Reopening a Public Garden after the Coronavirus Shutdown

As the coronavirus pandemic continues to affect our daily lives, we are all looking forward to the future and a return to normalcy. As the stay-at-home orders are lifted and nonessential businesses are allowed to resume operations, there is a lot for gardens to consider before they welcome guests once again. What's more, many of these considerations are specific to your institution.

To protect visitors, employees and volunteers alike, it is important to perform your due diligence in assessing your unique risk.

At every decision, you have to constantly evaluate the science and safety. Relying on local authorities within the department of health is critical to understand the science specific to your area. As we know data changes all the time so staying connected with your local health authorities and the CDC guidance is paramount.

Reopening will have to take a phased approach so it is important to define those phases and be flexible in monitoring/revising them.

Phase 1. Initial Opening. The most restrictions

Phase 2. Modified. Some restrictions lifted

Phase 3. New normal operations

Consider using SWOT analysis to understand low to high risks associated with reopening each area of the Garden, including public and private spaces. This will help you establish the challenges in all phases of the process. Here are some thoughts to help you build your reopening plan.

Determining When to Reopen

- **Review guidance from state and local governments**—The COVID-19 pandemic impacts states and regions in different ways. Just because a business is allowed to reopen in one region of the country doesn't automatically mean your operations will be allowed to resume. As such, it is critical to understand and review all relevant state and local orders to determine if and when your business is allowed to reopen.

- **Legal, insurance and other professionals** – seek advice from your trusted advisors.

- **Understand the risks**—COVID-19 will continue to be a threat which underscores the importance of performing a thorough risk assessment before reopening. Prior to conducting a risk assessment, it is important to review guidance from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), state and local agencies, industry associations as well as your local

health department. It is critical to seek the expertise of legal, insurance and other professionals. Do keep in mind the importance of documenting your COVID processes and your protective actions to keep staff and guests safe. It is an important aspect of the preparation process and you will want to have evidence of the protocols and training completed.

Conducting a Risk Assessment

- **Identifying the hazards**—Complete the SWOT analysis for each area of the garden and each building; i.e. galleries, bathrooms, gift shop, café. Perform a walkthrough of the premises to identify the high-risk areas for visitors and for staff including those private spaces where staff will be working. It is also important to consider what tasks employees and volunteers will be performing and whether or not they are especially exposed to COVID-19 risks when performing their duties.

  Areas to be considered will be both private and public spaces, such as admissions, entrances, exits, common areas and high traffic outdoor spaces, staff and public restrooms and offices and facilities spaces.

- **Protecting staff and visitors**—After identifying the hazards, you want to determine which populations of your workforce could be exposed to COVID-19 risks. When performing this evaluation, you will need to make note of high-risk individuals (e.g., staff members who meet with visitors or individuals with preexisting medical conditions). Visitor protection will be more focused on how we manage their experience in our space.

- **Assessing risks**—Once you have identified the risks, you must analyze each to determine the potential consequences. You will want to determine:

  - How likely is this particular risk to occur?

  - What are the ramifications should this risk occur?

  When analyzing your risks consider employee and visitor safety, potential financial losses, compliance requirements, business disruptions, reputational harm and other consequences.

- **Controlling risks**—With a sense of the threats to your institution, you can consider the best ways to address them. There are a variety of methods to manage your risk, including:

  - **Risk avoidance**—Risk avoidance is when you eliminate certain hazards, activities and exposures from operations altogether. Example; closing the conservatory, picnic areas and the visitor center.

  - **Risk control**—Risk control involves preventive action. Example; sanitation schedules, directional signage for walking paths and timed ticketing.

  - **Risk transfer**—Risk transfer is when a business transfers their exposures to a third party. Example; hire out cleaning and sanitation services vs. using garden staff.

For COVID-19, control measures should include cleaning protocols, work from home orders and mandated personal protective equipment (PPE) usage. Additional workplace measures can be found below.

- **Monitoring the results**—Risk management is an evolving, continuous process. Once you have implemented your risk management response you'll want to monitor its effectiveness and reassess. As we all know COVID-19 risks, governmental mandates and guidance continue to change and it is important to remain compliant.

Maintaining Workplace Safety

Staff, including employees and volunteers, may be hesitant to return to work out of concern for their own health or for potential exposure to family members. The suggested protocols outlined here should provide a level of assurance that as an employer you are being strategic to provide a safe workplace. Communication is a key component of the return to work strategy.

- **Implement administrative controls**—Typically, administrative controls are changes in work policies or procedures that reduce or minimize an individual's exposure to a hazard. An example of an administrative control in response to COVID-19 is establishing alternating days or extra shifts that reduce the total number of employees working at a given time and facilitating staff working remotely.

  For those working on site require employees/volunteers to complete a "check in" including temporal temperature scan, passing the CDC screening questions and to confirm they have not knowingly been exposed to COVID 19. In some communities, occupational health clinics will conduct this screening on site.

- **Separate sick staff**—Employees or volunteers who appear to have symptoms (i.e., fever, cough or shortness of breath) upon arrival at work or who become sick during the day should immediately be separated from other staff and visitors and sent home. If an employee or volunteer is confirmed to have COVID-19, employers should inform staff of their possible exposure to COVID-19. Employers should instruct those staff how to proceed based on the CDC Public Health Recommendations for Community-Related Exposure.

- **Utilize Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)**—Follow the CDC or local mandates regarding PPE. Train staff on proper PPE best practices and provide them with the PPE they will be required to wear. Training material should be easy to understand and must be available in the appropriate language and literacy level for all workers. Avoid sharing equipment and in those cases where you cannot avoid it, establish cleaning requirements for all such equipment whether office equipment, garden tools, carts and vehicles. Be sure you have sufficient hand washing stations, hand sanitizer and PPE.

- **Support respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene**—You should encourage good hygiene to prevent the spread of COVD-19. This can involve:

    - Providing tissues and no-touch disposal receptacles

    - Providing soap and water in the workplace

    - Placing hand sanitizers in multiple locations to encourage hand hygiene

    - Place CDC signage in bathrooms & breakrooms.

    - Ensure 6 feet space distancing in workspaces.

    - Avoid touching your face.

- **Consider engineering controls**—Engineering controls protect workers by removing hazardous conditions or by placing a barrier between the worker and the hazard. For COVID-19, engineering controls can include:

    - Installing high-efficiency air filters

    - Increasing ventilation rates in the work environment

    - Installing physical barriers, such as clear plastic sneeze guards

    - Convert high traffic doors to hands free entry

- **Be adaptable**—how can you amend operations to be in compliance with the science and social distancing requirements. Understand your space and how you can accommodate while meeting the safety requirements.

- **Maintain dialogue with staff, vendors and partners**—Communication with employees, volunteers, and vendors is important. Keep the communication frequent and targeted to your audience.

    Be sure vendors understand your requirements as you move through the various phases of the reopening; they will need to meet the same expectations, as well as the industry/CDC guidelines applicable to their services/industry.

    Member communication is critical throughout the process and utilization of web-based opportunities to engage and to inform continue to be the best platform.

- **Encourage social distancing**

    - Avoiding gatherings of 10 or more people

    - Instructing workers to maintain at least 6 feet of distance from other people

    - Hosting training & meetings virtually when possible

    - Discouraging people from shaking hands

- **Perform routine environmental cleaning and disinfection**—Some best practices include:

    o Cleaning and disinfecting all frequently touched surfaces such as workstations, keyboards, telephones, handrails and doorknobs.

    o Discouraging employees from using other workers' phones, desks, offices, or other tools and equipment, when possible. If necessary, clean and disinfect them before and after use.

    o Providing disposable wipes so that commonly used surfaces can be wiped down by employees before each use.

    o All bathrooms should be monitored and cleaned hourly. The cleaning should be documented as it is completed and records maintained.

- **Shared equipment and vehicles**

    o Gardening gloves should be required for those working outdoors and potentially sharing tools.

    o Develop a protocol for utilization of carts and garden vehicles. Best practice would be to clean and disinfecting all touched surfaces after use and before use. Equip vehicles with disposal wipes to facilitate.

- **Volunteers**—Since volunteers are key members of Garden staff, they should be part of the same onboarding and protocol, however keeping in mind that many are considered higher risk to COVID based on their age and perhaps underlying health issues.

    o Important to train them in the same way you do your staff with emphasis on the safety distancing.

    o Adhere to schedule for cleaning and disinfecting the workstations between shifts and on regular intervals.

    o Consider the work needed and maintain adherence to your safety guideline.

    o If you provide the same level of precaution, training and documentation, it is not felt that an amended waiver specific to COVID is necessary. The key is training, communication and monitoring to confirm that protocols are followed.

Reopening the Garden to Guests

Consider a soft opening to members only initially, using a timed visit schedule. These are your Garden's key supporters; they are familiar with the Garden and understand basic Garden etiquette and protocol. They also have a vested interest in utilizing their membership. They do not need to purchase tickets, which eliminates risk of ticket transactions.

- **Consider timed ticketing**
  - This will help control the number of guests and assist in eliminating contact with others and maintain social distancing expectations with guests.
  - Develop a traffic patterns for the various areas of the Garden that are open.
  - Each day during the first week or more monitor and observe how guests are using the space and make necessary accommodations for safety and to develop strategies to move forward with full opening.
  - Plan for on-site ticketing with plexi-screen and space for adequate distancing for staff and guests.

- **Encourage social distancing**
  - Avoiding gatherings of 10 or more
  - Stay at least 6' away from other guests or garden staff
  - Add one way directional signage to pathways where appropriate
  - Update your garden map to include social distancing requirements and way finding.
  - Place signage throughout the garden on expectations of the guest while visiting

- **Perform routine environmental cleaning and disinfecting**
  - Cleaning and disinfecting all frequently touched surfaces including handrails and doorknobs.
  - Bathrooms should be cleaned hourly and a log maintained.
  - Identify other spaces unique to the Garden that need will need to have routine cleaning and disinfecting due to interaction of the public. These could be exhibits or art objects that people frequently touch.
  - Have ample hand washing & hand sanitizing stations.

- **Eliminate common use items**
  - Consider wheelchair and scooter usage as well as trams and whether you can provide the necessary steps to adequately sanitize this equipment as you reopen.
    - Benches that cannot be properly cleaned and sanitized should be removed or marked to not be seated.
    - Children's play areas. Currently the CDC is recommending eliminating use of playgrounds, splash pads & water areas.
    - Drinking fountains should be covered; however, alternative access to water for staff and guests needs to be available.

- **Event Planning**
    - Simplify the event. Example; eliminate additional vendors to help mitigate risk.
    - Establish criteria to meet social distancing requirements & post signage with your expectations for guests.
    - Have ample hand washing & hand sanitizing stations.
    - Offer pre-purchasing items such as boxed lunches for the event.
    - Offer the event multiple times to allow for more opportunities while managing social distancing.
    - Communicate the expectation with guests ahead of the event. What they can expect when they arrive and what their behavior needs to be while attending.
    - Include temperature checks for guests attending events. Will you require masks to be worn? Will you ask if they have been exposed to anyone who is sick?
    - Provide a budget forecast to determine if event is worth the risk.
    - Add use of "safety greeters" to the event who can help articulate the precautions that must be followed.
    - Include all essential stakeholders and staff for planning and implementation.
- **Survey your staff**
    - To better understand and address their primary concerns, how to better communicate and to evaluate their confidence in protocols.
    - For insight to address the protective measures to prevent illness for all.
    - Do they understand the mission and do they feel fully supported in the Garden's ability to continue to lead in the crisis?

Safety is Paramount

It is critical to demonstrate that everything done is for the safety of all employees, volunteers and guests. Clearly outline the risk and mitigation measures to minimize risk to the lowest level. Document your protocols and all of the various training provided to employees, volunteers and vendors.

Liability risks are certainly the forefront of concern and it is uncertain how claims will be pursued and evaluated. However having a plan and then training, following, testing and modifying the plan will help establish that management is taking prudent measures of precaution to keep all safe. These strategies will be key to bringing staff back and reopening your Garden. Gardens are sorely missed by staff, members and the general public. We are hopeful that these guidelines will assist as you plan to reopen in the best possible manner to the benefit of all involved. Please contact the BHS Public Gardens team if we can be of further assistance at 1-800-350-7676.

Additional Resources:

https://www.publicgardens.org/covid-19/resources

https://www.medicare.gov/medicare-coronavirus

https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/parks-rec/index.html

https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/visitors.html

https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Guidelines-for-Opening-Up-America-Again.pdf

www.thinkhr.com items available include:

- A comprehensive Return to Work Checklist
- 3 short training videos on topics like "If an Employee Declines Offered Work"
- A sample Welcome Back letter
- A sample Employee Notice on wearing of face coverings
- Q&As addressing common questions like whether it's ok to screen employees for COVID-19