

Urban Forest Accelerator Case Study:



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Manchester City of Trees Recruitment

IF YOU WANT TO RECRUIT NEW PEOPLE, YOU HAVE TO DO RECRUITMENT IN A NEW WAY

GREEN JOBS AND THE FORESTRY INDUSTRY ARE FACING A NUMBER OF CHALLENGES:

The challenges of recruitment in green jobs include low wages, lots of competition for roles and a culture that favours more middle class, wealthy individuals, from White backgrounds, gaining jobs at all levels. **"If you work in low-income communities for any length of time you recognise that there's tonnes of frustrated talent that just needs an opportunity."** Says the Green Jobs Co-ordinator, **"It's quite a middle-class sector. We are the least diverse"** and it's certainly a challenge facing the whole of urban forestry. Another challenge is the lack of women, **"It's white men who were big honchos [in] these organisations, but we are a good team of women."**

"Trying to get yourself a foot in the door of the environment sector or the green sector, it's so difficult" explained one Project Officer and she is right. **"It's a really very difficult sector to get into because it's also quite small and competitive"** she said, adding that **"I've had 2 jobs in the world, but they were quite short just because of the funding availability of project support."**

The roles and experience requirements often exclude people without financial support **"You just have to volunteer for years... we just have to do it, and it's just so disheartening... I need to pay my bills".**

Canva **"The reason why the wages are so poor in the green sector generally is that people have worked for nothing because they're so desperate to get a step on the ladder. There's quite a lot of people here [who] have done volunteering for six months or longer, unpaid, to get a foot in the door. That's a problem because wages are going to be lower, because why would you pay somebody who's doing it for nothing."**

It's not just the difficulty in getting jobs in this sector, there is also the issue of how parents and teachers view the roles. One Project Officer remembered teachers saying you should work hard at school, or you might have to do planting jobs all day, as though it was a punishment. Now that Officer makes sure to show children how planting something is just one part of the whole picture and shows young people how **"You're not just wallowing around in mud all day or just digging holes!"**

Another Officer stated **"I've got a lot of friends who are from Pakistani and Indian backgrounds and I remember one of my best friends, he was saying that when he told his parents that he was going to do animal conservation or biology, his parents [said] 'no, you're not doing that. You've got to become a doctor'. You've got to become a lawyer".** The status of roles in green jobs is an issue.

RECOGNISING THE PROBLEM, CITY OF TREES ARE TRYING TO ADDRESS THIS:

"There's talent everywhere, but they just don't get those opportunities. I think if we can create the platforms and networks of support, you can give that talent an opportunity where they wouldn't expect it", said the Green Jobs Co-ordinator at City of Trees.

HOW ARE CITY OF TREES APPROACHING RECRUITMENT DIFFERENTLY?

City of Trees are confident in their recruitment process which not only sources recruits with a positive attitude, but also retains them. From sending the candidates questions in advance of the interview, to reduce their stress levels at interview stage, to a supported first few weeks at work, members of the team only had praise for this process.

STEP BY STEP RECRUITMENT CHANGES HAVE BROUGHT BIG REWARDS

Canva: "We change the way we recruit so that we send people the questions before the interview. We want them to do the best in the interview and some of these people need that support in order to get through at this stage". Green Jobs Co-ordinator.

ADVERTISE IN DIFFERENT WAYS AND PLACES

City of Trees get a positive response from engaging with the local Job Centres during recruitment drives as **"Green jobs are the flavour of the month!"**. Working together, the Green Jobs Co-ordinator explained the process he follows: **"We say we have these opportunities...it's a really nice thing for them. They looked at their customers, sifted and sorted and then we did the interviews at Stratford Job Centre and that's a big change because if you just recruit normally and advertise through the normal channels like we used to do, then you're going to get the same audience. So, you have to go to where the audience is different and recruit differently"**.

Advertising for recruitment was done on a wide range of sites. **"We did a lot of advertising on our website and then we use LinkedIn, sending it out through our networks. We put it on Environmental Jobs and on Countryside Jobs as well"**, a team member said, describing one job advertising plan.

Having looked for jobs in My Environmental Jobs and LinkedIn **"For ages"**, one Assistant Project Officer came across their role in City of Trees through a friend sharing an Instagram post for a contract role. The team at City of Trees then got in touch with her to inform her that they had another role, which was that of Assistant Project Officer. They thought that would be better suited to her. They were right and she got the job. This proves the worth of advertising roles in places and platforms that are not typical, and for being open-minded when people apply.



RECRUIT FOR PERSONALITY TRAITS NOT EXPERIENCE

Recruiting people with the right personal characteristics is important. One new recruit explained **"They knew that I could jump in straight away and it's the pro of an enthusiastic person. I was very willing to learn. I booked in with 1-2 other people in my diary for them to show me, so it didn't take long for me to get to grips with the basics and planting"**.

One member of the team shared her thoughts about how personality traits are important, **"Sociable - I think being able to talk to anyone and everyone. First of all confident and being a people person, being able to interact with all different kinds of members of the public, teammates, contractors, people you're paying and people who are paying you...having that ability to communicate openly and clearly about what**

it is you need - I think that's really important".

"Someone who is eager and enthusiastic and quite positive... definitely character over skills and experience. I don't think you need a degree or years of experience working in the sector to join the sector, and I really do think it comes down to what you are like as a person, whether you're up for a challenge and working hard".

City of Trees' Green Jobs Co-ordinator noted that **"People don't know about the sector, but when they find out about the sector, they absolutely love it!"**

When considering recruits, **"It's helpful if some people have had experience of maybe managing some volunteers, experience of working in schools, experience of using hand tools and things like that but it's just generally that kind of enthusiasm that I want"**. This isn't always easily conveyed in a CV so having a supported interview process, where recruits are able to prepare responses in advance, helps to identify more about the individual themselves. The process is more open-minded and suits entry level roles well.

MAKE SURE THE SALARY IS ENOUGH TO LIVE ON

One vital point for reaching people from lower income backgrounds is to make sure the wages are enough to live on. Most people from working class backgrounds can't access extended family financial support as adults and so they need to pay their wages accordingly.

It is really important for this low paid sector that the salaries conform with the National Living Wage, **"We want people to feel as if they're getting a good salary, especially with the cost of living now because it is tough"**, a team member told us. All team members discussed their passion to help the environment which means that lots of passionate individuals may be unable to access these jobs if they don't pay living wages.

CONSIDER ROLES WHICH DON'T NEED EXPERIENCE

A regular comment was the difficulty of getting into work in the environmental sector. Roles that require no experience are highly valued, with one member of the team saying that **"No experience needed was such a bonus because trying to get yourself a foot in the door of the environment sector or the green sector, it's so difficult"**. Having access to a Co-ordinator who offered advice, training links, and industry insights played a crucial role in candidate success.

DON'T INSIST ON DEGREES

The team recommended giving more candidates a chance at interviews rather than relying solely on cover letters and CVs, especially in roles that require practical skills. Suggestions were made such as internships or placements for candidates who **"Don't want to go into higher education - they can get into more like placements and get trained up on the job instead of having to have the degree or the masters"**, she suggested. Making work in the sector **"More accessible to everyone"**.

The Green Jobs Co-ordinator we interviewed said, **"Opening it up to not only those people with a degree in environmental science or an MMA masters, but those looking for attitude and passion"**

City Of Trees and their partners **"are open and wanting to get people who don't have degrees or an environmental background get into the sector - I think that's very special"** explained one member of staff. She felt that bringing together so many people from different backgrounds contributed to **"A very diverse team of so many different skill sets, instead of being a bit of a blueprint copy like every role having the same specifications"**. She went on to express the value in this diversity, saying that **"It's very rare that someone comes from a place where they've planted trees before...I think it's the fact that they're open to acknowledging different people's skill sets"**.

SEND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS IN ADVANCE

Talking about getting the interview questions in advance, a team member said: **"Definitely that was the biggest thing and even in my second interview they didn't send me all of the questions in advance, but they sent me 4 out of 11 questions... just having a few points that you definitely can touch on in the interview, just for your confidence levels going in"**. The interview itself was **"Very relaxed...an informal chat. They were just very friendly, really, really welcoming. We had a laugh, which was nice"**, she said.

This interview process, which included questions in advance, helped boost confidence and helped candidates to feel more comfortable. A team member recalls the value of having seen the interview questions in advance saying **“going in with an idea of what you're about to talk about , made, a world of difference”**.

TOP TIPS TO RECRUIT PEOPLE FROM A WIDER RANGE OF BACKGROUNDS:

- Reach out to places, rather than expect candidates to find you – MCOT forged a partnership with their local Job Centre for example
- Look for personality traits – enthusiasm for example
- Don't expect experience if possible – this disproportionately excludes people who can't afford long term volunteering
- Offer internships and placements which don't require degrees
- Send questions in advance – this allows people to prepare in advance, which can be vital if no one in your immediate circle or family, works in these kinds of jobs

SUPPORT PEOPLE ONCE THEY GET THE JOB

Although she considers herself a **“Really fast learner”**, a team member recounts her first few weeks of work as being well supported. **“They didn't put me on any projects that were due to be completed... there were no urgent deadlines. I was always working with someone who had been here for an amount of time prior to me joining”**.

This example project provided a training budget for each placement, with the Project Officer saying that this **“Has been great. That's been a huge help... having the choice and such a wide choice to do whatever I want and tailor it [the training] to what I'm interested in or what will benefit the role I'm in”**.

Support, guidance and mentorship, during both recruitment and career development, was valued by the City of Trees team. A recent recruit discussed that moving from working in hospitality to an environmental placement had been **“A big leap”**. This programme offers a training budget as well as 1:1 mentoring sessions every month.

City of Trees benefit from having a Green Jobs Co-ordinator which was valued by those we spoke to: **“He's got loads of experience. He's done a crazy amount of interviews; being the interviewer and the interviewee, which is great because he knows exactly how you feel. He was brilliant in my interview and even now I'm settled, he's forever sending out links to conferences, training courses, anything to sort of better your individual skills and knowledge”**.

Working in a supportive environment was crucial, with one Assistant Project Officer saying that initially, **“Everything that I was working on was in conjunction with somebody else and that hugely helps”**.

THESE STAFF CAN SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCES WITH OTHERS, AND THIS WILL HAVE A LONG TERM IMPACT ON THE INDUSTRY:

City of Trees is a well-connected project at both regional and national levels. Nationally it collaborates with The Woodland Trust and is about to begin a national flood management programme. One of the ways this collaboration happens locally is through the focus on children and the next generation of urban forest staff. Working with Manchester City Council on UNICEF and the Child Project is one example, and reaching out to children at all ages through nurseries and high schools is another.

Working with these children is effective at raising aspirations as one staff member explained “You can see a lot of children are quite shocked if you say that this is your actual job or that you get paid to do [this]... they’re seeing it as an option in their future employment and it sparks an interest.”

They also work with more local partners and have recently hired apprentices with funding from Bolton Council, for a Bolton apprentice and Manchester City Council for a particular apprentice from a social housing background.

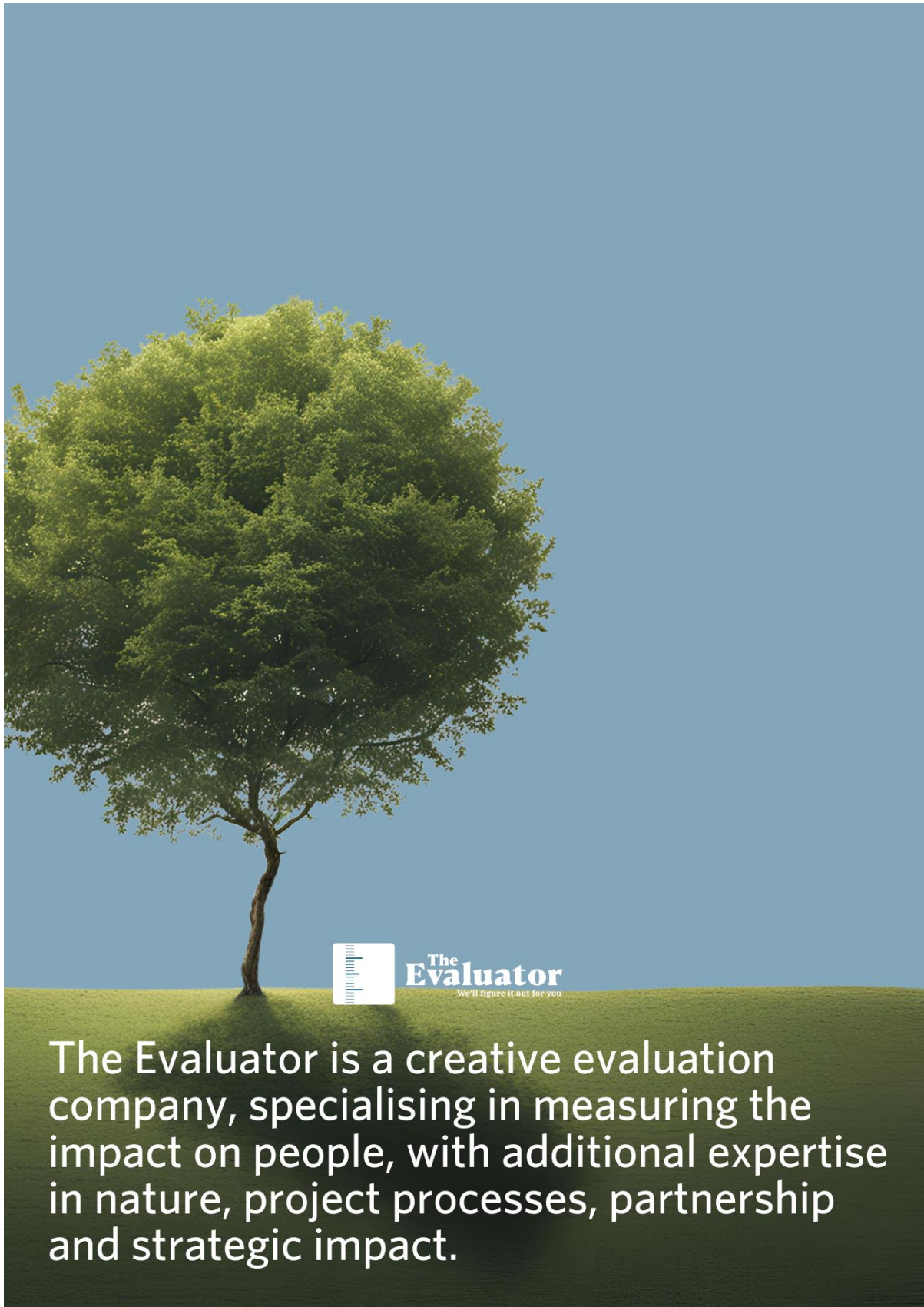
Reaching new staff, from a range of backgrounds, means that their community outreach work can also reach new people. The Green Jobs Co-ordinator explained that “**All of the voluntary organisations will have volunteers who they have access to**” and often it’s this volunteer base that generates new recruits once they’ve had a taste of the work. For example, two of their recent recruits now lead dementia-friendly walks. “I’m very passionate about the dementia friendly walks, myself” they said, adding “Most of the attendees we have are 70 plus... a lot of them have spent a lot of time outdoors in nature, a lot of them are keen bird watchers. It [the dementia walk] makes them really excited to be there. It brings us that wealth of knowledge that they have that otherwise would either be forgotten or they would not be able to talk about.” That member of staff explained “I’m really content, very happy here... feels like I’m making some sort of difference in the world”

Ultimately, the work with local people, is building bridges in communities and helping Manchester City of Trees share their work with a larger audience.

“I like the fact that it’s very community focused and when we do do the planting, we try to do it so that the communities or schools are doing most of it with us, and I think that’s very unique for forestry companies because often they’re just trying to get the trees in.”

Staff commented on the variety that they enjoyed in their work, “**I just like how different the role is...in one minute I’m out...one minute, I’m in the office. I’m working on software (GIS) or I’m talking with schools. It’s all very different. I really like that”.**





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