Eugene, Salem and Vancouver, a detailed breakdown of effective recruitment techniques will help inform the overall new-market volunteer recruitment strategy.

Additionally, by getting answers to broad, community-focused questions like “How often do you volunteer in your community?” and “Do you feel more comfortable speaking to your neighbors after planting?”, we are able to strengthen our outreach strategies for appeals and applications to donors, foundations and the general public.

It is often difficult to quantify our impact as a community building organization, as there are no easy numbers (as opposed to “Number of Trees Planted” and “Numbers of Volunteers Engaged”) that fall out of our work naturally. But, by digging a bit deeper, we will be able to build a more robust picture of the impact of our work in the Portland-Vancouver region.

INCENTIVES

The survey was promoted as “25 Questions for 25 Bucks” and all respondents were entered into several randomly-selected drawings for \$25, \$50 and \$100 gift cards on a weekly, monthly and seasonal basis, respectively.

\$1,000 in gift cards were purchased directly from REI and \$850 of these gift cards were claimed. The 28 winners were contacted via email and the gift cards were sent to them in the mail. (The remaining gift cards are being used for Summer Inspector incentives and Volunteer Appreciation raffle prizes.)

RESPONSE

At least 4,300 individuals received the survey invitation between January and May 2013, representing the more than 7,200 volunteer moments at more than 80 public tree care and planting events in the NT and GSI programs between September 2012 – May 2013. While the number of people accessing the survey via the website is unknown, the Friends of Trees website receives an average of 11,083 unique visitors per month.

There were 529 individuals who responded – with 500 completing the entire survey. This represents over 11% of everyone who volunteered with Friends of Trees for the season – an excellent response rate. Some selected response highlights are summarized below.

WHAT CAN WE LEARN ABOUT OUR VOLUNTEERS FROM THIS SURVEY?

Who are they?

- **They're involved.** 45% of respondents volunteer for other organizations at least once per month and more than 95% volunteer at least once per year.
- **They have broad age diversity.** *We do not collect personal information for those under 18 years old, as reported by the volunteer, so the under 21 year old age group is most likely under-represented here:*
 - ≥20 years old: 9.1%
 - 21-29 years old: 17.6%
 - 30-39 years old: 28.6%
 - 40-49 years old: 18.9%
 - 50-59 years old: 15.8%
 - ≤60 years old: 9.9%
- **They're loyal.** 64% would 'definitely' or be 'more likely' to support a business if they knew it provided financial support to FoT; 58% had volunteered with FoT previously.
- **Top three occupational industries.** Education (12.4%), Non-profit (10%), Government (8.5%).
- **Other job data.** 15% of them are unemployed and 7% are retired. Students self-reported at a rate of 4.2%, but because we don't collect personal information for those under 18 years old, this group is most likely larger.

How are our volunteers hearing about us?

- **Yard signs continue their reign.** More than 70% of respondents heard about FoT from our yard signs.
- **People are talking to other people.** More than 50% of respondents heard about FoT from their friend or neighbor and 22% from their Neighborhood Associations.
- **People like the digital world.** 47% of respondents heard about our events from online outlets and social media.
- **People like to hear directly from us.** The top three methods people prefer to find out about events are: emails from Friends of Trees (69%); Friends of Trees website/calendar (45%); social media (30%).

- **Top online resources.** For those that prefer online resources, Hands On Greater Portland and Craigslist were the most popular sources for event information.

Getting to our events

- **Volunteers like to keep it local.** 83.5% of respondents travelled less than 10 miles to get to our events.
- **But volunteers will travel, if needed.** 38% would travel more than 10 miles.
- **Well-balanced transportation options.** 57% drive their car daily and 41% walk or bike daily.

The Plant It Portland and business partnership effects

- **Publicity matters.** More than 35% of respondents heard about us in the past 3-5 years. The Plant It Portland campaign launched in 2010.
- **Big pictures and words.** 21% of respondents reported hearing about us from the Plant It Portland billboards.
- **Business partnership boosts.** Other sources for respondents learning about FoT: 10% PGE Paperless billing campaign; 7.5% New Seasons; 7.5% Portland Timbers; 6.9% REI; 4.7% KBOO.

Delivering the unexpected: motivation vs. experience

- **Volunteering to make a difference.** More than 65% of all respondents were motivated to volunteer with us to make a difference in their city.
- **Wildlife habitat, water quality and being outdoors.** More than 54% of all respondents volunteered because they wanted to improve habitat and water quality, as well as be outdoors and get exercise.
- **In their own words.** We asked respondents to tell us about their favorite aspect of the planting events, and we've tried to group these responses into categories.
- **Community building, meeting people and working with others.** 47% of all respondents liked these aspects of the event more than any other reason.
- **Delivering the unexpected.** Even though 'making a difference' and 'doing tangible work' were two of the top motivations for volunteering, only 20% of respondents liked these things the most about the event. Our events deliver the unexpected pleasure of meeting new people and working together towards a common goal.

Favorite thing about the event: Crowdsourcing what community-building really means

- "My favorite part of the day was having drivers pass by our site and honk and yell 'thank you' out their windows. It felt awesome to be giving back and having a community that supports it!"
- "I love the way strangers come together and leave as friends and neighbors after planting trees together."
- "Seeing that many people, young and old and all ages, working together in a worthwhile project. Many willing workers accomplished a lot of good. Sense of cooperation from staff and volunteers."
- "I loved working outdoors with my children and showing them how to get out and make a difference, and to show them how many other people are getting out and planting trees to help the habitat of the future."
- "I loved meeting my neighbors. I just bought my first house in April of 2012 and have not met many people in my neighborhood. This was fun and a positive experience for me. I felt a sense of community when I was volunteering."

- “Meeting new people in my own neighborhood and supporting this very worthwhile effort to increase the tree canopy in my newly-adopted city. As a lifelong gardener, I could have easily selected and planted the tree myself, but this was a wonderful opportunity to get involved with a local non-profit with an important mission - I’m so glad I did (my husband was not particularly enthusiastic at first, but ended up thoroughly enjoying himself!). Since we are in our mid-sixties, we were just a little sore the next day, but it was worth it and we are looking forward to volunteering again.”
- “I felt like I was ‘part of the team’ and not ‘just a volunteer’. I have volunteered with other organizations and found I was more of an easily-replaced ‘tool’ rather than a functioning part of the team. Great environment.”
- “My favorite thing was that everyone in the group bonds, no matter what their background. Teamwork always brings groups together and it makes Portland really feel like a place everyone feels comfortable. There was never a moment when a team member doubted their methods or intentions throughout the day.”
- “I really continue to do this because of the community-building aspect. The lovely conversations that I hear around me and the laughter and people getting dirty and feeling good about the work done is all magic. The fact that we planted some big trees or lots of little ones and I get to see how they grow over the years and how things change because of this new habitat reveals itself later and keeps me coming back to the same plantings year after year.”