



Tower Hill Botanic Garden Programming Needs Assessment Portfolio

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ESE5060: Program Evaluation
Produced Fall 2017

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PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The Worcester County Horticultural Society, of Worcester County, MA, was founded in 1842. After nearly 140 years of creating temporary displays and exhibitions, Tower Hill Botanic Garden was established by the Society in order to pursue a vision of “growing a better future with people and plants.” Since opening in 1986, Tower Hill has utilized their 132-acre site to establish itself as a must see attraction and its visitation rates are continually increasing. To keep up with this growing demand and uncertain as to the best method with which to do so, Tower Hill is to undergo a programming needs assessment to better serve its guests and discover the best avenues for the future.



photo credit: Madison Walter

CRITICAL QUESTIONS AND LOGIC MODEL

What are the Critical Questions?

Critical questions are the overarching questions that an evaluation, or a needs assessment, sets out to answer. These big ideas are what guide the evaluation process to ensure that achieves its intended purpose. The critical questions for Tower Hill's Program Needs Assessment (see below) stem from Tower Hill's rapidly growing patronage and equally growing demand for quality programming.

3 Critical Questions

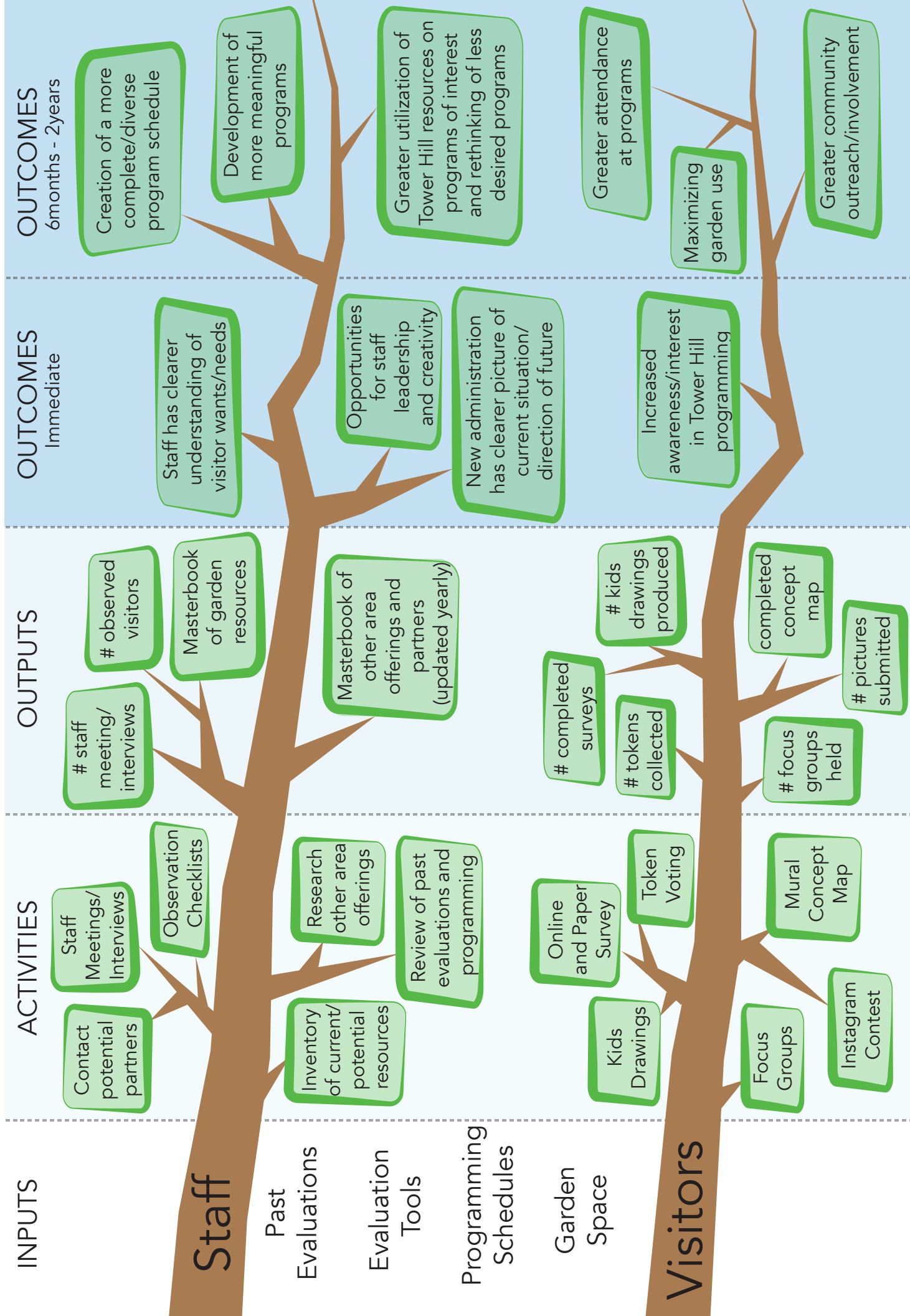
- 1) What programs are currently working at Tower Hill? Who is coming, why are they coming and how can we better serve them?
- 2) What kinds of programs, in terms of structure and content, are desired by visitors?
- 3) Who is currently not coming to Tower Hill? How can Tower Hill reach those who aren't coming to programs?

Logic Model

On the following page is a logic model for the Tower Hill Needs Assessment. This logic model differs from a traditional logic model in that the whole process is evaluation rather than evaluation being a smaller part of a larger program. Something else of note is that through creation of the logic model, two main channels of evaluation emerged. These channels focus on the subjects that are completing the prescribed activities: staff and visitors. As seen in the logic model, activities, outputs, and outcomes are grouped by these two entities.

TOWER HILL PROGRAM NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Impact: To develop programming that meets the needs of visitors while pursuing Tower Hill's mission





EVALUATION PLAN

EVALUATION PLAN OVERVIEW

This evaluation plan has four main steps to help answer the critical questions discussed earlier. In the following pages there is a given overview for each step and tools that *could* be used. Please keep in mind that there are plenty of other tools out there and the ones included in this document are just a sampling of what is possible. Below are the four steps with central ideas or questions behind each.

STEP 1: WHAT ARE WE DOING NOW?

- Primarily Staff Focused
- Inventory of current practices and resources
- Establishing institutional history

STEP 2: WHERE DO WE GO NEXT?

- Primarily Visitor Focused
- Gathering ideas concerning potential new avenues
- How can we best expand our efforts?

STEP 3: INFORMATION ANALYSIS

- What did we find?
- What does the information tell us moving forward?

STEP 4: REPORT AND USE

- Sharing collected information with visitors, staff, and other stakeholders
- Letting new data help inform programming choices
- Implementing new ideas

TOWER HILL EVALUATION PLAN CHART

| EVALUATION QUESTIONS | INDICATORS | INFORMATION SOURCES | TOOLS | DESIGN AND SAMPLING |
|---|--|---------------------|--|---|
| What is currently working and what is not currently working? | Meaningful interactions, high attendance, overheard comments or observed positive behaviors. (or the opposite of any of those) | Staff | Staff meetings: in depth analysis of past evaluations and current offerings. Observation Checklists: pre-chosen behaviors to be recorded over a time | Staff Meetings: by department then all together Checklist: as often as desired. (All Visitors- no sampling) |
| What draws people to Tower Hill right now? | Observed positive behaviors and expressed positive qualities about Tower Hill programs and | Staff Visitors | Observation Checklist: pre-chosen behaviors to be recorded over a time Survey- open-ended response section to identify what quality of the Tower Hill programs are inviting to visitors | Checklists: often as desired. Any visitors Survey: incentivized (All Visitors- no sampling) |
| Why are people not coming to Tower Hill? | Expressed barriers or concerns that have prevented visitors from coming | Visitors | Survey: open-ended response section to identify what has prevented them from coming before | Survey: incentivized (All Visitors- no sampling) |
| How can we reach those who are not coming to Tower Hill? | Suggested methods of outreach, partnerships, venues, and subgroups | Staff Visitors | Staff meetings and Focus Groups: discuss in depth about various potential resources and groups | All Staff Focus groups: THBG members and visitors that indicated on survey |
| What types of programs would visitors most like to see? | Mentioning of preferred structure or the time willing to commit to a program | Visitors | Survey: question with pre-selected choices about how much time visitors are willing to commit Focus groups, Token Voting, Concept Map | Survey: incentivized Token Voting and Concept Map (All Visitors- no sampling) Focus Groups: see above |
| What topics would visitors most like to see addressed through programs? | Expressed interests or high attendance at a given program | Visitors | Survey: question with preselected choices about how visitors spend free time Focus Groups, Kid's Drawing, Instagram Contest, Concept Map | Survey: incentivized Kid's Drawings,, Instagram Contest, and Concept Map (All Visitors- no sampling) Focus Group: see above |

STEP 1: WHAT ARE WE DOING NOW?

OVERVIEW:

Step one focuses on internal reflection from the Tower Hill staff and taking a deeper look into what Tower Hill is already doing. This includes looking at past/current programming and evaluations, in addition to collecting more information through observations (see Observation Checklist below). This serves to see where Tower Hill is already succeeding and to find areas that are growing edges. Step one has two main components: staff meetings and observations. Both of these efforts will work to establish a baseline that can be referred to throughout the needs assessment process.

TOOLS:

Staff Meetings:

These meetings allow staff to dive deeper into past and current documentation. Creating a concise version of institutional programming history can help inform where to go in the future. Items like past evaluations and programming schedules can be important tools when building a foundation, it is better to know where you've been and where you are before moving forward. Staff meetings are also an opportunity for staff to share experiences and data that might not be easily found in the written record. Personal reflections and stories should be documented and combined with the other information to create a more holistic picture of past and current programming at Tower Hill. These meetings are for staff to work together to create lists of community resources, compare current offerings to Tower Hill's mission, and envision what the staff wants Tower Hill to become. Lastly, staff meetings provide time and space to ensure that all members are on the same page and have a clear understanding of the desired outcomes.

Observation Checklist: (example checklist can be found in on page 8.)

The observation checklist has two main types of questions- who is coming and what are they doing? The first type not only looks at the total number of individuals, important raw data, but also focuses on groupings of people. This type of information is useful for determining structures for programs. For example, a program that is catered for an individual would look different than a program designed for 10. The second type of question focuses on certain behaviors. This gives insight on how people are *actually* using the space, which can be different than what someone might say how they use the space. For example, a high percentage of visitors might report in a survey that they read every sign in the garden, because that's what they think Tower Hill wants to hear. However, observations could show that only a small percentage of people actually read the signs. This makes observation a method of collecting data that limits errors found in self-reporting. That being said it is important to have a brief meeting with those who will be making the observations beforehand to provide any needed clarification or answer any questions. Doing this helps ensure that there aren't variations in the interpretation of the behaviors and provides more accurate/reliable information.

Note, when performing an observation, please ensure that visitors are made aware through signage or other method that observations are being made so they have an option to not participate should they so choose.

TOWER HILL BOTANIC GARDEN Observation Checklist

_____ Exhibit or Event being observed

_____ Name of Observer

_____ Date and Time

This sheet is designed for passive observations of visitors ONLY and is not intended to be used during a structured activity. **PLEASE NOTE:** when conducting observations of this kind it is important to ensure visitors are aware that observations are happening through signage or similar methods.

_____ Length of observation

Approx. total number of people observed _____ total

How many people per group? (one tally for each group observed)

_____ 1

_____ 2

_____ 3-5

_____ 6-9

_____ 10-15

_____ 15+

OBSERVED BEHAVIORS:

Tally for each person who completes a given behavior

| Behavior | Tallies |
|---|---------|
| Shared finding(s) with another person(s) | |
| Interacted with staff member(s) | |
| Exchange pleasantries | |
| Asked question | |
| In depth conversation | |
| Used a sense other than sight | |
| Taste | |
| Smell | |
| Touch | |
| Listen | |
| What did they do in the exhibit? | |
| Walked through | |
| Stopped and read signage | |
| Stopped and looked at a plant | |
| Stopped and observed other natural phenomenon | |
| Sat and/or lingered in the space | |
| Other: _____ | |

Please include any other observations or overhead quotes on the back of the sheet!

STEP 2: WHERE DO WE GO NEXT?

OVERVIEW:

Step two is about getting the visitor, both current and potential, perspective on programming at Tower Hill. This means finding out what type of programs they would prefer (i.e. workshops, tours, etc.) as well as the subject matter for said programs. When collecting this type of information it is important to have multiple sources in order form a more complete picture. While the survey is the most prominent form of data collection in this step, there are a few other methods that can be used to help in conjunction.

TOOLS:

Survey: (example survey can be found on pages 11-12)

The survey is a way to ask a large number of people a variety of questions with minimal staff inputs. Ideally this survey would be made available in a paper form and given out to visitors at the gatehouse when entering Tower Hill. Additionally, the survey should be made available in a digital form and distributed through email lists, the Tower Hill website, Tower Hill's Facebook Page, even through flyers with QR codes. The digital format allows the survey to be dispersed more extensively, reaching an audience of potential new visitors. The biggest concern with surveys is getting a low return rate which can be overcome by incentivizing participation through a prize. This also encourages participants to leave contact information which can be used as a method to prevent duplicate entries.

The survey has questions centered on four different ideas. The first is pretty straight forward in determining why or why not people are coming to the gardens. The wording of the question is specific to dig down to what qualities of the programs are attracting people. This is in contrast to a question asking what programs have you been to before which would provide data about what programs are popular. That type of information could be ascertained through ticket sales or an attendance records. The second idea is getting at what structure of programs people would like to see. The reason behind asking about time versus asking for a particular structure is that results are dependent on the participant knowing what different program structures entail. Time is a universal metric that is constantly on people's minds and can be translated into a program format. For example, a few hours = workshop, while all day = festival. The third idea centers on the content that people would like to see in Tower Hill programs. Much like the above question, this question gets to that topic in a more round about way. If the question were to ask something along the lines of "what topics are you interested in?" the result is not necessarily that a participant would attend a program on that topic. For example, I am interested in bonsai trees but I would not go out of my way to attend a bonsai program. By answering how they already spend their time shows motivation to seek out activities of a certain theme. Then, just like before, these types can be translated to areas of content, i.e. physical = nature walks or locally oriented = native flora. The last question asks about participating in a focus group and is a way to create a resource to draw from if focus groups are a tool to be pursued. For more information about focus groups see page 10.

STEP 2: WHERE DO WE GO NEXT?

TOOLS CONT'D:

Focus Groups:

Focus groups are useful for having more in depth conversations on topics of interest or to further investigate interesting findings gleaned from another evaluation tool. *Focus* on a particular theme or topic and be structured just enough to keep conversation on track with enough flexibility to let the participants guide the conversation. Be respectful of participants time and ask questions that require in-depth or extensive responses and that cannot be gathered from other sources.

Instagram Contest:

This stage can also include an Instagram Contest, which pairs nicely with Tower Hill's strong social media presence. Asking a question that relates to the type of content visitors would like to see with a corresponding hashtag is a fun and creative way for visitors to express their interests. Participants can then vote on their favorite, narrowing down the pool until there is a winner. This not only expands the reach of the evaluation but helps spread the word about Tower Hill in the process.

Kid's Drawing:

This is a way to get the children's point of view. It is as simple as having children draw a picture with prompt such as "If you could design your own program at Tower Hill, what would it be?" After the drawing is complete has each child explain what they made and have a staff member take notes to record the vision.

Mural Concept Map:

In the conservatory or library hang a large sheet of paper on one wall. In the middle, have a central topic and invite visitors to build ideas off that topic either through words or drawings. This is a visual and passive way to collect visitors thoughts and extended the same conversation across multiples days or groups.

Token Voting:

Token voting works much like any voting system. However, instead of indicating preference vocally or via paper, token voting works by distributing physical items (i.e. beads or acorns) to visitors and asking them to cast their vote on a given topic by placing their token in the corresponding receptacle. This is a passive, but hands-on way to see which choice visitors would prefer.

TOWER HILL PROGRAMMING SURVEY

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Tower Hill is working on improving its program offerings to better serve visitors. To show appreciation for your time completing this survey, if you fill out the contact portion on the back of this survey and bring it to the gift shop, you will be entered for a chance to win a special prize from Tower Hill Botanic Garden! Please know that your responses will remain confidential and any contact information you provide will not be used for anything except to notify the winner of the prize.

Have you been to Tower Hill before? (choose one, then see below)

Yes

No

If **yes**, what keeps you coming back to the gardens?

If **no**, what has prevented you from coming?

How much time are you willing to commit to coming to a program? (choose one)

30mins

Half-Day

If **other** please specify:

1hour

All Day

3hours

Other

What type of activities do you seek out in your free time? (choose all that apply)

Physical

Educational

If **other** please specify:

Locally Oriented

Leisure

Creative

Other

- PLEASE TURN ME OVER -

If you want to be entered for a chance to win a special prize from Tower Hill Botanic Garden please leave an email address or phone number below. Please know that your responses will remain confidential and any contact information you provide will not be used for anything except to notify the winner of the prize. (see below)

Email Address.....

Phone Number (with area code).....

Would you be interested in participating in a focus group (one evening, for 2 hours) to further help Tower Hill improve its program offerings?

Yes

No

If **yes**, please make sure to leave contact information in the spaces available above.

STEP 3: INFORMATION ANALYSIS

OVERVIEW:

Analyzing the collected data and information is the most rewarding part of the evaluation process and can also be the most time consuming. Most analysis depends on what data is actually collected and what the ultimate use for the data is. Keep in mind that not every equation or method is appropriate given the data set. That being said based on the type of data, quantitative or qualitative, there are some overarching methods to use as a starting point.

DATA TYPES:

Quantitative:

For most of the quantitative information that is collected, performing simple calculations such as averages, medians, or modes (most common) will probably be the most useful as data sets will not be complex enough to warrant more in-depth statistical analysis tests. After these initial tests, transforming the results into either percents or fractions will most likely be the more beneficial. This type of information can then easily be converted into visual representations such as charts or graphs which are useful when reporting findings.

Qualitative:

For the qualitative data; quotes, stories, pictures, etc., the best method will probably be the development of a coding scheme. This could be predetermined or emergent coding and will depend on the situation and use of the information. Once coded, the information could then be transformed into a quantitative form and transformed into the charts and graphs discussed above. Additionally with qualitative data, don't be afraid to embrace the ephemeral qualities it possesses and try qualitative means of representations like word-clouds or art.

STEP 4: REPORT AND USE

OVERVIEW:

Arguably more important than collecting the information is using it. To most effectively use the information collected through the needs assessment, the method in which that information is reported should be carefully considered. A report for internal use is much different than a summary given to a potential funder. Regardless of what the specific use is, it is important to keep the context and end user in mind. Remember that not all the information is necessarily useful for every end user and to try to focus on findings that are interesting, practical or that can impact decisions. Below are various end users of the information and suggested tips about reporting information to them. Below are just some potential uses and reporting strategies that would be possible.

INTERNAL:

- Full written report that includes charts, graphs, and statistics. This becomes a resource for future programming decisions.
- Visual representation of the information that could be easily referred to in future staff meetings.
- Outline of the major findings as a quick reference chart for staff to keep at their desks.

EXTERNAL:

- Large visual representation of the ideas collected to be displayed for Tower Hill visitors to see. This allows participants to see what was done with the information collected.
- Full report available through the Tower Hill website.
- One sheet summaries on various topics to be given to potential future funders or partner organizations.
- Key findings report and corresponding short presentation for the Worcester County Horticulture Society.
- Summarizing digital presentation with clear graphics and highlights for other stakeholders.

POTENTIAL IMPACT ON TOWER HILL

- 1) Increased visitation numbers including higher number of returning visitors and higher numbers of new visitors.
- 2) The creation of a resource that illustrates need and justification of to present to future funders of programming efforts.
- 3) More efficient use of Tower Hill resources, including staff time, money, and land.
- 4) Development of a unified vision of future programming amongst the staff and the creation of leadership and creative opportunities.
- 5) A robust programming schedule that meets the needs of visitors while pursuing the mission of Tower Hill Botanic Garden.