



SB Botanic Garden: Improving Accessibility for the Local Community

As the nation's first botanic garden dedicated solely to native plants, Santa Barbara Botanic Garden remains driven by our mission to conserve native plants and habitats. Just a stone's throw from downtown Santa Barbara, our five miles (8 kilometers) of meandering trails, historical landmarks, working labs, and more than 1,000 species of California's native plants on display offer our guests the chance to explore the state's native plant diversity and biological wealth.

Santa Barbara Botanic Garden is nestled within the residential neighborhood of Mission Canyon and, when you take a detailed look at our visitation, it becomes clear that just over half of our yearly visitors (61.7%) consist of people who live within the local community. While the Garden is proud to be a notable tourist destination, we also aim to attract members of our community who are underrepresented in our visitation and aim to find ways to invite, accommodate and offer support to facilitate their engagement with the Garden at both our physical location and at other offsite locations throughout the Santa Barbara community.

Our goal is to improve access to our mission through a variety of initiatives to reach an audience that better reflects the diversity within our community. We hope that by offering and enhancing specific programs, the Garden will see increased visitation amongst households with children, representation across income levels, as well as greater visitation from Latino members of the Santa Barbara community. The Garden seeks to serve as an educator and role model to our local community, visitors, and everyone regarding the importance of native plants for biodiversity and combating climate change.

Families in Santa Barbara:

The Backcountry Section is designed to mimic the remote, open spaces of California. Visitors of all ages are invited to explore varied terrain to connect with native plants through play and study. With the opening of the Backcountry, our goal was to attract families with children, and we are happy to see that both membership and visitation amongst this group have increased. But with the rising cost of living in Santa Barbara, it's also important to offer affordable options for those that need them.

Through our partnership with Museums for All, those receiving food assistance (SNAP benefits) can gain free or reduced admission to more than 1,300 museums throughout the United States simply by presenting their SNAP EBT (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Electronic Benefit Transfer). After launching the Museums for All partnership in 2022, the Garden welcomed over 700 guests through this program during the first year and has seen notable increases for every year thereafter.



The Garden has also partnered with the Santa Barbara Public Library to distribute 'family passes' for families to check-out and utilize throughout the year. As a result of community interest, we have increased the amount of 'family passes' available from three to thirty and have recently received a donation that will allow us to place more of these 'family passes' at other regional libraries outside of the city of Santa Barbara.

In addition to the programs mentioned above, the Garden is also expanding our partnership with the Housing Authority of Santa Barbara to provide after school programs at the Garden and the Police Activities League to provide scholarships for our Summer Camp program.

We hope that by offering affordable and discounted options, the Garden will continue to see visitation increase amongst the families that live in our community and that their engagement with native plants continues beyond their visit to our physical location.

All members of the Santa Barbara Community:

Santa Barbara Botanic Garden differs from many other public gardens in that it is nestled within the residential neighborhood of Mission Canyon. While this location provides multiple benefits, it also requires our Garden to operate under a "Conditional Use Permit" which restricts the number of visitors we can have at our location at any one time and throughout the year.

While these restrictions limit our visitation, this limitation has also motivated our organization to get out into the community to meet people where they are. With the launch of Landscape Transformations projects, we are working in partnership with many of our local parks to create satellite gardens that will increase engagement with Santa Barbara County residents, especially for those who can't physically visit the Garden. The first of these "Landscape Transformations" projects has begun at Elings Park and we saw engagement with over 120 volunteers and over 200+ participants from within the Santa Barbara community that helped with planting 1,368 individual plants (from 27 different species).

In addition to the Landscape Transformations project at Elings Park, the Garden is also collaborating with community partners to create a demonstration garden at Alice Keck Memorial Garden in the busy downtown area. This location is very popular and easily accessible, which we hope will allow many community members to see the benefits and beauty of California native plants in a community-centered location.

Santa Barbara Botanic Garden has also recently received a \$818,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to provide conservation outreach, education, and science assistance to small farmers in the Cuyama Valley. The three-year Equity in Conservation Outreach Cooperative Agreement (Equity Agreement) develops climate-smart conservation practices in the Cuyama Valley that conserve soil and water and benefit agricultural productivity by creating diverse native habitats. This project will reach far beyond the gates of our Garden



we look forward to partnering to help make a difference in this diverse and underserved community.

Offsite outreach also included 297 registrants and thousands of virtual participants for the Conservation Symposium, a yearly event where the public is invited to join conservation experts in a day-long exploration of a conservation themed topic for an opportunity to learn more about the important work we do. We hope that by increasing our support of these various programs, the Garden will continue to see increased engagement amongst a diverse audience at many touchpoints throughout Santa Barbara County.

Increasing Diversity at the Garden:

Currently, the Latino community represents the second largest ethnic group in Santa Barbara County ([U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Santa Barbara County, California](#)) making up approximately 46% of the Santa Maria-Santa Barbara Metropolitan Statistical Area, and 34.5% of those living within 10 miles of the Garden. In 2022, this demographic represented 24.1% of our visitation. In 2023, this demographic had risen to 29.4% of the Garden's overall visitor population as assessed from data provided by Alexander Babbage. Our Garden recognizes the importance of building a stronger connection with all members of our community and have made efforts to offer inclusive amenities such as a full translation of our website, Garden maps available in Spanish, and bilingual interpretation throughout the Garden.

A new initiative that can also help bolster this effort is the California Native Plant Landscaper Certification (CNPLC) program launched in partnership with the Theodore Payne Foundation. California Native Plant Landscaper Certificate Program (CNPLC) is a job-training course for landscape professionals developed and taught by highly respected native plant experts. Designed with the professional —and the aspiring professional— in mind, this 19-hour course is offered in Spanish and English with flexible hours including nights, weekends, and recordings that can be accessed anytime. Most participants in our new CNPLC program are Latino and at the end of the course, participants receive a certificate of completion and learn how to promote their business.

This year, the Garden has also chosen to participate in Latino Conservation Week, which was established by the Hispanic Access Foundation to support the Latino community in getting outdoors and participating in activities to protect our natural resources. To help engage our community we are aiming to highlight Latino artists in the conservation/native plant space in our next gallery exhibit, offer docent tours in Spanish, lead tours showcasing the restoration at the Alice Keck Memorial Garden (a new off-site location mentioned above), partner with a local organization for a Bike Tour to explore local native plants and gardens, and potentially partner with the Public Library to schedule a story time in Spanish or host bi-lingual story boards in the Backcountry.



Looking ahead, the Garden is also looking for ways to support El día de los niños, commonly known as Día, which is a celebration where the focus is on children and making them feel special. Children's Day has been celebrated annually in Mexico since 1925. Children are recognized as an important part of society, so the day focuses on the importance of loving, accepting and appreciating children. It is a festivity that is quite unique, full of laughter and play, when adults are reminded of the importance of childhood and children teach us how joyful and simple life can be. ([In Mexico, April 30 is Children's Day: el Dia del Niño - MexConnect](#))

The Garden has also been in conversations with the Barbareño Band of Chumash Indians (BBCI), (the local tribe on whose unceded lands the Garden sits) to encourage a partnership in support of access and representation. To foster this relationship, we currently have 31 BBCI members who have signed up for a complimentary membership with the Garden. We have also been in conversations whilst developing new interpretive materials that will include Chumash names on plant labels. The Garden has also been supportive of an offsite project called Hammond's Meadow (officially "Hammond's Meadow County Open Space") which is a Chumash heritage site known as Shalawa. The 2.96-acre parcel is in Montecito and the Garden is partnering with the Barbareño Band of Chumash Indians and Channel Islands Restoration to restore native habitat while protecting the integrity of the archeological site and remaining respectful of Chumash heritage.

Indicators of Success:

We are working towards diversity in staff, programming, and all aspects of the Santa Barbara Botanic Garden. With improved bilingual and accessible interpretation, we hope to see increased engagement with the Latino community reflected not only in our visitation but also in our community volunteers, event/class participants and staff. We hope that by continuing our outreach efforts we can find new and interesting ways to work together to ensure biodiversity thrives.

We hope to increase awareness about California Native Plants throughout the community, especially amongst those who do not currently have a connection to the Garden to offer interactions where access is free and easy. Whether you're a nature lover, home gardener, or someone who has never even been to our Garden, we hope to provide the insight and resources necessary to understand, protect, and grow native plants in your own community. With passion for the health of our planet, and a legacy of transforming knowledge into action, the Garden hopes to inspire a movement of native-plant advocates from backyards to the backcountry of California.

By increasing community outreach, we hope to motivate a diverse representation of Santa Barbara residents to visit the Garden or to plant native plants in their own communities. We hope to see a measurable difference by the end of the 2024 calendar year, but our larger strategy hopes to transform our county to be covered by 30% native plants by 2030.



Santa Barbara
Botanic Garden

Project Team Participants:

Mark Funk, Board Chair; Steve Windhager, Executive Director; and Kaile Katsumoto, Executive Assistant to the Garden Directors

Resources:

Funding will be needed to support staff time to research and track the outcome of specific programs. We expect the project implementation to be on-going but more time-consuming during the initial year as the activities roll out and projects are identified and monitored. The project participants have also suggested a board level line item for accessibility improvements be added to the 2025 budget.

Milestones & Deadlines:

June-July 2024 - Share project proposal with Cohort members and Santa Barbara Botanic Garden Board members for input and to finalize the project. Ask for feedback regarding programs that have the greatest impact.

August-December 2024 – Continue to monitor programs, gather metrics and track visitation statistics to measure success. Measure participation for Museums for All, track volunteer participation for the Landscape Transformations projects, capture participation for the Conservation Symposium and continue to utilize metrics to observe changes in visitation.

January-March 2025 - Review metrics to identify which programs are having the most community impact. Cultivate relationships between Santa Barbara Botanic Garden and supportive stakeholders and seek their recommendations. Utilize these metrics to determine which programs could benefit from additional funding and resources and which programs can be scaled back or eliminated.

April-December 2025 - Continue to cultivate relationships between Santa Barbara Botanic Garden and collaborative partners. Hold a celebratory event for staff to recognize progress and share the data to illustrate progress over the past three years.