

Learning from the Trustees

The Trustees

The Trustees is the largest conservation charity in Massachusetts established in 1891 “for the purposes of acquiring, holding, maintaining and opening to the public...beautiful and historic places”. It was, in many ways, the inspiration for all national trusts, and certainly for Octavia Hill. This year marks their

125th anniversary.

They have 100,000 members, 200 permanent staff and care for 115 special places, covering 25,000 acres (10,100 hectares). They have also secured with Conservation Restrictions over a further 46,000 acres. Their places include: 75 miles of

coastline, 17 historic houses or buildings, eight gardens, nine working farms, 43 urban community gardens, 2 urban greenways, and 143 Urban Wilds. They are also the main partner of the new Boston Public Market.



Special points of interest:

- Secondment from UK to USA
- Two way knowledge sharing between Trusts
- Identifying the key lessons learnt

Scope of the Secondment

Since becoming President and CEO of the Trustees, Barbara Ericson has been supporting her team to learn from colleagues in other organisations, and teams of Trustees staff have been sent to the UK to meet staff from the National Trust and visit properties. In 2015 Barbara invited two National Trust General Managers (John Gibson and Andrea Selley) to come and work with her team in the Massachusetts on a three month secondment.

The Trustees were

planning to make changes to the way they structured their operational staff, creating a new General Manager role similar to that used by the National Trust. Barbara wanted existing GMs from the National Trust who could help all levels of the organisation understand how the GM role works, and to provide specific advice on the development of their visitor offer and business.

Prior to starting their secondment, John and Andrea agreed what their

role would be, and this was set out in their individual Project Descriptions so that expectations were clear. The logistical details about accommodation and expenses were also agreed in advance between the two organisations.

Outcomes from the Secondment

John and Andrea ran five 'sharing sessions' for Trustees staff, covering topics from membership recruitment to volunteering. The Trustees were particularly keen to learn how the National Trust develop and use Spirit of Place statements: one legacy from this secondment was the development of a

team of Trustees Spirit of Place trainers who can continue to facilitate workshops for property teams. The secondees also helped the Trustees develop a Business Plan template that the new General Managers could use, and shared tools to help plan for increased volunteer involvement.

Trustees staff seemed to particularly value having the opportunity to talk with 'a critical friend'; people who were dealing with same issues and challenges, who could question their thinking, offer some alternative approaches, but above all provide some reassurance that the road they were on was the right one.



National
Trust

What did the National Trust Learn?

From the National Trust's perspective, the secondment was seen as a good way of developing their staff and building their capability further. Andrea Selley: "There is no better way to learn about your own organisation than if you have to explain it to someone else! I certainly feel more confident about my knowledge and its value, and I'm sure this helped me secure a further internal secondment to a more

senior role within the National Trust."

John and Andrea also learnt new approaches to common issues from the Trustees. John Gibson: "I was particularly interested to learn about their approach to land conservation. The Trustees are very proactive in their use of Conservation Restrictions and partnership working. They have also taken quite a different approach to the National Trust with

their agricultural land, bringing farms back into production and championing the link between land, farming and food."

"I was especially interested in the way the Trustees were reaching out to new audiences, particularly in urban areas." Says Andrea: "The work being done through the Boston Natural Areas Network and their Youth Corps programme is truly inspiring."



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