



Greater Des Moines Botanical Garden

Summary Report: **What's your *Why?***

Participating in the Pilot Cohort of the IDEA Center for Public Gardens was a year-long endeavor that became the start of a much longer journey. This Summary Report provides a description of the progress we made, sharing where we began and some examples of where we are today, and where we're headed.

When we decided to apply to be part of the IDEA Pilot Cohort, work was underway to establish organizational Values intended to serve as an extension of the Mission and Vision of the Greater Des Moines Botanical Garden. The addition of value statements to the Mission and Vision would help articulate more about our Garden, our team, and our shared perspectives. Topics related to inclusion, diversity, equity, and access were frequently raised through this values-focused work, and this cohort opportunity became available with incredibly timely alignment.

The cohort work began in May 2022, and as participants, we understood that by the end of the year-long cohort experience, a related project would need to be completed. In the fall, our project outline was due, including indicators focused on how the success of the project would be measured. We determined that our project would be focused on refreshing the DEI statement for the Greater Des Moines Botanical Garden, coupled with initiatives intended to deepen community engagement through targeted 'community nights.' The project outline and measures of success that were submitted in 2022 have been attached to this Summary Report (see Exhibit A).

Our decisions were very action oriented. We wanted to leverage the cohort experience to complete a tangible task from the ever-present to-do or must-do list. Of course, this motivation isn't wrong. However, the experiences we gained from participating in the cohort led us on a journey to realize that this motivation also isn't really the 'right' one, either.

Throughout the cohort sessions, one of the themes speakers discussed was centered on being clear about *why* engagement in IDEA topics is occurring. This question – *Why?* – is something we began to frequently ask, and this seemingly simple exercise resulted in a complexity of thought that we actively leaned into to better understand.

There are many ways that 'Why?' was (and continues to be) asked and answered related to IDEA work. The most concrete and tangible answer identified that various funders, specifically corporate and foundation grant makers, have IDEA-related requirements that must be met to make funding possible. Requirements such as clear organizational statements about DEI and measurable DEI initiatives had to be prioritized to open doors to important contributed revenue.

To sum up: Why IDEA? *Because we must deliver on expectations to open doors to funding.*

Another clear response to 'Why?' focused on our staff and their committed and enthusiastic interest in becoming involved in making positive improvements. Members of our Botanical Garden

team expressed interest in digging into various work-related processes, ranging from recruitment, hiring, and onboarding practices, to accessibility improvements for visitors. Their collective desire to have voices of influence in making positive changes, for themselves, our organizational culture, and for our visitors was worth activating. And, equally as important, ensuring that this group of valued employees felt heard was something that could be demonstrated through action.

To sum up: Why IDEA? *Because passionate employees result in positive outcomes.*

By consistently asking ourselves why we're engaging in IDEA work, we were able to gain clarity that both summed-up reasons stated above are true and valid. This clarity resulted in shared understanding of and support for the decision to form a cross-departmental DEI Committee. The formation of this committee accomplished a measurable initiative that would not only satisfy external requirements by funders, but also created a vehicle for engaging and leveraging the passion of our team members. One of the first work-products of this newly formed committee is the draft of a committee charter (see Exhibit B).

Asking 'Why?' continued as our participation in the cohort progressed. Many of our responses were generally focused on *expanding the Garden's reach to community members not actively reflected in our visitor data*, and to *improve the experiences of those served by the Botanical Garden*. Increasing the annual number of visitors has been a defined priority for years, not unlike many other public gardens. A more recent priority has been focused on deepening the engagement by the Botanical Garden with and within local communities. Visitor data reflects that there are various groups underrepresented when compared to local census and related data.

Based on recent experiences, we've learned that by making intentional changes to programming offered, we can create experiences that attract targeted groups. For instance, before the pandemic, families with young children were not frequent visitors to the Botanical Garden. By making some intentional changes to the programming available – Story Sprouts, the addition of a natural wood playhouse to an inside space, school-break day camps, seasonally-changing scavenger hunts, and family-focused drop-in activities on weekends, to name a few – we have seen significant increases in visits by families. Our team didn't stop there. Rather than making decisions about what would come next, we've established routine methods to ask for input from these families about ways to make the Botanical Garden even more family friendly. The relationships built with families have been strengthened by asking for their input and keeping them engaged in the Garden's decisions about future improvements. As we continue to make improvements and add to our family friendly options, the numbers of families visiting the Botanical Garden and joining as members has continued a strong growth trajectory.

So, when we apply what we've learned from families with young children to our 'Why?' response above (the goal expand reach and improve visitor experiences), the DEI-lens invites us to think specifically about topics we need to better understand to consider improvements we could implement. Several different initiatives have begun, because of asking why. For instance, we've started working with a local school serving low- and no-vision students and a sensory-focused tour of the Botanical Garden was established to make visits for these students a positive and engaged experience.

Another initiative that is underway relates to the materials that are available to visitors as they prepare for their visit, and once they arrive at the Botanical Garden. We're actively updating the infrastructure of the website, along with substantive content improvements, to make sure that visitors can plan for their unique needs and priorities before they arrive. For instance, accessibility

for wheelchairs and strollers will be outlined in detail, with images available. Gender-specific and gender-neutral bathroom options will be more clearly specified. Once onsite, large new maps have been recently installed to enhance the visitor experience.

We've also begun taking Botanical Garden programming into other local community events to address geographic and financial forms of access barriers. Participating in local community farmer's markets has been underway for several months and we hope to not only learn more about the community members who participate in these events, but also demonstrate our interest in and commitment to being an active participant in the community.

Finally, we've also realized that some of our responses to 'Why?' are, simply put, "I don't know." So, we've decided to partner with a local consulting firm that specializes in DEI work to help us answer some of these questions. This firm has begun a thorough DEI assessment process for us, inclusive of stakeholder interviews, focus groups, business practice audits, etc. Upon completion of this assessment, the Botanical Garden will receive a detailed report of findings, as well as recommendations for DEI-focused strategies for consideration. We are grateful that this engagement is taking the form of a pro-bono donation of services.

The journey we began through participation in the pilot cohort is not complete, and we have found comfort with the clarity that it won't ever be so. There is always more work to be done. There are always improvements to make. There will always be new perspectives to seek to understand. By asking ourselves and each other *why* throughout all facets of our work, we are better positioned to make decisions that we can explain, embrace, and implement. We can also better articulate decisions about changes when the reasons for such change are clear. Chances are, as we continue to make changes, our *why* will also change. Not only are we better prepared for that reality, but we're also excited to keep answering the question.

Written by:
Kim Perez, President & CEO
Greater Des Moines Botanical Garden
Summer 2023

Exhibit A: Project Outline, Fall 2022

Garden:

Greater Des Moines Botanical Garden

Primary: Kim Perez

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Project Title: IDEA Statement Refresh and Community Engagement

Description:

Plant communities and people communities have a lot in common. They are stronger when the members of the respective community (plants or people) are working in concert and supporting one another. This view of communities is a core focus for the Greater Des Moines Botanical Garden and all that is being planned. A process to update organizational values and the vision statement began in late 2021. As these statements are finalized, it is timely to also update the IDEA statement. The finalization of this group of critical statements will serve as a launching point for community engagement initiatives focused on building and strengthening relationships with community members/groups.

Project Goals:

1. To update the Garden's IDEA statement to align with the organization's mission, vision and values.
2. To publicly launch these refreshed statements
3. To leverage the public launch of these statements as an opportunity to build and strengthen relationships with community members and groups, particularly with households and groups not already engaged with the Botanical Garden.
4. To plan and host "community nights" for groups to visit the Botanical Garden with their friends and neighbors, eliminating barriers to access, and inviting community input into future Garden plans.

Project Team Participants:

The full staff and Board will be involved in this project at key stages. Those listed below will participate in more detailed work.

- Kim Perez, President & CEO
- Ed Kenny, Board Chair
- Staff Leadership Team
- Executive Committee

Stakeholders:

Staff; volunteers; Board of Directors; GDMBG members and supporters; visitors

Resources:

Time – including staff time and Board time, specifically for planning and execution of all project aspects and the execution of Community Nights.

Specific budget information for Community Nights will be established as part of the planning.

Milestones & Deadlines:

- Vision statement, Values, and refreshed IDEA statement approved by Board of Directors by 12/31/2022.
- Public launch of statements by 2/28/2023.
- Community Nights planned with dates set by 3/31/2023.
- At least one Community Night hosted by 6/30/2023.

Exhibit A: Project Outline, Fall 2022

Potential Risks to Success and Completion:

This project presents limited risk regarding success and completion. The significant investment is that of time. Lack of engagement by those in the community related to Community Nights is the largest risk. To mitigate this risk, plans will remain nimble and responsive.

Measuring Success

What is the scope of your project? (Try to be as specific as you can - e.g., we will update [#] interpretation signage for outdoor collection.)

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What does success look like for this project? (By internal and external stakeholders; this can also include qualitative factors, such as, feeling safe to disagree.)

1. Fully engaged process for establishing the refreshed IDEA statement, including various groups of actively participating stakeholders.
2. Interest/Engagement in the Garden's statements by members of the public, as demonstrated by comments/feedback (including positive, negative, and neutral comments/feedback) shared via any method (in person, social media, written forms, etc.).

How will you measure success? (See Measuring Success slide in the D&I Project Roadmap and Guide for help)?

1. In the year that follows, increased visitors originating from zip codes represented by those participating in Community Nights.
2. New collaborative relationships with community-based organizations also serving households located in zip codes represented by those participating in Community Nights.
3. Increase in Pineapple Memberships (free memberships) for households in zip codes represented by those participating in Community Nights.

What factors may impact success?

1. Lack of engagement in the processes involved.
2. Lack of participation in Community Nights.

Exhibit B: DEI Committee Charter Draft



Greater Des Moines Botanical Garden

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Committee Charter

Part 1: Mission, Vision, and Values

Mission: Exploring, explaining, and celebrating the world of plants.

Vision: Our vision for the Greater Des Moines Botanical Garden is to be a cherished community resource, known for enriching quality of life in our region and state through education and stewardship of the vital connections between plants, people and the natural world.

Values:

- We are a **community** of people welcoming all to join us in caring for one another and the plant communities that make up our Garden.
- We are **growers** who, with many hands, cultivate and nurture a thriving ecosystem filled with plants and people.
- We are **curious** and passionate about the natural world, and we are dedicated to doing our part to sustain and protect it for future generations.
- We are **committed** to creating and tending gardens where joy is experienced, curiosity is cultivated, and lifelong memories are made and cherished.
- We lead with **kindness** in all that we do to create an environment that promotes growth of our plants, our people, and our community.
- *We are a **community of growers** who are **curious, committed and kind.***

Part 2: Purpose of the DEI Committee

The DEI Committee of the Greater Des Moines Botanical Garden consists of cross-departmental employees who collaborate with the leadership team to foster a culture of diversity, equity, and inclusion. More specifically, the Committee:

- Maintains a leading role in developing and implementing the DEI-focused initiatives that support the Botanical Garden's mission, vision, values, and strategic plan.
- Aids the Botanical Garden in building effective and efficient processes to identify needs and make recommendations to establish and/or improve DEI practices.
- Provides representation from across the Botanical Garden to assist in explaining, promoting, and encouraging DEI-related topics to ultimately ensure that the Botanical Garden is experienced by our staff, volunteers, and visitors as a welcoming environment where people feel included, respected, and supported.

Exhibit B: DEI Committee Charter Draft

Part 3: Committee Member Responsibilities

Committee members are selected based on their voiced interest and confirmation by the President & CEO. Members of the DEI Committee commit to:

1. Attend and actively participate in Committee meetings, following up when absences are necessary.
2. Respectfully engage fellow Committee members in the implementation of effective DEI policies, practices, and programs.
3. Commit two (2) hours/month at minimum to Committee meetings and DEI duties and activities.
4. Keep record of Committee tasks and outputs (i.e., agenda, minutes, etc.)
5. Maintain effective communication, including active listening, to effectively work with different stakeholders.
6. Proactively communicate individual or Committee concerns and barriers to the President & CEO and/or others, as needed.
7. Maintain confidentiality.

The Chair of the DEI Committee is responsible for the following:

1. Serve as the bridge between the Committee and the leadership team.
2. Establish the meeting schedule and agendas through collaboration with the Committee and the leadership team, as well as ensuring the tracking and reporting of results.
3. Facilitate the Committee meetings to keep on task and on time.
4. Delegate responsibilities for documentation of discussions during meetings, follow-up actions, etc.