THE IMPACT OF SPECIAL EVENTS AT PUBLIC GARDENS:
IS BIGGER BETTER?

A Thesis
Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Cornell University
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Professional Studies

by
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May 2008
ABSTRACT

The following paper describes a research project studying the impact of special events at public gardens. The purpose of this study was to explore the relative benefits of large blockbuster events over smaller non-blockbuster events. A key aim was to assess the impact of special events on measureable garden economic trends, such as visitation, revenue, gift shop sales, and membership. For this project, special events were referred to as “large events,” defined as “any special event not part of the daily activities and operations of the garden (exhibits, festivals, etc.).” The main steps of this study were to find out how garden leaders felt about the relative costs and benefits of events; identify what kind of events gardens have held in the past five years; and assess how these events have driven economic trends. Data was collected through a three-part survey sent to 62 directors of large public gardens. The survey had a 42% response rate.

Key findings were:

1) Garden directors considered large events beneficial to public gardens, citing increased visitation and publicity as top event benefits. They also recognized that large events cause disruption at public gardens, citing diverted staff time and high impact/damage to grounds as the most prevalent disruptions.

2) A construct by which to evaluate events was proposed by one garden director. According to this director, events fall into three categories: events that embody the mission, events that reflect the mission, and events that create revenue and/or visitation to promote the mission of the garden.

3) A total of 257 large events were reported by the study gardens, with events falling into two broad categories: blockbusters and non-blockbusters.
Non-blockbuster events were further categorized by event type, with the three most common event types being holiday/cultural events, garden collection-specific events, and art events. The blockbuster events reported included Dale Chihuly’s glass exhibit and Dave Roger’s Big Bugs.

4) The Chihuly exhibit was found to have a significant positive impact on visitation and gift shop sales, whereas Big Bugs was not found to significantly impact any of the economic measures.

5) Among non-blockbuster events, only the holiday/cultural event type was found to have a significant positive impact on visitation. The other top event types had positive, though not significant effects on visitation.

6) Assessment of individual garden trends suggested that the positive impact of blockbusters events on visitation, while significant, may be short lived. Contrastingly, some evidence suggested the positive impact of non-blockbusters on visitation, though not significant, may be more subtle and longer lasting.

7) Data also suggested that non-blockbuster events are ingrained in the normal operations of public gardens, require less investment than blockbusters, and can be held sustainably on an annual basis at gardens.

Based on these findings, an event model was proposed for public garden professionals to use in evaluating their currently held events and in making future event-related decisions. This event model, as well as the findings of this study can be used by garden leaders to help set effective event planning strategies.
Miriam Pinsker received a BS from Cornell University in 2004 in Natural Resources Conservation with a concentration in Applied Ecology. Prior to her graduate studies, she worked on Capitol Hill as an environmental policy congressional intern, and worked in resource management at Yellowstone National Park. Miriam has served as a volunteer at the Atlanta Botanical Garden and as an intern at Cornell Plantations and the Rio Grande Botanic Garden. Following the completion of her graduate studies, she will serve for one year as the Curatorial Intern at the Scott Arboretum.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the members of my committee, Dr. Donald Rakow, Dr. Sonja Skelly, and Dr. Eric Eisenstein, for their insight, guidance, and support in making this project possible. I also thank Cornell Plantations for providing me with a fellowship in the Master of Professional Studies program in Public Garden Leadership. Finally, I thank my friends and family for the love and support with which they provide me in all that I do.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Public gardens are important parts of the cultural landscape in the cities and towns in which they are present. People visit gardens for a multitude of reasons – to learn, to recreate, to experience a sense of peace and tranquility, to observe beauty. Similarly, gardens exist for different reasons and, as such, are driven by different missions. These missions are varied and wide-ranging, from educating the public about and researching horticulture and conservation issues, to connecting plants and human culture. In order to promote their respective missions, public gardens must have the proper resources—an adequate operating budget, a solid base of staff and volunteers, committed donors and sponsors—with which to manage all aspects of the garden. In addition to possessing these resources, gardens must also have the ability to attract visitors. What good is a mission, if there are no visitors with whom to communicate it?

Ideally, the botanical collection itself, with its associated educational displays and programs, is enough to attract visitors to a public garden; however, this is often not the case. A large majority of potential visitors to cultural institutions, such as public gardens, are general cultural tourists, rather than specific cultural tourists (Richards, 1996), meaning they view cultural tourism activities, such as visiting a botanical garden, as secondary to activities like sporting events, shopping, and sightseeing (Tweed, 2005). This point sheds light on a challenge gardens face: how can gardens attract visitors when people tend to instead gravitate towards activities like shopping and watching sports? Even within the realm of cultural tourism, there exists the challenge that gardens must compete with other nearby cultural institutions for visitors. In addressing this challenge, it is interesting to note that general cultural
tourists are attracted to “living culture,” a cultural experience distinguished by the ability to engage people, rather than just expose them to specific objects or sites (Richards, 1996). These findings suggest that gardens must offer visitors unique and actively engaging experiences, rather than just horticultural displays, in order to remain competitive.

Special events may offer public gardens these added opportunities for visitor attraction and engagement, beyond the usual experience of visiting the garden grounds. Whereas in 2005, only 7% of U.S. adult travelers visited a botanical garden, 75% of U.S. adult travelers attended a cultural activity or event that same year (Travel Industry Association of America, 2005). Events can help change cultural tourists’ perceptions of gardens as active and engaging places to visit, rather than just museums for plants. Especially in today’s cultural landscape, where there are so many institutions—museums, historic sites, and other cultural venues—vying for the public’s attention, events may offer gardens a way to set themselves apart from the crowd and create unique and compelling reasons for tourists and community members to visit their grounds (Piacentini and Casciato, 2003). In addition to their potential to attract visitors, special events also may offer opportunities for enhanced visitor entertainment, education, revenue generation, publicity, and member and donor cultivation at the garden.

This paper will examine the issue of special events at public gardens. It will help identify the types of events public gardens are currently holding, garden leaders’ opinions of special events at public gardens, and the goals that garden leaders set for the events held at their gardens. This paper will also analyze the impact of certain events—including blockbuster exhibitions—on public gardens, looking at metrics such as visitation, revenue, gift shop sales, and membership. Lastly, recommendations
will be offered to public garden professionals as to how they should make event-related decisions, based on their desired organizational goals.
Events at Cultural Institutions

Before delving into the issue of large events at public gardens, it will be useful to examine the impact of large events among other organizations and cultural institutions. Holding special events has become an increasingly popular trend in the public garden field in recent years (Schwerner, 2003); however, holding special events for the purpose of achieving organizational goals has been a long-time practice among other groups, such as city chambers of commerce, museums, and other cultural institutions and associations (Bean, 1994).

Some examples of events these groups hold include: large-scale sporting events and political conventions in major cities (Surowiecki, 2006); tradeshows or exhibitions at city convention centers (Bond, 2007); traveling blockbuster exhibits in event spaces and at museums (Kinnaird, 2007, and Granberry and Levinthal, 2007); regional festivals in towns and cities (Smith, 2007 and Frost, 2006); and fundraising events (Cap-Labrosse, 2004). Associated with each of these events are distinct benefits and detriments.

It is without a doubt that with events come economic benefit. According to the Tourism Works for America Report, special events are becoming increasingly popular tourist attractions, with non-local tourists contributing up to 54% of the direct economic impact to an area (Hotel and Motel Management, 1996). The ‘Tutankhamun and the Golden Age of the Pharaohs’ traveling exhibition, for example, had an approximately $168-million economic impact in Los Angeles in 2005 and a $150-million economic impact when the exhibition traveled to Fort Lauderdale that next year (Granberry and Levinthal, 2007). Revenue that cities garner from renting
public venues for events also has significant positive economic impact. In 2006, public space booked through London’s venue enquiry service equated to £77-million of economic impact to the city (Bond, 2007).

The significant economic impact from events is largely attributable to the sheer increase in visitation brought on by the events. Since 1996, “BODY WORLDS: The Anatomical Exhibition of Real Human Bodies,” has attracted over 20 million visitors in 35 cities around the world, making it the most attended traveling exhibit in the world and bringing significant economic benefit to its host cities (Kinnaird, 2007). The earlier mentioned King Tut traveling exhibition brought an average of 700,000 visitors over four-month periods, at each of its four US tour destinations (Santiago, 2006). Even special events in smaller communities can bring thousands of visitors, significantly boosting overall tourism to the area (Smith, 2007). Not only is it clear from these numbers that events are successful in attracting large number of visitors to cities, museums, and other cultural attractions, but events also can attract visitors who would not otherwise visit an area. The Pueblo Convention Center—built in 1997 and having already served as a venue for over 2000 banquets, conventions, meetings, and trade shows and exhibitions—has attracted over half a million visitors to the city, who would otherwise not have had a reason to visit the relatively unknown town of Pueblo, Colorado (Bonham, 2007). This example also underscores the importance of cities and cultural institutions having the appropriate infrastructure to support these beneficial events.

Having established that events attract large numbers of visitors to an area, and subsequently boost the local economy, it is important to discuss the specific sources of this economic benefit. When tourists attend an event, they spend money not only at the event itself, but also in the surrounding area. Examples of tourist expenditures, beyond the cost of event attendance, include food, lodging, transportation, and
shopping (Tourism Works for America Council, 1996). However, not all visitors or tourists are created equal. The cultural tourist—that is, an individual visiting an area for the purpose of visiting museums or other cultural institutions—is of greater benefit than other visitors, in that a cultural tourist spends more money and remains for a longer time in the given area (Davidson, 2007). This idea suggests that events held by museums and other cultural institutions bring a higher quality of economic benefit to an area than do other tourist destinations or activities.

Furthermore, there is evidence that one event in an area can positively impact many neighboring attractions, because when tourists attend one event, they often stay and visit other places in the vicinity. When two national recreational vehicle events, the Rally and the Family Motor Coach Association Annual Convention, were held in Redmond, Oregon in 2007, the executive director of the Redmond Chamber of Commerce Convention & Visitor Bureau stated that the events were “a boom for all different attractions in Central Oregon” (McDonald, 2007). With the realization that an event at one cultural institution can create a ripple effect, neighboring cultural institutions can start being strategic in the use of their events. During an international seminar on urban tourism held in Croatia in 2001, presenters suggested that, in any given tourist region, events and activities can be bundled in a “common package” for tourists, in ways that lead to maximum benefit for all cultural institutions involved (Jelinčić, 2002). This strategy also resembles the new Arts and Culture plan of Monterey County, California, which plans to improve the local economy through creating relationships and partnerships with tourists departments and arts and culture groups in the area (Davidson, 2007). This kind of cultural tourism strategy that involves events and multiple organizations is just another example of the potential impact of special events.
Thus far, events have been discussed in the context of visitation and economic benefit as offshoots of the event itself. However, museums and cultural institutions often develop and host events specifically with the issue of fundraising in mind. Many leaders of non-profit organizations feel that the importance of fundraisers cannot be overstated (Cap-Labrosse, 2004). In addition to raising money through the event itself, fundraisers promote membership by linking events to membership benefits, such as member’s access to special exhibition openings and gala events (Cap-Labrosse, 2004). Fundraising by way of bolstering membership is beneficial to organizations because it helps strengthen the visitor’s sense of affiliation to the organization. This is often the case at museums, because members receive museum mailings, such as newsletters and event calendars (Fischer, 2006). Thus, members become more well-informed about the museum’s goings-on and can feel more connected to the museum. This increased sense of affiliation—brought about by membership involvement and special fundraisers and events—often leads to increased donor buy in and subsequent monetary benefit to organizations (Ensman, 1993).

While not undermining the significant monetary and economic benefit resulting from events, it is important to consider the benefits of events that stretch beyond what can be measured in economic terms. According to the Ontario Trillium Foundation’s “Economic Impacts of 97 Festivals and Events” (2003), festivals and events benefit geographical regions by “by strengthening communities, providing unique activities and events, building awareness of diverse cultures and identities, and acting as a source of community pride.” Through celebration, demonstration, and education, special events yield important power in bringing people together and unifying communities (Tourism Works for America Council, 1996).

These important points address the intangible benefits of events held by cities and communities; however, for cultural institutions, these intangible benefits lie
principally in people’s evolving perception of the institution itself. Events can serve as powerful tools to elevate the status of museums and cultural institutions. The Fort Lauderdale Museum of Art, for instance, is now recognized as one of South Florida’s leading cultural institutions as a result of hosting highly popular and successful large exhibitions like “Saint Peter and the Vatican: The Legacy of the Popes,” “Diana: A Celebration,” and “Tutankhamun and the Golden Age of the Pharaohs,” (PR Newswire, 2006). This elevation in status and prestige occurs largely as a result of the increased publicity that accompanies high-profile events and exhibitions (Bean, 1994).

Publicity is an especially important component of why many major cities choose to host what economists call mega-events, large-scale sporting events such as the Olympics and the Super Bowl, or high profile political conventions, such as the Democratic and Republican National Conventions (Surowiecki, 2004). Supporters of these events argue that they provide an economic boom, through tourist dollars spent and through the creation of new jobs. Likewise, the publicity surrounding these events is highly desirable — events are “pitched as advertisements for cosmopolitanism and comfort” and help build a city's brand name (Surowiecki, 2004). For these reasons, it is common for large cities to compete for the chance to host these mega-events.

Some economists, however, feel that the emphasis on holding these types of events is not warranted and that, in fact, mega-events rarely live up to their expectations. Mega-events drive tourism, but they also drive away locals and disrupt the normal operations of the city, which can result in overall decreases in productivity (Surowiecki, 2004). Likewise, mega-events often require months and even years of preparation that are both expensive and disruptive to the city long before the event even occurs. After hosting the Democratic National Convention in 2000, Michael Collins, executive vice president of the Los Angeles Convention and Visitors Bureau, stated that “on a dollar-for-dollar basis you'd be better off with a national
gastroenterologists convention" (Albright and Karp, 2002). This sentiment suggests that it may be more beneficial for cities to pass over mega-events and instead focus on holding smaller, but more frequent events, such as tradeshows and small-scale conferences that make use of already established convention center space and involve less disruption and stress to the local community (Kinnaird, 2007). As Surowiecki (2004) notes, these type of events are “less glamorous but more profitable, and a lot less trouble.” The approach of focusing on smaller-scale events can also be more practical for smaller cities and towns, which often do not even possess the infrastructure to hold large-scale events (Bonham, 2007). However, despite these leanings towards the benefits of smaller events, the allure and the potential for large returns offered by mega-events still remain.

**Events at Gardens**

Public gardens can certainly learn about the impact of special events by studying large events at other organizations and meaningfully connecting the information to the public garden field. However, it will also be useful to review what is already known about large events at public gardens.

Public gardens, just as other cultural institutions, must create memorable visitor experiences to ensure long-term success (Piacentini and Casciato, 2003). As Pine and Gilmore (1999) write in *The Experience Economy*, memorable experiences are “events that engage individuals in a personal way.” As such, it can be inferred that holding events may serve as a crucial element to the success of a public garden.

While event planning has become a recent trend in public gardens, some have held events since their inception. The Royal Tasmanian Botanic Garden has been a site for cultural and recreational events since 1845, with a superintendent who felt strongly that botanic gardens, “while primarily scientific institutions, also needed to
offer pleasure and relaxation to the public” (Ross, 2006). This thought is in line with an 1895 article on the responsibility of museums. This article, indicating that “the zoological park, the botanic garden and the aquarium are essentially museums” and that the “principals of museum administration are entirely applicable to them,” also states that one of their principal responsibilities is “to serve the great general public, through the display of attractive exhibition series” (Goode, 1895). These early opinions appear to support events as an important component to public garden operations.

Perhaps taking cues from their predecessors, many gardens in recent years have begun to more closely incorporate special events and exhibits into their operations strategy. The Des Moines Botanical Center, for example, attracts visitors through offering more than 2,000 events yearly, including seasonal holiday celebrations, jazz concerts, children’s programs, and opera performances. The garden is “more than a place for plants, the garden is a place for people,” says Matt Rosen, director of Des Moines’ Division of Parks and Recreation (Benfield, 2002). Phipps Conservatory—well known for over 100 years for their seasonal flower shows—has recently adopted a strategy of spacing out smaller-scale exhibits to increase attendance during non-flower show months (Piacentini and Casciato, 2003).

With the advent of more special events at public gardens, certain types of events have risen up to become especially popular and commonplace. For instance, “garden railroading,” the incorporation of model railroads into the garden scenery, can be seen throughout the public garden world (Hayward, 2001). Butterfly exhibitions and festivals also rank high in popularity, as do musical events, like summer concerts series (Bleck, 2006). In fact, John Lord, a cultural tourism consultant, believes that there is a natural marriage between gardens and music (Benfield, 2002). Similar to the above-mentioned Phipps’ seasonal flower shows, most of these popular events are
held annually and are spaced throughout the year, as part of an event strategy that encourages year-round visitation.

While many gardens take the smaller, more frequent approach to event planning, others follow a strategy involving the use of big blockbuster events at their gardens. Blockbuster events require large amounts of planning and money, and gardens that host them must possess sufficient infrastructure to meet the space and resource needs of these events (Maunder, 2007). In a sense, blockbuster events at public gardens are analogous to the previously discussed mega-events at major cities. This comparison raises the same question Surowiecki (2004) poses with regards to mega-events: Are blockbuster events worth all of the effort, or are gardens better off focusing on smaller, less high-profile events?

To begin answering this question, it will be useful to look at the current body of knowledge surrounding blockbuster events at public gardens. Dale Chihuly’s glass art, featured at eight public gardens in the past decade, attracts attention wherever it travels. During Chihuly’s 11-month run at the Garfield Park Conservatory in 2001, over 600,000 visitors flocked to the conservatory, tripling visitation from the previous year (Schwerner, 2003). As a result of the Chihuly exhibit, Garfield Park Conservatory gained national publicity and was able to commence a revitalization project that positively impacted the conservatory and the Park neighborhood, both of which had been declining in previous years. The Garfield Park Conservatory was the first garden to host art installations by Dale Chihuly, and its huge success suggested that the inclusion of art at gardens enriches the visitor experience, and that the impact of these sorts of events can have a large impact that extends beyond the garden into the surrounding community. Another Chihuly example lies with the Atlanta Botanical Garden. When it hosted “Chihuly in the Garden” in 2004 for a nine-month run, the garden experienced a surge of success, with significant increases in visitation,
membership, and gift shop sales (Laufer, 2005). Just as with the Garfield Park Conservatory, the benefit of the Chihuly exhibit extended into the community, bringing in $50-60 million and 1,000 overnight hotel-stays to the City of Atlanta (Laufer, 2005).

These findings are very compelling, suggesting that blockbuster exhibitions have the capacity to bring enormous benefit to public gardens. However, in order to fully explore Surowiecki’s question as it relates to public gardens, a more in depth analysis is needed. More examples of blockbuster events, as well as the impact of smaller non-blockbusters events, need to be assessed. In exploring the value of blockbuster events, garden professionals will become better equipped to set effective event strategies, bringing overall benefit to their gardens and helping them remain competitive with other cultural institutions.
CHAPTER THREE
METHODS

In order to analyze the topic of special events at botanical gardens, a three-part survey was constructed and distributed to selected public gardens. The survey included both quantitative and qualitative data, closed- and open-ended questions, and aimed to investigate three principal questions:

1. How do garden leaders regard special events at gardens?
2. What events are public gardens currently holding?
3. What is happening at public gardens, in terms of measurable economic trends?

It was felt that investigating these issues would help determine the current climate surrounding events at public gardens and determine how currently held events are driving observed economic trends in public garden operations.

Survey questions were developed using information gathered from preliminary research on the topic of special events at public gardens. The survey (Appendix A, B, and C) was mailed, with an explanatory letter (Appendix D), to the directors of all the large public gardens—with the exception of Cornell Plantations—in the United States and Canada, totaling 62 gardens. Large gardens—classified by a yearly operating budget of at least $2.5 million (American Public Garden Association, 2006)—were chosen for this study because of their greater likelihood of holding special events, which would result in a potentially larger data set. The survey was sent out in early August 2007 and gardens were given a full month to respond (with the understanding that extensions would be granted). Electronic copies of the survey were also sent to the garden directors via email. In the explanatory letter, confidentiality was granted to
all potential participants, assuring the gardens that their name would not be attached to any information submitted.

**Survey components**

Throughout the three parts of survey and the subsequent analysis, special events were referred to as “large events.” “Large events” were defined as “any special event not part of the daily activities and operations of the garden (exhibits, festivals, etc.).”

While Part One of the survey was designed specifically to be answered by the director of a public garden, Part Two and Part Three were designed to be answered by the director or by a staff member the director deemed appropriate.

*Part One -*

Part One, “Questions for Directors” (see Appendix A), asked garden directors for their opinions of special events, both generally and specifically as they related to their garden. The format of this section was a combination of closed- and open-ended questions. All close-ended questions were on a 7-point scale, with 1 indicating either “Strongly Disagree” or “Never” and 7 indicating either “Strongly Agree” or “All the time.

*Part Two -*

Part Two of the survey, “Large Event Feedback Form” (Appendix B), asked for the details of the large events held at the garden over the past five years. For each event, garden staff members were asked to detail start and end dates, a description of the event, attendance numbers during the event, fees, primary goals, and the event’s perceived success on a 7-point scale, with 1 indicating “Not at all Effective” and 7 indicating “Completely Effective”.
Part Three -

Part Three of the survey, “Garden Data Request (Appendix C), asked for the following pieces of data over the past five years, in time increments at which they are tracked (e.g. – monthly, quarterly, yearly): garden visitation, total garden revenue, gift shop revenue, total number of members, number of new members, and number of member renewals. A template with which to tabulate this data was provided, but gardens were advised to submit the information in whatever manner was most convenient.

Survey Analysis

The statistics program, JMP 7.0, was employed for this study. Data from all three survey parts were transferred into a master data table in JMP that enabled a range of statistical analyses. Regression analysis and descriptive statistics were used to analyze trends. To facilitate effective analysis, data was transformed in several ways:

- To ensure confidentiality, gardens were assigned numbers to be used in place of the garden name. These numbers are used to refer to the garden name as well the garden’s director.
- Years reported were transformed to reflect each garden’s fiscal year, as economic measures were reported on a fiscal year basis which did not in all cases follow the calendar year. All listed years in this project refer to a garden’s fiscal year.
- In regression analyses, the log value of economic measures—visitation, revenue, gift shop sales, and membership—were used to diminish the impact of varying garden size upon results.
• In regression analyses, the garden name variable was randomized, under the assumption that the gardens included in the study are part of a larger pool of public gardens that follow a normal distribution.

• Qualitative data trends in open-ended questions were tabulated through identifying and tracking the frequency of key terms in directors’ quotations.

• Non-blockbuster events were categorized by type of event (e.g. – holiday, music, etc).
CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Survey Response

Of the 62 gardens sent the survey, 26 submitted finished surveys, with varying levels of completeness: 25 of 26 gardens completed Part One; 24 of 26 gardens completed Part Two; and 20 of 26 gardens completed Part Three. Among the gardens that submitted Part Three, 9 gardens provided a complete set of data on all the requested economic measures.

Part One – Questions for Directors

Respondents reported holding large events frequently; the mean number of events reported was 5.15 per year (sd=3.99), with a median of 4.5 events per year. A summary of directors’ responses to Questions 2-7 can be found in the Table 1. These responses are on a 7-point scale, with 1 indicating “strongly disagree,” 7 indicating “strongly agree”, and 4 representing neutrality. The t-statistics in Table 1 tested the actual mean against an expected neutral mean (4/7), and indicated that all responses, except those to questions 3 and 5, swayed towards the “strongly agree” side of the spectrum, rather than resting at neutrality.

Table 1. Part One Responses to Questions 2-7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions about Large Events**</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>T-statistic</th>
<th>P-value*</th>
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<tr>
<td>2. Events are beneficial to public gardens.</td>
<td>5.92/7</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>t(23)=9.64</td>
<td>&lt;0.0001*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Given the ability, we would hold more events.</td>
<td>3.92/7</td>
<td>1.98</td>
<td>t(23)=-0.21</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Events are effective in achieving goals.</td>
<td>5.08/7</td>
<td>1.79</td>
<td>t(23)=2.96</td>
<td>0.007*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Events cause disruption in the garden.</td>
<td>4.5/7</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>t(23)=1.25</td>
<td>0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Events are great ways to expand audience.</td>
<td>6.04/7</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>t(23)=10.01</td>
<td>&lt;0.0001*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Events should relate to core garden mission.</td>
<td>5.71/7</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>t(23)=5.41</td>
<td>&lt;0.0001*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Significant at p<0.05

**Questions paraphrased to save space (refer to Appendix A)
As indicated in Question 2, “Large events are beneficial to public gardens,” respondents regarded large events as beneficial to public gardens. Event benefits cited by respondents can be found in Table 2.

Table 2. Event Benefits Cited by Garden Directors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># Times Cited</th>
<th>Event Benefits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Increase visitation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Publicity and marketing/increase institutional visibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Expand/diversify audiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Revenue generation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Promote/support garden mission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Connect garden to community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Increase membership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Educate covertly (get people in the door)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Engage/attract donors, sponsors, and officials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Expose visitors to value of the garden beyond the event itself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Visitor enjoyment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Remain competitive with other cultural institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Encourage staff to do their best work</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The director of Garden 107 encapsulated several of these benefits in his response:

“Large events such as exhibitions are beneficial to botanical gardens because they enable us to communicate our mission more broadly to an expanded number of visitors, some of which might not have been aware otherwise.”

In addition, some directors, such as Director 104, discussed the benefits of publicity and audience diversification that events provide, especially as a result of higher profile events, such as blockbusters:

“They provide an opportunity to build visibility and an audience. Gardens take time to grow and to ‘show.’ I’ve noticed, over the years, how ‘non-living’ museums, such as art museums, benefit from the opportunity that doing ‘blockbuster’ shows provides. There is an opportunity to obtain press
coverage, an opportunity (through the formulations and creation of the ‘show’) to cultivate an audience or develop a new one.”

Another sentiment expressed is that botanical collections are not enough; public gardens need events to create compelling reasons for visitation:

“Given the demand for the public’s discretionary time and money, Gardens are in a very competitive market, and not just with other not-for-profits. As much as I hate to say it ‘just plants’ are not enough to bring them in, especially for most young establishing gardens. Special events introduce a ‘new’ public to our gardens and remind past visitors that it’s time to revisit.” (Director 105)

A complete list of directors’ descriptions of event benefits is located in Appendix E. While respondents agreed that large events are beneficial to public gardens, they also recognized, although not significantly, that events cause disruption in the garden (Question 5, Table 1). Top disruptions cited by directors are diverted staff time, and high impact and damage to grounds (Table 3).

Table 3. Event Disruptions Cited by Garden Directors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># Times Cited</th>
<th>Event Disruptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Divert staff time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>High impact/cause damage to grounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>High expense and hidden costs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Disrupt regular visitors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Large recovery time to return to normal operations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Disrupt local community</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These disruptions—namely those that impact staff work—can result in decreased staff morale. In the words of Director 105, “If we had many more events the staff would mutiny.” Furthermore, many directors cited these disruptions as limiting factors in how many events their gardens hold. Director 106 explained, “Staff time is considerable across all departments. We are currently exceeding the staff’s capacity to
carry out the existing roster of events.” Likewise, Director 122 said, “Current staffing levels prevent us from holding more events.”

While conscious of the various disruptions resulting from large events, directors still recognized ways in which these disruptions can be mitigated:

“Large events can be considered disruptive to staff and visitors; however as part of a culture shift, such “disruptions” can be assimilated as an ongoing part of operations. Events do require significant staff effort during planning, execution, and aftermath. For effective coordination, communication is essential among various departments. It is also important to communicate to visitors who might be affected by plans that could be disruptive.”

(Director 112)

Other directors, like Director 126, highlighted the importance of evaluation of events:

“Events should be evaluated regularly to see if they have grown into something that does not reflect the goals of the garden and to evaluate if they: promote mission, public outreach, generate funding/donations, remain vibrant and not stale or routine, etc. They should be discontinued if they don’t meet expectations (before they become a burden). Events should always be evaluated as to the disruption to the gardens; this includes damage to grounds, displacement of staff time and function, and hidden costs.”

A full list of directorial responses to Question 5—regarding event disruptions—is located in Appendix F.

When asked whether there were events directors have regretted holding at their garden, 9 respondents said yes, while 12 said no (4 did not respond). Most who regretted events shared at least one of the following characteristics: guests were irresponsible and destructive; the event was not related to mission; expenses were high
without significant return; and flow of visitors overwhelmed garden operations. A complete description of regretted events can be found in Appendix G.

While many directors did not state feelings of regret towards any events, several noted lessons learned from events held in the past:

“Rather than say that we regretted having certain events, I’d say that we learned by having certain large events. We have had to get tough, lay down rules, and insist on various types of “reassurances” when renting to various community groups.” (Director 104)

“We have not regretted holding a large event at the Garden, but this is not to say we have not learned from our experiences in having them. For example, the logistics involved in managing large crowds is something we continue to work to refine.” (Director 107)

The director of Garden 126 expressed a similar attitude towards learning from past events. Furthermore, he/she suggested a construct to be used in evaluating events and in determining where a large event falls within the mission-related and operations-related goal spectrum of a public garden. This evaluation construct is composed of three categories:

1. Events that *embody* the mission of the garden
2. Events that *reflect* the mission of the garden
3. Events that create revenue and/or visitation to *promote* the mission of the garden.

Director 126 believes that “only category 1 events could lose money and be done again.” To clarify, category 3 events are in most cases non-mission related, but they create benefits that can be fed back into the mission.
Part Two – Large Event Feedback Form

A total of 257 events were reported by the 26 participating gardens in Part Two. The mean number of events reported by gardens was 2.94 events per year (sd=1.61), with a median of 2.5 events per year. This number contrasts with the number of yearly events reported by directors in Part One (mean=5.15), indicating that the data in Part Two may not represent a complete list of the events held at the gardens.

The events reported fell into two broad categories: blockbusters and non-blockbusters. Of special interest to this study are the blockbuster events reported by gardens. Two blockbuster events were reported: Dale Chihuly’s glass exhibit and Dave Roger’s Big Bugs exhibit. The Chihuly exhibit was reported at five gardens and Big Bugs was reported at three gardens. Among the non-blockbusters, events fell into several categories:

- Holiday or Cultural (e.g. – a Christmas lights show or Chinese new year celebration)
- Garden-specific (e.g. – a gala opening of a new garden or event highlighting a specific collection)
- Art (both performing—musical and theatrical—and visual)
- Seasonal (e.g. – a fall or spring festival)
- Plants (e.g. – an event celebrating a specific plant, like orchids)
- Regional (e.g. – an event celebrating a regional feature or distinction)
- External (e.g. – an event, such as one connected to a professional conference, that is hosted by an organization external from the garden)
- Plant sales
- Butterfly festivals
- Model railroad shows

The top three non-blockbuster event types reported were holiday/cultural, garden-specific, and art events. The non-blockbuster events reported were primarily annual events; therefore, multiple data points exist for these events, representing every year in which they were held.


Part Three – Garden Data Request

Four economic measures were assessed in Part Three: visitation, total garden revenue, gift shop sales, and membership (total, new, and renewals). As increased visitation was identified by respondents as the top benefit of events, and visitation was the measure most consistently reported, the data analysis focused primarily on the impact of reported events on garden visitation. Figure 1 details visitation trends at the study gardens. All gardens—with the exception of Gardens 105, 108, and 126—experienced an increase in visitation, indicated by a positive slope over the years reported. Some notable jumps in visitation—that can be seen more easily in Figure 2—occurred during certain years for Gardens 107, 109, 113, 116, and 125 (Figure 2).

![Figure 1. Visitation by year at study gardens](image-url)
Figure 2. Visitation at gardens holding Chihuly exhibit

The Chihuly glass exhibit occurred in the years at each of the labeled points. Chihuly was found to have a significant effect on increases in visitation (p=.0001) and gift shop sales (p=0.0026). Results from tests of significance of the Chihuly effect upon other economic measures can be found in Table 4.

Table 4. Chihuly Effect on Economic Measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Economic Measure*</th>
<th>Regression Coefficient</th>
<th>P-value**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visitation</td>
<td>.3812</td>
<td>.0001**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gift Shop Sales</td>
<td>.1668</td>
<td>.0026**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Revenue</td>
<td>.0559</td>
<td>.5238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total # Members</td>
<td>.0837</td>
<td>.1365</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Members</td>
<td>.8196</td>
<td>.2533</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renewal Members</td>
<td>.0990</td>
<td>.5619</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Log value

**Significant at p<0.05
The other blockbuster reported by gardens, Big Bugs, did not have a significant effect on visitation (p=.5847) or any other economic measure. Results from significance tests of the Big Bugs effect on other economic measures can be found in Table 5.

Table 5. Big Bugs Effect on Economic Measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Economic Measure*</th>
<th>Regression Coefficient</th>
<th>P-value**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visitation</td>
<td>.0809</td>
<td>.5862</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Revenue</td>
<td>-.1037</td>
<td>.9965</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gift Shop Sales</td>
<td>.0062</td>
<td>.9752</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total # Members</td>
<td>.1226</td>
<td>.9837</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Members</td>
<td>.9598</td>
<td>.8489</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renewal Members</td>
<td>-.0394</td>
<td>.6994</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Log value  
**Significant at p<0.05

The significance of non-blockbuster events on the economic measures was assessed for the top three event types: holiday/cultural celebrations, garden-specific events, and art events. Of these three, only the holiday/cultural celebration event category was found to have a significant positive effect on visitation (p=.0069). However, garden-specific and art events possessed positive regression coefficients, indicating that even though they did not significantly increase visitation, they still had a positive impact upon visitation. The mean visitation regression coefficient for the top three event types was 0.302, representing an associated 30% increase in garden visitation as a result of these top events, compared to the 4.8% change in visitation resulting from all other event types.
CHAPTER FIVE
DISCUSSION

At the outset of this study, the issue of blockbuster events/exhibitions was of primary interest. The Surowiecki (2004) article on mega-events highlighted an interesting question: should organizations hold mega-events, or in the case of gardens, blockbuster exhibitions? In analyzing data from the study gardens, it became clear that the answer to this question is not a simple yes or no. Results indicate that the Chihuly glass exhibit was the only large event—with the exception of one non-blockbuster event type—that significantly impacted the studied economic measures. Yet, these results do not signify that the Chihuly exhibit is the only worthwhile event for gardens to hold.

First, it is important to recognize that most public gardens do not possess the means— with regards to infrastructure and design—to hold an exhibit on the scale of a Chihuly exhibit. In the words of the director of Garden 114, “Most gardens were not designed with large events in mind. Therefore, oftentimes extraordinary measures must be taken to accommodate the events.” Even when these “extraordinary measures” are achievable, they often result in previously-discussed disruptions, such as diverted staff time and can cause declining staff morale and undue stress on the overall operations of the garden.

Next, it is important to point out that the benefits of events are not always accounted for by the studied economic measures, and thereby the results of the regression analysis alone are not enough to effectively guide decisions regarding what events gardens should hold. In revisiting the event benefits listed in Table 2, it can be seen that many of the benefits cited by directors are less quantifiable, such as increased publicity and institutional visibility; diversification of garden audience; and
increased connectedness to community. It can be argued that these benefits do impact economic trends; for instance, an increase in garden visibility and connectedness with the surrounding community may result in increased visitation. However, this effect may not be immediate and therefore will take longer to take the form of an actual economic benefit. This idea that some event benefits are less immediate could partially explain the steady upward economic trends seen at all but two of the gardens. So, while non-blockbuster events may not have a significant immediate impact on economic trends, they may have a less direct and perhaps long-term positive impact on these garden trends.

The immediate versus long-term effect of events is a factor to consider in weighing the relative benefits of different event types. As indicated by the results, non-blockbusters on the whole did not have measurable impact over the five-year time period analyzed, whereas the impact of Chihuly—especially on visitation—was seen over the period of just one year (Figure 1). In focusing in on Chihuly’s impact on visitation, however, it appears that Chihuly may provide only short-term gains and may not provide a sustained effect on visitation. Consider the visitation trend for Garden 125 (Figure 3).

![Figure 3. Visitation at Garden 125](image)
Clearly, there was a significant jump in visitation during 2004, the year Garden 125 hosted the Chihuly glass exhibit. However, in 2005, visitation returned to the same general trend line and slope it followed prior to holding Chihuly, suggesting that the visitation benefit of the Chihuly exhibit is perhaps short-lived, providing significant short-term gain, but uncertain and perhaps doubtful long-term gain.

Despite this caveat in the impact of Chihuly, there is still no denying the important potential Chihuly offers to gardens wishing an immediate boost in visitation. Consider the visitation trend at Garden 109.

![Figure 4. Visitation at Garden 109](image)

Visitation was on the decline for Garden 109 until 2006, when they hosted the Chihuly exhibit, and the garden consequently experienced a marked increase in visitation. Visitation information was not provided past 2006, so it was not possible to observe if Garden 109 experienced the same drop in visitation seen at Garden 125 following the Chihuly exhibit. Regardless, it is safe to say that the Chihuly exhibit results in extreme short-term gains in visitation, in contrast to the more subtle long-term gain perhaps associated with smaller non-blockbuster events. These differences are
important to consider, as they could be incorporated into a garden’s event-setting strategy.

Another important point to consider when weighing the relative benefits of smaller non-blockbuster events against the proven benefits of the Chihuly exhibit is the frequency by which each of these events are held. As mentioned before, many gardens do not have the ability to hold large blockbuster exhibitions. They are expensive, labor-intensive, and require adequate infrastructure to support exhibition space and increased visitation. Even at gardens possessing the ability to hold blockbusters, these high-investment events cannot be held with great frequency. By contrast, non-blockbuster events are less expensive, less labor intensive, and according to Part One survey data, are held with greater frequency. In a sense, these events, often referred to as special events, are not really “special” at all. These events are ingrained in the regular operations of public gardens. According to the director of Garden 102, “holding and implementing these events are both part of the annual plan and the annual budget,” and in the words of Director 112, the most effective events are ones that are “assimilated as an ongoing part of operations” (Appendix F).

More evidence that many events—namely annually held non-blockbusters—can be considered part of the normal operations of a garden came early on in the study, during the survey distribution process. As mentioned earlier, the definition of a large event was provided in the survey as “any special event not part of the daily activities and operations of the garden (exhibits, festivals, etc.)” (Appendix B). However, as gardens received and began to review the survey, several staff members had questions regarding what type of events to include in their responses. Specifically, individuals were confused by the designation of a special event as something outside of the “daily activities and operations” of their gardens, stating that their large events are a part of their normal operations. The confusion surrounding the classification of a special
event suggests that the definition of a large event employed by this survey should be reassessed for future studies; but more importantly, it reaffirms the idea that special events are ingrained in the normal operations of public gardens.

If non-blockbuster events are indeed ingrained in regular garden operations, it is interesting to evaluate what happens in the absence of these events. An example of this occurrence can be found in the visitation data for Garden 102 (Figure 5).

![Figure 5. Visitation at Garden 102](image)

Garden 102 reported holding one large annually-held event during 2003-2007. However, weather disturbances led them to cancel this event in 2004. The impact of this event cancellation on visitation can clearly be seen by the sharp dip in visitation during 2004, followed by an increase the following year when the annual event took place as scheduled. This observation, though just an example of one event at one garden, illustrates that the benefits of annually held events often go unseen until there is a disturbance to garden operations.

Up until this point, the relative benefits of events have been discussed primarily with regards to how different event types drive economic trends. However, event goals set by gardens are wide-ranging and do not always revolve around
economic benefits. These goals often vary based on individual garden factors, such as size, type (i.e.– botanical garden, arboretum, historic estate, etc.), funding sources, and principally, mission. The issue of how mission drives event planning at public gardens relates back to the construct for event evaluation proposed by the director of Garden 126 (Appendix G). To recap, Director 126 feels that all events can be placed in three categories:

1. Events that *embody* the mission of the garden
2. Events that *reflect* the mission of the garden
3. Events that create revenue and/or visitation to *promote* the mission of the garden

In his/her opinion, mission—not economics—is the ultimate measure by which to guide event decisions. In reference to the three described event categories, Director 126 feels that, “All of these should reflect positively on the institution and its mission” (Appendix G). In fact, he/she suggests that category 1 events—those that embody garden mission—can actually lose money and still be held again, thus placing fulfillment of mission above economic gain.

Though mission-centered, this construct also accounts for non-mission related events. These events, Director 126 believes, are justifiable when they create revenue and visitation benefits that can be fed back into the garden’s mission. Director 126 is not alone in this sentiment; as stated by Director 107, “…the earned income associated with large events supports all our programs including scientific research, children’s education and horticulture” (Appendix E). Blockbuster events, such as Chihuly, certainly fall under this category of events that are not necessarily mission-based but create benefits that can be redirected to support mission.

As indicated in question seven of the survey Part One (Table 1), directors agreed that events should relate to core mission (mean=5.71/7, at t(23)=5.41 and
p<0.0001). Thus, it can be said that an event construct focusing on mission-relatedness is one that will be useful for public garden professionals to use in evaluating their events. However, this construct—through the categorization of events—simply provides a framework by which garden leaders can begin to think about the events held. In order to address the complex decision-making process that leaders face in setting an effective event strategy, a more detailed model is necessary.

Based on the framework provided by Director 126 and in drawing from the findings of this study of the relative costs and benefits of events, a model was constructed (Figure 6) to aid public garden professionals in making event-related decisions.

![Figure 6. Event Model](image)

This model summarizes some of the relative costs and benefits associated with blockbuster and non-blockbuster events; provides a quick reference for gardens in classifying their current events; and offers a system by which gardens can consider future events.

To best explain this model, it will be useful to look at an example; consider a fictional garden with a mission to educate the public about edible plants. In the case
of this garden, a category 1 event—one that is directly tied to the garden’s mission—
could be a family educational event centered on the role edible plants play throughout
the world. A category 2 event for this garden could take form of a food and drink
festival that highlights edible plants, thus reflecting the garden’s mission. In applying
the study results to this scenario, these non-blockbuster events would increase garden
visitation, though not as significantly as if the garden chose to hold a non-mission-
based, category 3 blockbuster event like Chihuly. However, as category 1 and 2 non-
blockbuster events have shown to involve less investment than blockbusters, they will
be able to be held sustainably from year to year. In doing so, these events have the
potential to become ingrained in the year-to-year operations of the garden, and will
thereby possess more potential to provide subtle on-going and long-term gain to the
garden, than a blockbuster that must be held with less frequency.

Garden professionals who wish to set a new event strategy at their gardens can
use this model, working either from bottom to top or from top to bottom, thinking
about what goals they wish to achieve and how they wish to achieve them: How much
do they want to invest into events, in terms of staff time, money, and other such
factors? Do they want to achieve immediate gains, or focus on attaining more subtle
long-term gains? Do they want annually-held events or instead to focus on one-time
arrangements? Is it important for them to hold mission-based events or can they
justify events not directly tied to their garden’s mission? Once these questions have
been considered, garden professionals can determine which event categories or which
combination of event categories fit their goals and approach.

Not only can this model be useful in setting an event strategy, it can also be
used in assessing currently-held events. Assessment and evaluation are important
components of any event planning strategy; to reiterate an important point made by the
director of Garden 102: “Events need to be continually assessed so that they do not
become an end in themselves with the mission of the garden lost in the general flurry of event activity” (Appendix E). This sentiment especially applies to events that are not mission-based. In planning and executing non-mission-related events, such as blockbusters, it is important to ensure that these events do not become the garden’s focus and that they operate under the precept that their benefits will in some form be rolled back into the mission. On the other hand, in dealing with mission-based events, it is important to ensure that such events are serving their intended purpose and are not becoming a burden to the garden. Regardless of the events gardens choose to hold, Director 126 summarizes nicely in saying, “A garden should not simply become a venue for events; rather it should be a garden that has events to promote the mission and operations of the institution” (Appendix F).

In addition to aiding with evaluation, the event model may be used to involve garden staff with the event planning process. As mentioned earlier, staff morale can suffer as a result of disruption from large events. By involving staff with event decisions and brainstorming, it may be possible to gain staff buy-in for garden events and thereby stave off any declines in staff morale that arise due to miscommunication of event motivations and goals. Furthermore, encouraging staff to participate in the development of an event strategy can lead to feelings of empowerment and ownership that improve employee productivity and job satisfaction (Heldenbrand, 2007). In that sense, involving staff members with event planning and with reviewing the event model may be an effective managerial strategy.

**Concluding Remarks**

As often is the case with research, the results of this study led to the formation of questions and considerations other than those originally proposed, some that were addressed in this study and others that must be addressed by future studies. Future
research on large events at public gardens may benefit from addressing blockbuster events and non-blockbuster events separately. A study on just blockbuster exhibits, for instance, would allow for an in-depth analysis of a greater number of blockbuster exhibits, including but not limited to traveling art exhibitions by Henry Moore, Niki de Saint Phalle, Fernando Botero, and Roy Lichtenstein. Likewise, a study limited to non-blockbuster events would allow for a more focused study, without the confounding effects of blockbusters held at the study gardens. For future research on blockbusters exhibitions, large gardens would still be an appropriate choice for survey gardens; however, for any future research looking at the impact of non-blockbuster events, it would be beneficial to include gardens of all sizes in the study, since both small and large gardens hold smaller-scale non-blockbuster events and exhibitions.

Another recommendation for future research is to carefully consider the definition of a large event before developing a survey instrument. Although a definition was provided to gardens in this study, garden leaders interpreted it differently, signaling that the definition used was too vague. To avoid any ambiguity, it would be beneficial to quantify the term in some manner. Possible ways to do so would be to define a large event based on its time-span, percentage of attendance it draws, or how much financial investment is involved in the event relative to the garden’s everyday operations.

In conclusion, what began as a question, of whether or not gardens should hold blockbuster exhibits, ended up as an examination of the decision-making process involved in setting effective event strategies for public gardens. Results showed that these strategies should incorporate both economic and less quantifiable impacts of events, and they should also account for individual differences in the missions and organizational goals of gardens. The proposed event model can be used to assess currently held events, guide future event-related decisions, and involve garden staff
with the event planning process. Ideally, the findings of this study, the development of the event model, and future research on the subject of large events will equip public garden professionals with the knowledge and tools necessary to successfully plan and evaluate events at public gardens.
APPENDIX A

Survey Part One - Questions for Garden Director

Public Garden Name: ____________________________________________________________

Name of Director: ___________________________ Email Address: ____________________________

For the sake of this project, a “large event” should be considered any special event not part of the
daily activities and operations of the garden. Most of these events possess definite start and end
dates, and they can range from being a one-day festival to a several month-long exhibition.

Please circle your numbered response (if you wish to further expand on any of your responses,
feel free to write on the back or in the margins):

1. The garden with which I am affiliated holds large events.
   Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 All the time
   Please specify the relative frequency of large events at your garden (1-2/year, 3-4/year, 5-6/year?):

2. Large events are beneficial to public gardens.
   Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree
   Why do you feel this way?: ____________________________________________________________

3. If we had the ability, we would hold more large events at our garden.
   Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

4. Large events are effective in achieving my garden’s goals.
   Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

5. Large events cause disruption in the garden.
   Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree
   If you circled numbers 5-7 on the scale, please explain further: ____________________________

6. Holding a large event is a great way to expand my garden’s audience.
   Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Agree

7. Large events should relate to the core mission of my garden.
   Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 In all cases

8. Have there been large events that you have regretted having at your garden? If so, what type of event was it and what were its drawbacks?

Please continue on additional sheets if necessary.
APPENDIX B

Survey Part Two - Large Event Feedback Form

Public Garden Name: ________________________________________________

Name, position and Email: ____________________________________________

For each large event held at your garden in the past five years, please fill out the following information. Two events can fit per page—please make additional copies of this form as needed. For the sake of this project, a “large event” should be considered any special event not part of the daily activities and operations of the garden (exhibits, festivals, etc.).

Event name: _______________________________________________________

Event dates (please include start and end date): __________________________

Approximately how many visitors attended: _____________________________

Describe this event: _____________________________

Was the event included with regular admissions? If not, what was the additional fee? ______

Goal(s) of event (please mark ‘1’ by primary goal and mark an ‘x’ by any others that apply):

  ___ Increase visitation  ___ Entertain visitors
  ___ Increase membership  ___ Educate visitors
  ___ Increase revenue  ___ Expand garden audience

On a scale of 1-7, how effective do you believe the event was in fulfilling goals (please circle)?

  Not at all effective  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  Completely effective

Event name: _______________________________________________________

Event dates (please include start and end date): __________________________

Approximately how many visitors attended: _____________________________

Describe this event: ________________________________________________

Was the event included with regular admissions? If not, what was the additional fee? ______

Goal(s) of event (please mark ‘1’ by primary goal and mark an ‘x’ by any others that apply):

  ___ Increase visitation  ___ Entertain visitors
  ___ Increase membership  ___ Educate visitors
  ___ Increase revenue  ___ Expand garden audience

On a scale of 1-7, how effective do you believe the event was in fulfilling goals (please circle)?

  Not at all effective  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  Completely effective
APPENDIX C

Survey Part Three - Garden Data Request

Public Garden: __________________________________________________________

Name, position and Email: ________________________________________________

At what level are the following types of data collected at your garden (i.e. - weekly, monthly, quarterly, etc.)?

Visitation: ____  Membership: _____  Gift Shop Sales: _____  Total Revenue: _____

At whatever increment of time you collect data (ideally monthly), please provide the following pieces of data for the past five years (or for however long is available):

- Numbers of visitors to your garden
- Number of total garden members
  - Number of new members
  - Number of renewals
- Gift shop sales
- Total garden revenue
- Entrance fee (adult ticket, nonmember)
- Cost of membership (at each membership level)**

The following is an example of what we ideally would like the data to look like:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Date A</th>
<th>Date B</th>
<th>Date C</th>
<th>Date D</th>
<th>Date E</th>
<th>Date F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total # Visitors</td>
<td>DATA</td>
<td>DATA</td>
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<td>DATA</td>
<td>DATA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total # Members:</td>
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<td>- New members</td>
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<td>DATA</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Renewals</td>
<td>DATA</td>
<td>DATA</td>
<td>DATA</td>
<td>DATA</td>
<td>DATA</td>
<td>DATA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gift shop sales ($)</td>
<td>DATA</td>
<td>DATA</td>
<td>DATA</td>
<td>DATA</td>
<td>DATA</td>
<td>DATA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total garden revenue</td>
<td>DATA</td>
<td>DATA</td>
<td>DATA</td>
<td>DATA</td>
<td>DATA</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entrance fee ($)</td>
<td>DATA</td>
<td>DATA</td>
<td>DATA</td>
<td>DATA</td>
<td>DATA</td>
<td>DATA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membership fee ($)</td>
<td>DATA</td>
<td>DATA</td>
<td>DATA</td>
<td>DATA</td>
<td>DATA</td>
<td>DATA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If the above format is inconvenient, feel free to submit the data in whatever format is most convenient. Also, if you wish to submit this portion of the data request electronically, please email it to mrp25@cornell.edu.

** Additional membership questions:

What are the different levels of membership at the garden? ________________________________

What percentage of garden members fall into each of the levels? ________________________________
APPENDIX D

Request Letter Accompanying Survey

[Date]

[Address]

Dear [Garden Director]:

Greetings from Cornell Plantations! My name is Miriam Pinsker and I am a graduate student in Cornell Plantations’ Public Garden Leadership graduate fellowship program. I work under the guidance of Don Rakow, Director of Cornell Plantations, who sent an introduction of me and my research topic to you last week, as well as Sonja Skelly, Director of Education at Plantations.

As part of my graduate fellowship, I am working on a research project related to the impact of large events on public gardens. I am studying how effective large events are in helping to achieve organizational goals, such as increasing visitation, membership, and revenue. The goal of my research is to help public gardens, especially large gardens like yours, to understand more about the beneficial (and possibly detrimental) effects of large events, and to help public gardens in better using such events to fulfill their missions.

This is where your garden comes into the picture. In order to determine the efficacy of large events, I need to collect long-term information regarding the major events you have brought to your garden in recent years. Associated with each of these events, I am interested in learning about the goals set for them, as well as a few other details related to the event and your garden. I am also interested in collecting long-term data on your garden’s membership, visitation, and revenue. Your garden’s participation in this study will contribute to our knowledge of how to manage public gardens, will provide new insight into the role of large events in fulfilling the goals of public gardens, and will help you to understand the impact of future large events on your garden. At the completion of my analysis, I will provide all participating gardens with a comprehensive report of my research findings, and I would be willing to discuss the report with you, if you so desire. Any data and information that you submit will remain confidential and will be released to no one. In any report that may be published based on these data, no information will be reported that will allow your garden to be specifically identified. Enclosed with this letter are three short surveys that I sincerely hope you and your garden staff will complete:

1. **Questions for the Garden Director**: Questions for you, as director of the garden, regarding your opinions of large events at public gardens.
2. **Large Event Feedback Forms**: Forms asking for details on the large events your garden has held in the past five years.
3. **Garden Data Request**: Request for data on garden visitation, membership, and revenue for the past five years.
Part 1 of this data request is geared specifically for the director of the garden, but please feel free to pass along Parts 2 and 3 to the appropriate staff member(s) as you deem necessary. Also, I recognize that five years of data and event information may not be accessible, but please provide as complete a set of information as possible. The utility and quality of the data analysis and final report depend on the completeness of the data, and I hope that your garden will participate in this important study.

Please return the surveys (in addition to any other data required for parts two and three) in the enclosed envelope by **August 20, 2007**. In addition to the hard copy of the surveys I have provided here, I will also email you with the electronic files so you have the option to type your responses. Please call me at (607) 227-9343 or email me at mrp25@cornell.edu with any questions.

Sincerely,

Miriam Pinsker
M.P.S Graduate Fellow
Cornell Plantations
APPENDIX E

Directors’ Responses to Part One, Question 2
Are large events beneficial to public gardens? (Please explain):

*Note – Brackets are indicated where text was changed to preserve confidentiality.

Garden 101:
“A large event offers a unique opportunity to create a sense of community and deliver the institutional message to a lot of people. Synergy can be created by those who come as observers and those who come to interact, helping to make new friends and build enthusiasm for the institutional mission.”

Garden 102:
“They increase cash flow, increase gate attendance and raise the level of awareness of the Garden. On the other hand, they can be a drain on staff and often interfere with daily garden maintenance activities. Events need to be continually reassessed so that they do not become an end in themselves with the mission of the garden lost in the general flurry of event activity.”

Garden 103:
“Public events offer opportunity to connect with a broader public, introducing new audiences to education programs and the importance of plants and our work to study and conserve them.”

Garden 104:
“They provide an opportunity to build visibility and an audience. Gardens take time to grow and to ‘show.’ I’ve noticed, over the years, how ‘non-living’ museums, such as art museums, benefit from the opportunity that doing ‘blockbuster’ shows provides. There is an opportunity to obtain press coverage, an opportunity (through the formulations and creation of the ‘show’) to cultivate an audience or develop a new one. We have focused in this way on developing various ‘cultural’ audiences. Through three cultural advisory committees we developed public programs that attracted 2-4,000 people for one-day events of interest to Chinese, Latino, and Korean communities (we have used other devices such as programs in the community, various research mechanisms, etc. to cultivate other cultural and ‘garden’ communities). We had different goals for these programs, including visibility, audience development and later on, goals for increasing membership and sponsorships. Always, if done thoughtfully and the weather is with you, such events will generate increased earned income through sales in the shop, parking fees, etc., which then increases an organization’s self-sufficiency (that is, it’s “sustainability!”)
As plants take a while to grow and develop and produce this “show,” events that are thematically appropriate provide an important mechanism to gain visibility, and thereby allows a garden to better compete within the world and the media for the
attention of reporters, and ultimately, visitors and future visitors.”

Garden 105:
“Given the demand for the public’s discretionary time and money, gardens are in a very competitive market, and not just with other not-for-profits. As much as I hate to admit it ‘just plants’ are not enough to bring them in, especially for most young establishing gardens.

Special events introduce a ‘new’ public to our gardens and remind past visitors that it’s time to revisit.”

Garden 106:
“Large events generate widespread attention in the news media, further bolstering institutional visibility. They sometimes attract a different segment of the overall garden audience, and serve as a means to engage new audiences. Large events offer the opportunity to engage funders by providing visible benefits of sponsorship. Large events provide a venue to introduce elected officials to both the garden and their constituents, and to deepen the official’s understanding of the institution’s role and importance. Large events offer additional opportunities for an institution to fulfill its mission.”

Garden 107:
“Large events such as exhibitions are beneficial to botanical gardens because they enable us to communicate our mission more broadly to an expanded number of visitors, some of which might not have been aware of it otherwise. The exhibitions bring people to the Garden for a variety of reasons and enable to diversify our base. For example our art exhibitions bring people interested in art and our Holiday Train Show brings families. It is hoped that the portion of the audience that is coming to the Garden for such an event for the first time will be inclined to return whether or not a large event is taking place, having experienced the beauty and educational value of the Garden. Large events also help us gain publicity and brand recognition which is useful in building all mission-based activities at the Garden. Lastly the Earned Income associated with large events supports all our programs including scientific research, children’s education and horticulture.”

Garden 108:
“Large events are definitely beneficial for [Garden 108]. However they are time consuming and expensive. The positive aspect: it brings visitors.

We have four large events/year:
[Butterfly Event]. March and April – approximately 150,000 visitors
[Horticultural Festival]. Last week of May (3 days) – 20,000 visitors
[Chinese Lantern Event]. September and October – 250,000 visitors
[Halloween Event]. October – number of visitors included in 250,000 above.

Considering that approximately 50% of our visitors come for special events, it is scary to think that our collections and education programs “are not enough” to bring people to the garden.”
Garden 109: “They draw attention and increase interest in the Garden and beyond what would be possible otherwise.”

Garden 110: “Fundraising is critical to most gardens to survive; Brings awareness to the garden; Helps market the gardens; Social value.”

Garden 111: “Increases exposure of the gardens; Broadens the audience; Provides opportunity to acquaint new visitors with our site and our mission”

Garden 112: “Large events:
-introduce people to grounds and facilities, providing exposure to plant collections, education programs, research and other initiatives, and mission-related themes.
-attract new audiences not ordinarily affiliated with gardens, create reasons for occasional visitors to renew their interest in returning, and add to the diversity and appeal of activities available to regular visitors and members.
-offer opportunities to communicate key messages to all audiences
-provide channels for sponsors and other financial supporters
-provide a venue to build membership”

Garden 113: “Increase attendance; Increase status of garden in community; Generate members; Generate income; Advance mission; Create ‘news’.”

Garden 114: “The events help make a connection from the garden to the community in which it is located. Events help to raise awareness of the garden in the eyes of the public and the community decision makers. Events help the garden make connections with people who might not otherwise come to the garden.”

Garden 115: “People tend to socialize rather than observe the gardens.”

Garden 116: 1. “They improve the quality of life for people who attend. 2. They further our mission. 3. They provide attendance and revenue. 4. The help us sell memberships”

2. Brings people who otherwise might not come.
3. Expands interest.
4. Good publicity.
5. New member source.”

Garden 118:
“Depends on the garden and its situation.”

Garden 119:
“Large events are frequently ways to attract visitors who have not been to the garden before with the intent of exposing them to the garden beyond the event itself. While there is a “buzz” around the event, there is the opportunity to convert first time visitors to members. Hopefully, successful large events can raise the level of return visitorship giving us the opportunity to better connect people with nature, to learn about it and become more conservation minded.”

Garden 120:
“I think large events that support the mission of the public garden are beneficial. For example, we had a family festival (day long) when we opened our new garden on [date]. We had demonstrations and hands-on learning about butterflies, music about plants, and fun garden staff for children. In contrast, we also have events sponsored by [group] that the attendees enjoy but don’t really appreciate the value of what we are trying to do as a public garden.”

Garden 121:
“The more that the garden is highlighted and ‘shown off’ the better in my estimation. I feel that it is not only a good PR opportunity but also a way to encourage staff to do their absolute best work because they have ‘company coming’.”

Garden 122:
“Community relations, introduction of [Garden 122] via complimentary events; assists with donor cultivation, showcases mission and generates community good will.”

Garden 123:
“Brings in money, visitors, members”

Garden 124:
“They attract new audiences and have strong financial potential. Our fireworks show, wine & jazz festival, concerts, etc. are some of the most highly attended events.”

Garden 125:
Did not submit Part One data
Garden 126:
“They bring in a diverse group of persons, they are a way to fundraise with sponsors (the only way for us to make money on events), and there is an increased publicity as this is something special. We have many weddings that are smaller and have not counted them as special events, but are considering doing larger weddings that may push them into the special event category due to the work and the planning.”
APPENDIX F

Directors’ Responses to Part One, Question 5
Do large events cause disruption in the garden? (Please explain):

*Note – Brackets are indicated where text was changed to preserve confidentiality.

Garden 101:
No response

Garden 102:
“The amount of staff time that goes into large events is often considerable. They involve multiple meetings for planning and coordination and then overtime and additional hired staff for implementation. However, disruption may be too strong a term since holding and implementing these events is both part of the annual plan and the annual budget. I view a disruption as more of an unplanned, unanticipated event.”

Garden 103:
No response.

Garden 104:
“Large events require a lot of staff time, and one must have the staff, or develop a “project” or contracted out basis for effectively offering them. [Garden 104] suffers from, “I didn’t know there was a botanical garden in [city]!” We are in the shadow of our larger, better known sister gardens in [city]—[listed garden names]. We need the visibility. And we will need our new facilities to generate support to operate them. We want our new store to be successful. We want more people wanting to rent our space. As a free garden, we want to develop ways that visitors will feel compelled to “invest” in us by paying fees for various things. Large events can be very disruptive, not only to staff and the use by regular visitors, but also to the surrounding community. In addition to the large events the [Garden 104] offers, we have over the years (not since we have been in construction for the past 3 years, though) rented space to community groups (often cultural groups) who seek a place where upwards of 2,000 people may gather in an outdoor setting to enjoy music, food, crafts and community.”

Garden 105:
“Events are good plus consumer money and staff time. If we had many more events the staff would mutiny.
As we try to make our events educational—they help meet mission—although some goals are more/new visitors.
Given staff resources events take considerable time and the ‘hangover’ (not from alcohol) takes staff a day or days to get back up to speed with their present job.”
Garden 106:
“Staff time is considerable across all departments. We are currently exceeding the staff’s capacity to carry out the existing roster of events. Large events are an effective tool for audience engagement, as detailed in Question 2.”

Garden 107:
“Large events are effective in achieving my Garden’s goals to be an advocate for the plant kingdom. We pursue our mission in part through our role as a museum of living plant collections arranged in gardens and landscapes and large events enable us to do so more effectively—reaching a greater number of individuals, many of whom may be newcomers to the Garden. Large events also enable us to provide an educational experience for an increased number of visitors, another goal of the garden.

Garden 108:
No response

Garden 109:
“Effective in achieving our goals. Bringing people to the Garden and letting them know where it’s located. Staged properly, they can also begin to familiarize people with the Garden.”

Garden 110:
“Theft and damage by would-be party-goers. Focus taken away from the gardens/with resources that are already in short supply one focusing on the event and preparation of… Recovery of the garden can be long from trampled sites”

Garden 111:
“Large events can be beneficial but are very high impact”.

Garden 112:
“Large events can be considered disruptive of routine to staff and visitors; however, as part of a culture shift, such “disruptions” can be assimilated as an ongoing part of operations. Events do require significant staff effort during planning, execution, and aftermath. For effective coordination, communication is essential among various departments. It is also important to communicate to visitors who might be affected by plans that could be disruptive.”

Garden 113
“Events are essential in my community”.

Garden 114
“Most gardens were not designed with large events in mind. Therefore, oftentimes extraordinary measures which must be taken to accommodate the events.”
Garden 115:  
“Too much trampling on vegetation.”

Garden 116:  
“We would like to add one more large event in the early fall”
Garden 117:  
“Positive disruption”

Garden 118:  
No response

Garden 119:  
“With 3,500 acres, we can spread out!”

Garden 120:  
“Events that are simply using the garden as a venue for a party can cause a lot of damage to the garden and reap little benefit (unless you charge a lot). I encourage events that educate and inspire people about the importance of plants in our lives. I feel that our gardens should be valued, respected, and enjoyed. If an event and the attendees are on board with this agenda, then it is a win-win.”

Garden 121:  
“Yes, I have to agree that events sponsored by outside organizations or the museums that border the garden do cause disruption. A recent event was particularly disruptive due to the inexperience of the event coordinators. Typically a walkthrough is held prior to the event. At the walkthrough specifics such as the need to close the garden early for set-up and the need for and the location of large generators were not covered. Generally more experienced event coordinators cover all details effectively.”

Garden 122:  
“Current staffing levels prevent us from holding more events. Events always showcase [Garden 122’s] membership, education programs and mission related information.”

Garden 123:  
No response.

Garden 124:  
No response.

Garden 125:  
*Did not submit Part One data*
Garden 126:
“Better and more efficient facilities would make for easier events and could generate more revenue, but there is the tendency to always want more facilities, and always shooting for something larger than can be accommodated, this can be a never ending cycle. Events can detract from the goal of the garden must be looked at as to how it projects the image of the garden. Events should be evaluated regularly to see if they have grown into something that does not reflect the goals of the garden and to evaluate if they: promote mission, public outreach, generate funding/donations, remain vibrant and not stale or routine, etc. They should be discontinued if they don’t meet expectations (before they become a burden). Events should always be evaluated as to the disruption to the gardens; this includes damage to grounds, displacement of staff time and function, and hidden costs. A garden should not simply become a venue for events; rather it should be a garden that has events to promote the mission and operations of the institution.”
APPENDIX G

Directors’ Responses to Part One, Question 8
Have there been large events that you have regretted having at your garden? If so, what type of event was it and what were its drawbacks?

*Note – Brackets are indicated where text was changed to preserve confidentiality.

Garden 101:
“No.”

Garden 102:
“If events are thoughtfully considered, have organization-wide buy-in and are carefully planned and implemented they should not lead to regrets. Things do go wrong however. We held an Easter Egg hunt that, although we thought was well planned, totally overwhelmed us because of the numbers and aggressiveness of the attendees. We did learn from it, but it was a difficult lesson.”

Garden 103
No response.

Garden 104:
“Rather than say that we regretted having certain events, I’d say that we learned by having certain large events. We have had to get tough, lay down rules, and insist on various types of ‘reassurances’ when renting to various community groups. We keep a clean-up bond so that if the garden is not cleaned to our satisfaction, we keep the money. However, this is not what we want either. We had one rental where the group was especially messy and left garbage and chicken bones and other garbage strewn around. Our agreement with them stated that they were supposed to finish the clean-up by 4 pm the following day (after a weekend, and on day we were technically closed to the public). However, no one showed up to start the clean up! So now we have a designated time to start the clean-up, and we put the renters through more ‘hoops’ to help us evaluate whether their group has the organizational structure and resources to responsibly and thoughtfully rent from us. We also have learned to let local community leaders, nearby residents, the local police precinct, and elected officials know ahead of time (via a memo) if we have a large event in the works and limit such large events to no more than two per month, as the Garden is in a residential/commercial area where traffic and parking are tight.”

Garden 105:
“No, we have not done an antique car show—at least not at this point.”

Garden 106:
“We attempted a winter lighting event outdoors that carried significant expenses but
did not succeed for weather-related reasons.”

Garden 107:
“We have not regretted holding a large event at the Garden, but this is not to say we have not learned from our experiences in having them. For example, the logistics involved in managing large crowds is something we continue to work to refine. Also we have to be aware of capacity issues and concerned about the effect of large crowds on our infrastructure including our Conservatory as well as the plant collections themselves. Overall however the benefits of having large events are outweighed by the drawbacks especially as we continue to produce the events in a more effective way.”

Garden 108:
“No.”

Garden 109:
“No.”

Garden 110:
 “[A poetry festival] was held at our site. As the host we suffered much damage to our property. Fields were rutted by cars and trampled by 25,000 visitors. Site was a muddy mess (rain).
It was costly – net loss in revenue.
Took a lot of the management’s time to plan and coordinate.
Heavy rain put a damper on the whole event.
Permitting with the town was a mess.
Disrupt the flow of operations.”

Garden 111:
“The gardens hosted a large (5,000+ visitors) garden party at high cost to the organization without defining its purpose. The art show is not deeply connected to our mission, but it is low cost/low impact because it is put on by an event manager.”

Garden 112:
“Following highly successful openings of new gardens and facilities on our site, which greatly increased awareness among new audiences—especially among families with young children—the attendance at one event (Easter Egg hunt) far exceeded expectations. While such a high level of interest was positive and welcome, the demand for participation went beyond our immediate ability to provide ideal accommodations. However, the event served as a learning experience.”

Garden 113:
“No.”
Garden 114: “No.”

Garden 115: “No.”

Garden 116
No response

Garden 117: “We have rental facilities and have rented for “Sweet 16” parties. Because of immaturity, guests were disruptive/destructive, we no longer have these events.”

Garden 118
No response

Garden 119: “Last year we had a beer tasting that was poorly marketed and did not reflect our mission. Several members did not like it. This year, we plan to do it again using a local brewer who is very environmentally conscious. The theme of the event will be conservation and we will write other conservation groups to participate. Good marketing and relationship to mission should make it a more acceptable event as well as being a revenue generator.”

Garden 120: “When I worked at [garden], we had large events and it generated much needed income. We let people use only certain places so damage was contained. It also helped us to let the community know about us and some became members and even donors. Here at [Garden 120] we do not charge for events. We only have events sponsored by [group] and/or events sponsored by [Garden 120]. I have regretted a very large event that we co-sponsored because the group had a fabulous time, would not leave, damaged our conservatory, and did not appreciate or respect our place. I will co-sponsor another event for them.”

Garden 121: “No.”

Garden 122: “None –yet.”

Garden 123
No response

Garden 124
No response
Garden 125:
*Did not submit Part One data*

Garden 126:
“None, except that we stopped several events that did not make money. One was a storytelling festival and another was a Christmas caroling event (low attendance and conflicted with other event). We have taken an annual event (very mission oriented) and made it into a biennial event due to costs.

I look at special events in three categories:

1) Is mission – [lists mission]
2) Reflects the mission – [examples of mission-reflecting events]
3) Makes money or attendance to promote the mission – [examples of non-mission events]

All of these should reflect positively on the institution and its mission. The event should generate goodwill and loyalty, and be a potential for fundraising. Only category 1 events could lose money and be done again (but then evaluate why and correct). Cost accounting should be done for all events; this includes staff time (planning and execution), displaced revenue loss, displaced staff time, equipment rental, facility wear, etc., to understand the cost benefit to the mission.”
REFERENCES


