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Docent Manual Development for the Oahu Urban Garden Center

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Docent Manual Development for the Oahu Urban Garden Center

Abstract

The staff at the University of Hawaii's Urban Garden Center on Oahu had become overburdened with the recent opening of the Children's Garden for tours. In the first 8 months, over 1,700 children participated in tours of the garden. To release pressure on the staff, volunteers need to be trained to lead the tours. A docent manual was developed for these volunteers (docents) as a training guide. It was developed with materials and ideas from the Urban Garden Center, US Forest Service publications, Ranger Rick's Trees are Terrific!, and several other publications.

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Introduction

The Urban Garden Center (UGC) in Pearl City, Hawaii opened its Children's Garden in September 2004 with nearly 3,400 attendees. The UGC has been part of the University of Hawaii's College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources Extension program since 1989. The Children's Garden is the result of 4 years of hard work by staff and volunteers.

The Children's Garden has attracted a large amount of public interest. In the first 8 months, more than 1,700 preschool and elementary school children took guided tours of the garden.

This influx of school groups has strained scarce staff resources, because Extension faculty members currently lead all tours at the expense of other tasks. This situation of too many demands on valuable staff time is typical of Extension staff nationwide (Byars, 1996; Wentz, 2005). Volunteers have been suggested as an effective way to provide extension services without increasing staff workload (Grieshop & Rupley, 1984).

The UGC is fortunate to have an existing cadre of 70-80 regular volunteers. However, none are assigned the role of docent, a volunteer who teaches or leads tours (Docent, 2005). Installation of a docent program at the UGC could provide trained volunteers who could assume docent responsibilities, allowing staff to focus on other tasks. A number of UGC volunteers are signing up to be docents. However, training materials were unavailable. A docent manual was developed to meet this demand.

Why a Docent Manual

Several methods can be used for training docents, including manuals, workshops, and online resources. The relative benefits and drawbacks are listed in Table 1. We chose to develop a manual for several reasons. A paper-based manual placed inside a 3-ring binder allows information to be added or removed without reprinting the entire manual. The binder is paginated by section so each section can be updated individually. The manual supplements other training methods, including UGC orientation and shadowing veteran docents. It serves as a tangible book of information the volunteers can reference throughout their time at the UGC.

This format provides flexibility, yet permanence. The manual can be updated when necessary and can be used on demand, unlike a workshop, which is temporary, lasting only a few hours or days. Although online activities and materials also are easily updated, this format lacks portability and requires access to and familiarity with a computer with Internet connection.

Table 1.
Benefits and Drawbacks of Various Training Methods

Training Method	Benefits	Drawbacks
Online activity or materials	Ease of access and updatability Lower cost of production Could be more interactive	All docents may not have access to or know how to use a computer Requires technical knowledge to develop materials
Workshops	Personal delivery method Question and Answer time	Temporary Workshops must be held several times to train new docents
Bound book	Permanent Professional look and feel	Cannot update without reprinting the entire book Heavy reading requirement
3-Ring binder	Easily updatable Easily reproducible Permanent	Less personal Heavy reading requirement

Manual Development Process

The goal of the UGC *Children's Garden Docent Manual* is to prepare the docent to safely lead a quality tour, to provide information on the Children's Garden and the UGC, and to conduct teaching activities with the children. The target audience for the docent manual was adult volunteers--a large majority of whom are retired community members. The target audience for the Children's Garden programs is fourth grade students. A major challenge was to write, at the adults' intellectual level, information on how to interact with youth.

The docent manual's content was based on previous UGC materials and other educational manuals (The Hawaii Nature Center, The Nature Conservancy of Hawaii, and Oregon Trout). Curriculum ideas were gathered from The US Forest Service's (1993) *Investigating Your Environment*, The National Wildlife Foundation and Ranger Rick's (1998) *Trees are Terrific!*, The Exploratorium's (1998) *The Science Explorer*, and Harper's (2003) *4-H Pizza Garden: An Agricultural Adventure*.

Initial drafts of the manual were reviewed by Urban Garden Center faculty and staff and by a small group of experienced volunteers. A number of changes were made based on these reviews. For example, early drafts included materials and suggestions for teachers about using gardening lessons in the classroom. This section was removed because it was not pertinent to the docent. Instead, it will be included in materials developed for teachers as pre- and post-visit activities. Material missing from original drafts included documents regarding docent responsibilities and privileges, and teaching suggestions for docents with limited teaching experience.

Docent Manual Contents

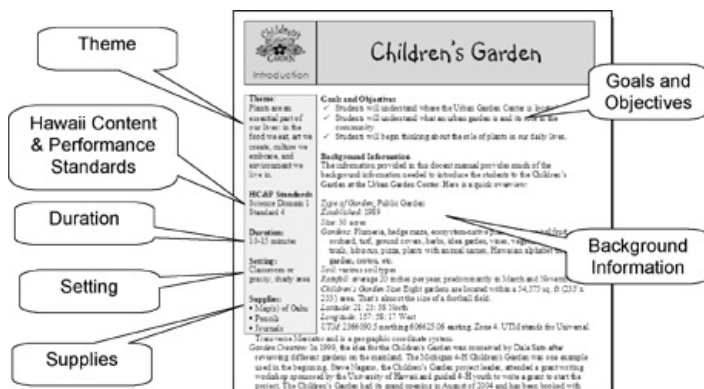
The Table of Contents is shown in Figure 1. The format outlines the manual by section and allows the docent to easily find pertinent information. Tabs provide easy access to each section. Additional information for docents, teachers, and the general public has been made available on the UGC Web site <<http://www.urbangardencenter.org>>.

Figure 1.
Urban Garden Center *Children's Garden Docent Manual* Table of Contents

TABLE OF CONTENTS	
•	Welcome Educator!
•	About the Urban Garden Center
•	About the Children's Garden
•	Additional Resources at the UGC
○	Educational Resource Library
○	Gardening Q & A
○	Soil Analysis Service
○	Urban Garden Center Staff
•	Safety First!
○	Safety Procedures
○	Be Prepared!
○	In Case Of Emergency
○	Volunteer Emergency Information
○	Urban Garden Center Accident Report
•	Teaching Tips
○	Teaching Suggestions
○	Public Speaking Techniques
○	Stages of Youth Development
○	Self Evaluation
•	Docent Responsibilities
•	Curriculum Ideas
○	Introduction
○	Pizza Garden
○	Hawaiian Alphabet Tree Garden
○	Sensory Garden
○	Animal Garden
○	House Garden
○	Sundial Garden
○	Butterfly Garden
○	Boardwalk
•	Urban Garden Center In the News

The Curriculum Ideas section was designed to highlight the important information needed prior to teaching each lesson, such as objectives, estimated duration, background information, and needed supplies (Figure 2). Each lesson is tied to a specific place in the Children's Garden, each with its own theme (Figure 1). The layout was adapted from Harper's (2003) manual. Additional information ties curriculum ideas into the Hawaii State Content and Performance Standards for public school students <<http://doe.k12.hi.us/standards/hcps.htm>>.

Figure 2.
Components of the Curriculum Pages



Next Steps

The docent manual will be provided to each UGC docent. Extension staff will solicit comments about the manual and will observe whether or not docents have adopted the practices and policies and internalized the information provided. After completion of the first year of manual use, this information, plus feedback from docents, teachers, students, and UGC staff will be included in an overall evaluation of the manual's perceived effectiveness.

This docent manual is only one piece in a complete outdoor education package. It provides volunteer training, but additional resources are necessary. For example, the garden center's visitors are generally teachers and students. These teachers currently lack materials that would help them to conduct pre- and post-visit lessons in the classroom that could complement student learning before and after visiting the UGC. We suggest the development of a teacher packet with classroom activities. This would help introduce students to the gardening topics and initiate follow-up after visiting the UGC to provide a more lasting and thorough experience.

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