



**Plant
Collections
Network**

AMERICAN PUBLIC GARDENS ASSOCIATION

Case Study:
**Benchmarking Orchid
Collections**



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**American Public Gardens Association
2014 Plant Collections Symposium
Washington, DC**

Plant Collections Network Mission

To **build a network** of North American public gardens to **coordinate a continent-wide approach** to plant germplasm preservation, and to **promote high standards** of plant collections management.

Excellence * Collections * Synergy

What is Benchmarking?



http://www.thecomicstrips.com/properties/speedbump/art_images/sb1071030_2.jpg

Term coined by Xerox engineer in 1980s: *the search for industry best practices to lead to superior performance*

3 Levels of Benchmarking

Internal (within your organization)



Strategic (among similar organizations)



Outside (among other industries)

The Process of Benchmarking

Organizations that benchmark, adapt the process to best fit their own needs and culture. Although number of steps in the process may vary from organization to organization, the following six steps contain the core techniques:



Credit: Total Quality Management

Why Benchmark?

- ❖ Compare your collection with others
- ❖ Define your collection's scope
- ❖ Verify what's special, unique, common
- ❖ Use results to make decisions – what to keep, what to cull, what to seek
- ❖ Renew organizational commitment & focus
- ❖ Connect with other collection holders

Application & Review Process

- Current collection vs ultimate collection
- List others known other significant collections
- Suggest a complementary collection

Start with Your Collection's Baseline Data

- Select high priority collection
- Conduct field inventory
- Update records
- Verify identity, nomenclature

Approach Depends on Specific Focus of Collection Scope

- Alpha-taxonomic
- Conservation – sampling genetic diversity in wild populations
- Cultivars vs species ...or both
- Historic significance
- Breeder's work, etc.

Sources for Information

INTERNAL

- PlantList
- International checklists, monographs, floras

STRATEGIC

- Online plant records
- Request inventories
- Plant Heritage collections/ RHS Plant Finder
- Plant collections listserv & American Public Gardens Association's collections forum

OUTSIDE

- IUCN red lists
- International plant registration authorities
- Plant societies



A Few Caveats...

- ❖ Benchmarking results are only as accurate as data provided
- ❖ May need to account for errors, track/include synonyms
- ❖ Resist temptation to reduce benchmarking to a numbers game

The Great Orchid Challenge

- ❖ One of world's largest plant families – daunting!
- ❖ Many gardens hold many orchids, often from private collections
- ❖ How many are actively curated vs maintained primarily for display?



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More Information:

- Go to publicgardens.org/programs/plant-collections-network
- Contact Plant Collections Network Manager, Pam Allenstein pallenstein@publicgardens.org
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