

**Virginia Native Plant Society Communications Workshop:
Exploring Ways to Grow Membership and Increase Diversity
December 1, 2018
Notes**

Participants

Sixteen people from seven chapters of the Virginia Native Plant society (Jefferson, John Clayton, Piedmont, Pocahontas, Potomack, Prince William and South Hampton Roads).

Agenda

- Review and discuss challenges presented by annual meeting speakers.
- Review VNPS mission and work currently undertaken.
- Identify potential actions and challenges to address.
- Review results and propose next steps.

Proposed Actions (listed in order of priorities according to number of votes received (see numbers in parentheses). Each participant had 5 votes to distribute over the proposed actions that emerged from small group discussions.

1. Encourage localities to adopt official wildflower and guide them through the process – these promote pride, provide opportunities to preach our gospel and encourage use. (10 votes)
2. Attend and present at or sponsor table at non-environmental conferences and festivals. Actively reach out to make contacts and offer presentations. Leverage professional conferences and contacts as well as personal connections. (10 votes)
3. Target other groups specifically in publicity to get them to our events. Current challenge: we are preaching to the choir. Also choose publicity photos that reflect the diversity we'd like to encourage. (10 votes)
4. Engage youth: 4-H, Boys and Girls Club and similar groups. Use them at plant sales, provide scholarships, especially to students who have demonstrated interest. Arrange transportation to events and provide active liaison, e.g., docent for field trip. (10 votes)
5. Proactively contact and offer native plant presentations to diverse groups: service clubs, nature groups. Different cultures, military, urban or rural. Include nontraditional e.g., non-environmental, groups. Put yourself out there. We might not fit 100% but we all love nature, so let's share messages. Make the offer proactively. (9 votes)
6. Link up with homeowners associations, get in early to new developments. Volunteer on Planning Commissions, land-use planners in localities. (8 votes)
7. Have other people who aren't like us come speak to us. (6 votes)
8. Partner with landowners and people who own large tracts to offer native plant surveys. Model: Virginia Working landscapes, which approached people with conservation easements (who

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already have demonstrated interest), offered information about habitat, etc. Smithsonian took over that effort. (4 votes)

9. Create native plant garden with school or civic league. Example: appoint steward to location to determine needs, then steward reports back to chapter or to school (science teacher liaison, for example). Issue with native plant gardens currently: they fall apart with time; a steward would take ownership and be accountable. (2 votes)*

* Related idea that did not receive votes separately: Partner with technical school that teaches students the nursery trade. Provide seeds and ask that students propagate native plants for the Chapter's plant sale.

Challenges and suggested solutions that cut across ideas:

- 1) There is limited staffing and capacity at chapter and state level. The mind is eager but the body falters. Solution: Team up – don't rely on one person, use other people's skills, divide and conquer, support each other.
- 2) Leadership – who will own it?
- 3) Will this distract us from other priorities? Example: working with county/local governments, lobbying for and against state legislation. Don't lose perspective of priorities at both state and chapter levels. Some solutions: pairing volunteers well with their passions and abilities, being willing to **"plant 1,000 seeds,"** remain relevant with timing and current events.
- 4) Reaching out to black churches. Challenges: reticence, how to approach, need more guidance. Solution: start by sitting around the table together first. Search for an intersection of goals: learn their goals and identify where they align with yours.
- 5) Diversity (numbers) versus inclusion. It is most important that people feel welcome and included once they do join us or try us out.
- 6) Relevant and timely social media – Quickly leverage what's in the news and current concerns. Make sure VNPS is heard on these relevant issues.
- 7) Take the long view – this might not seem important in the heat of the day, but keep what we need for the future in front of mind.

Next Steps

Write article on the communication workshop for newsletter.

Send proposed actions to all members and board being sure to note that these are suggestions that came from the brainstorming of those present at the communications workshop and that action is not compulsory. Ask for feedback, additional ideas.

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Reconnect with Kevin Bryan from the Keystone Policy Center who offered to stay in touch and come back with suggestions on specific steps, e.g., working with black churches. Cortney will follow up and send him notes from workshop.

Consider participating in the NPR radio show “Another View” where we can begin to express what we are doing about reaching out. Ask other groups with whom we are starting to partner to join us. See <https://www.npr.org/podcasts/381443531/another-view-radio-show>.

Board might reach out to national groups such as Outdoor Afro (outdoorafro.com), Latino Outdoors (latinooutdoors.org) and the Student Conservation Association (thesca.org) to meet and discuss potential common goals and activities.

Chapters might offer a “Meet Up” on native plants (see meetup.com).

Does board need to fill Publicity Chair position?