

## **Building successful volunteer programs – case studies from the Australian National Botanic Gardens**

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Volunteers are a vital component of the workforce in botanic gardens, providing significant enhancement to operations and public engagement. It is recognised that appropriate investment is required to establish effective and enduring volunteer programs. In recent years, the Australian National Botanic Gardens (ANBG) has increased the scope and quality of volunteer programs, including a dedicated volunteer manager role, a new policy framework, digital volunteer management system, increased volunteer supervisor support, as well as ensuring regular volunteer feedback and recognition. The ANBG has approximately two hundred volunteers who contribute to diverse functions across the Gardens. There are ten volunteer programs to suit different skills and interest, ranging from visitor engagement, such as volunteer guides and visitor information, to technical back-of-house roles supporting horticulture and living collections management, seed processing, and preparing herbarium specimens.

Using two case studies, this presentation will share insights and tools for developing and growing successful volunteer programs:

- Greenhouse Volunteer Program: initiated in 2022 to assist with manual insect pest control on tropical plants being grown for the new Ian Potter National Conservatory (under construction). The dedicated volunteer group has strong engagement, low turnover, and has substantially improved plant health. Role specific induction and training, and weekly ongoing learning and social interaction are critical to program success.
- Volunteer Guides Program: initiated in 1992, this program continues to thrive. Investment in ongoing learning and development, and iterative improvements and innovation, have underpinned this enduring program. For example, a new Themed Walk program, initiated by the Guides, has substantially increased visitation through historically quieter winter periods.

Presenters will discuss practical ways you can implement best practice volunteer management in your botanic garden to add value and connect to your local community.