



# Museum Profile

# **MENDOCINO COAST**

# **BOTANICAL GARDENS**

MENDOCINO COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

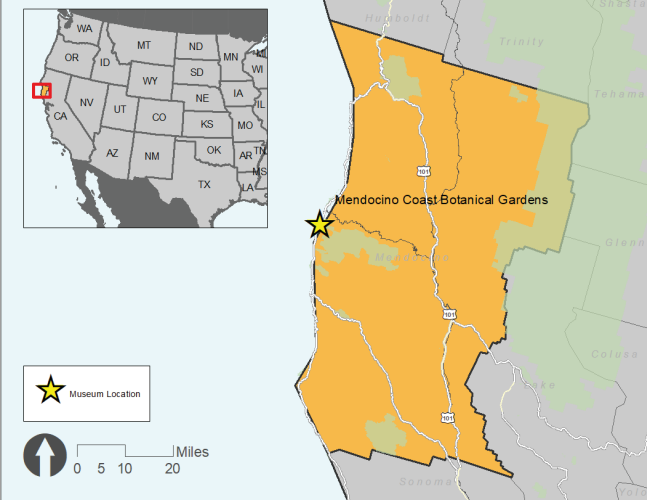
# Museum Profile: Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens



## MENDOCINO COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens (MCBG) is a rural museum located in Mendocino County, about 160 miles northeast of San Francisco, California. MCBG is located on 47 acres of coastal bluff land bordered by the Pacific Ocean and hosts more than 85,000 visitors per year.

MCBG’s overarching mission is “to engage and enrich lives by displaying and conserving plants in harmony with our Northern California coastal ecosystems and to preserve public access to the coast.” MCBG promotes wellbeing through reciprocal relationships with the local community, relying on local residents for financial and volunteer support. In return, MCBG encourages involvement in its classes, workshops, and other programming. MCBG also supports education throughout the county related to horticulture, botany, conservation, and environmentalism.



## JEFFERSON COUNTY

Mendocino County is a rural county with a population of 87,409. Nearly one-tenth of the county population lives in Fort Bragg, where MCBG is located. In addition to MCBG, Fort Bragg is the home to tourist attractions like the Skunk Train, which runs through ancient redwood groves; the Sea Glass Museum; and Glass Beach.

The median household income in Mendocino County of \$43,510 is considerably less than the national median of \$55,322. The county is majority White (66.4 percent) and has a large Hispanic population, which represents almost one-quarter of residents.

	Population	% Change in Population (2000–2016)	% White	% Black	% Hispanic	% Asian	% Other	Median Household Income	% Families in Poverty
United States	318,558,162	13.2	62.0	12.3	17.3	5.2	3.3	\$55,322	11.0
Mendocino County	87,409	1.3	66.4	0.6	24.0	1.8	7.3	\$43,510	18.4

Compared to other rural counties across the country, Mendocino County residents enjoy elevated levels of overall community health, while the K–12 educational system in Mendocino County experiences high needs, reflected in students' performance across a range of publicly available measures of success. Mendocino County fell in the top quartile of all rural counties

on the Community Health Index and in the bottom quartile on the School Effectiveness Index.<sup>1</sup> The primary industries in the county include Health Care & Social Assistance, Retail Trade, Accommodation & Food Service, and Education Services. These industries account for roughly 54 percent of adult employment in the county.

	Total Labor Force	% Health Care & Social Assistance	% Retail Trade	% Accommodation & Food Service	% Education Services
United States*	131,362,978	14.5	10.9	8.9	9.2
Mendocino County	27,046	19.0	13.0	11.0	11.0

Data Sources: 2012–16 American Community Survey five-year estimates; U.S. Census Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD), 2017.

\*Continental figures for total labor force include the 48 lower states and Washington, DC.

<sup>1</sup> Data elements included in the Community Health and School Effectiveness Indexes, along with measures for Mendocino County, can be found at the beginning of Appendix II.

## SITE VISIT PARTICIPANTS AND DATA COLLECTION

In February 2020, the study team conducted interviews with five current staff and board members and representatives from six different partner organizations. Site visit interviews conducted with staff and partners focused on understanding the MCBG programming and partnerships that support health, education, and social wellbeing in Mendocino County as well as MCBG's institutional approaches to assessment and sustainability.

In addition, the following data were used to create the network map included in this profile:

- 2018 MCBG Form 990
- Program evaluations for several MCBG programs
- Interview notes and related materials collected by the case study team

This site profile includes the following:

- A summary of select MCBG programming and partnerships that support visitors' access to formal and informal education and community health
- A descriptive network map that illustrates the scope and variety of connections MCBG maintains with local partners throughout the county and beyond

## MCBG FACILITATES EDUCATION, SOCIAL CONNECTION, AND SUSTAINABILITY

A sense of community ownership has created a strong connection to MCBG: Interview respondents noted that the community has played a meaningful role in the creation of MCBG. Historically, Fort Bragg has been the home of an exceptional number of plant nurseries that specialize in breeding and growing iconic area plants such as rhododendrons and camellias. Local nurseries sought out MCBG as a place to cultivate and evaluate how plants grow in the area. Since then, many Mendocino County residents have been involved in MCBG's robust volunteer program, which provides a place for like-minded volunteers to socialize and connect. The community perceives MCBG as a place to connect to plants, animals, and ecosystems. For volunteers and visitors alike, spending time in the beautiful outdoor space by the ocean supports physical and mental health.

Over the years, MCBG has expanded its activities to include a variety of educational offerings, like workshops and conservation activities, and participates in the statewide Master Gardener program. As one interviewee put it:

*"Every day the staff and volunteers, whether its gardening classes or doing mushroom walks or walking through the gardens and talking about plants, all of the education aspects are a huge part of staff and volunteer jobs."*

MCBG has also formed innovative partnerships with other institutions that integrate it into the wider community, like donating produce to the local food bank or hosting community service hours for the Sheriff's Department.

The community perceives MCBG as a safe space to experience beauty and connect with nature. Staff members alternately described MCBG as “a sanctuary” and “a real anchor for the community.” It is further regarded as both a resource for education and conservation and a space that promotes health and social wellbeing.

As one partner noted, “The Gardens wrap so much into health and wellbeing of the people in the community. It’s a gathering place and a place for people to come and connect with others.” Even with its strong ties to the community, MCBG also relies on the tourist economy and its ability to encourage nonlocal visits.

## **SIGNATURE PROGRAMS FOCUS ON HORTICULTURE, EDUCATION, AND OPEN SPACE PRESERVATION**

MCBG contributes to community educational opportunities through its participation in the statewide Master Gardener program. As a biennial host, MCBG holds a 50+ hour, 15-week instructional program around plant science and horticulture. The Master Gardener program partners with the University of California Cooperative Extension and alternates between Mendocino and another garden in neighboring Ukiah. Classes at MCBG take place in a farmhouse on-site, which was recently renovated to serve as an education center. Admission into the program requires an application from participants, and a fee covers the cost of instructors and materials.

Participants learn gardening knowledge, deepen community relationships, and contribute to high-quality educational opportunities through volunteering with local public school gardening programs and giving lectures. Following graduation from the program, Master Gardeners must complete and maintain certain volunteer hours at MCBG. This program is beneficial for everyone involved: Students gain knowledge and experience from renowned botanical experts, while MCBG gains an additional cohort of 12 to 30 docent volunteers who contribute to the overall upkeep of the grounds and give tours. The college-level courses within the program focus on holistic education and include a mixture of lectures and tactile, multisensory learning. Many volunteers choose to stay on after the course is over, and some have even joined MCBG’s board.

MCBG hosts an annual weekend-long biological inventory of its gardens called BioBlitz. Volunteers, residents, and local experts, along with the local Audubon Society, use the “iNaturalist” smartphone app to identify the various plants and wildlife that live on the grounds of MCBG. For instance, 60 different species of birds were identified during a previous effort. Participants also take photos that GPS-record the locations of plant specimens. The event promotes broad participation in order to record the diversity of plants and animals at MCBG. The results of the inventory give MCBG information on the number and types of plants in its collection and helps staff identify areas of the grounds that require maintenance. Finally, the event promotes interest in biodiversity and encourages hands-on learning and participation.

MCBG also supports the education of visitors by providing monthly garden and nature walks. Docent volunteer tour guides lead these free-of-charge experiences, which cover a range of topics from “Local Mushrooms” to “Birds and Bees.” The nature walks began in 1999 with the goal of increasing public outreach and making more educational offerings available. They have steadily increased in popularity over the years, making them an important way that MCBG engages with the community. MCBG invites local residents to suggest topics of interest for it to design walks around; this approach often leads to sold-out sign-up lists. Frequent attendees of the walks include local art teachers and University of California, Berkeley horticulture students.

Increased knowledge among participants then contributes to improving the care of ecosystems within MCBG and the surrounding areas as well.

MCBG also offers separate tours that cater to adult visitors and focus on ecological restoration and the horticultural collections on the property.

## **INNOVATIVE PARTNERSHIPS WITH INSTITUTIONAL ANCHORS CONNECT MCBG WITH ITS COMMUNITY**

A variety of innovative and long-standing partnerships with other institutions in the area have allowed MCBG to expand its reach and create meaningful impact in the wider community; one partner noted that, “MCBG has done a great job reaching out to the community.”

For instance, MCBG has had a decades-long partnership with the Mendocino County Sheriff’s Department through its Community Service Workers program. This volunteer program allows for nonviolent misdemeanor offenders to fulfill up to 1,080 hours, or 45 days, of community service at MCBG. All parties involved benefit: MCBG gains additional volunteers; the Sheriff’s Department can place individuals in MCBG in lieu of jail time; taxpayers save money; and participants further life skills and employment experience. The program develops landscaping, organized work schedules, gardening, and time management skills for participants. Since MCBG is open seven days a week, it is also a good fit for community service participants who need to navigate around their existing work schedules. MCBG has even retained volunteers from the Sheriff’s Department following the completion of service hours.

MCBG also partners with Community Integration Services (CIS), which uses MCBG as a venue for its programs that promote the physical, mental, and spiritual wellbeing of developmentally disabled individuals. CIS’s visits to MCBG began as a way to encourage participants to experience nature and practice social skills in a relaxing space. Over time, this has evolved to include volunteering and structured skills-development programs, which tie into providing a path toward employment elsewhere in the community by building work experience, developing horticultural and landscaping skills, and providing references to future employers. MCBG makes CIS participants feel comfortable and welcome—as one partner said, “There aren’t many places like this in the city. People here are understanding so it’s a comfortable place. You might get looked at or treated differently in the community, and that doesn’t happen here.”

MCBG supports better community health outcomes through growing and donating fresh produce to the local Fort Bragg Food Bank twice weekly. Over its seven-year partnership, MCBG has donated more than three tons of fresh produce. Making use of MCBG’s extensive vegetable garden, staff and volunteers grow a variety of vegetables from cucumbers to mint and tomatoes, and they harvest and deliver the resulting produce to the food bank. This is often one of the only sources of fresh produce for those who rely on the food bank.

## MCBG FACILITATES COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS AND SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH VOLUNTEERISM

More than 230 total available volunteers play a key role at MCBG. As many as 12 to 24 volunteers visit MCBG daily, assisting with grounds and vegetable maintenance, construction projects, retail sales, and back-office activities. MCBG staff make an intentional effort to understand volunteers' specific skills to ensure appropriate placement. All volunteers receive a general overview training, followed by position-specific training. MCBG also has a large share of seasonal staff and volunteers. Peak-season staff numbers reach 24, compared to 12 during the winter. MCBG trains each staff member in several topics, including safety, sexual harassment, workplace betterment, and volunteer interaction, and it encourages the staff members to utilize MCBG's budget to attend conferences and workshops related to their field.

MCBG's robust volunteer program facilitates shared social connections; multiple interviewees cited the close bonds and sense of community that volunteers have created at MCBG. As one noted, "It provides a home and a focus for bringing people together who have like interests. It's a community of people who have the opportunity to have a place where they belong."

People from different ages and backgrounds all come together to develop and care for MCBG and to steward that knowledge. Another staff member observed that the opportunities to volunteer, especially for retirees, "create a positive energy and rewarding feeling that they can still provide something to the community." And this extends outward into the community. For instance, volunteers can be a part of distributing produce to the food bank or leading schools on tours; "[MCBG] connects them back and forth." MCBG connects volunteers to each other and to a broader network of institutions, promoting individual and social wellbeing.

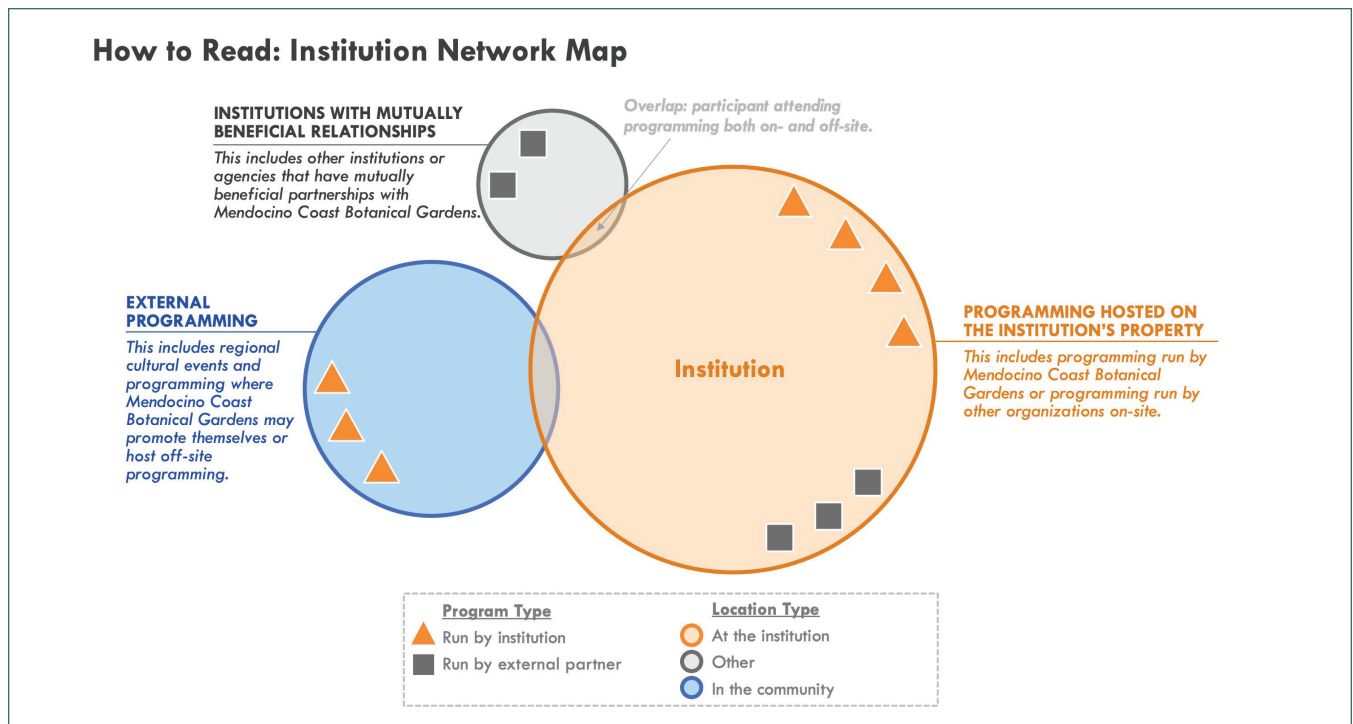
MCBG offers a space for residents and visitors to engage with nature and relax by the ocean. But it is also a space that hosts educational offerings, facilitates partnerships within and outside MCBG, and has built a vibrant volunteer community. MCBG actively animates social and institutional connections and links MCBG's resources with the needs of the surrounding area. MCBG's approach has made it a critical part of institutional and community networks in Mendocino County.

# MENDOCINO COAST BOTANICAL GARDENS NETWORK MAP

Using data provided by MCBG, the study team developed a descriptive network map to highlight the different types of connections MCBG maintains with other institutions in the local community. The map illustrates the relationships between MCBG and those entities that offer programming at MCBG itself and

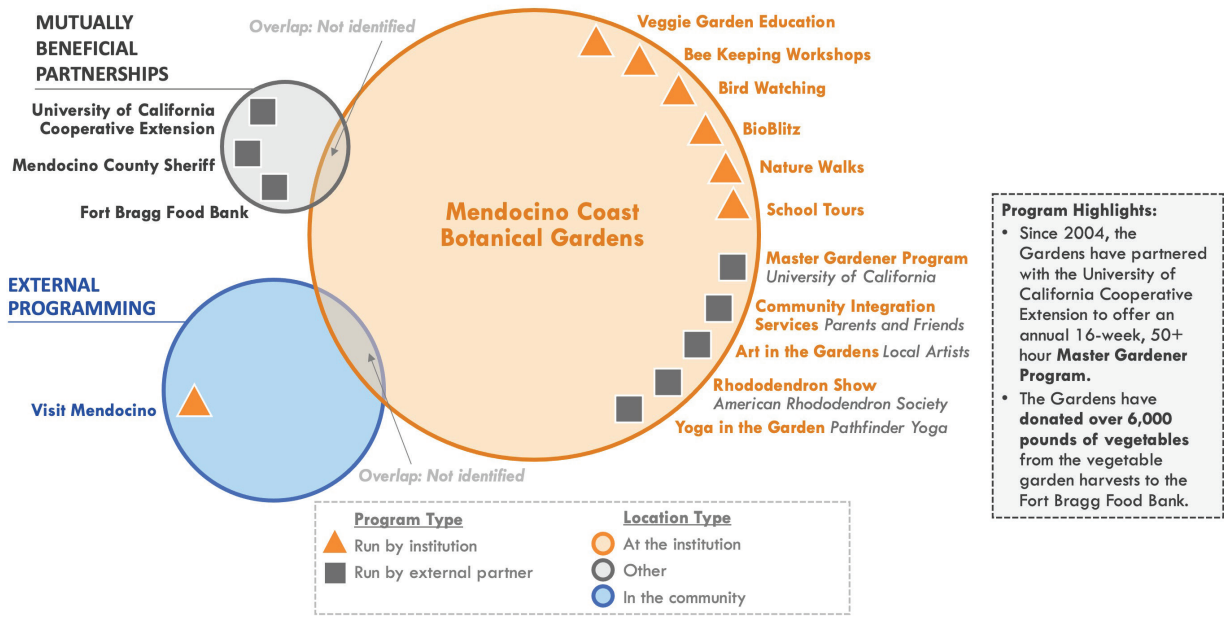
those that support cross-marketing efforts or have reciprocal relationships with MCBG, and it includes examples of off-site, MCBG-led programming. The map does not provide an exhaustive list of MCBG programs but attempts to illustrate a subset of the relationships that MCBG maintains.

*NOTE: The network map is purely descriptive. The connections represented on the map do not necessarily, and are not intended to, provide estimates of the duration, durability, intensity, or broader economic impact of the relationships between MCBG and any single entity, or the broader network itself. The goal of the network map is to represent the range and diversity of different types of institutions that connect MCBG in different ways.*





## Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens Network Map



The figure above illustrates a *sample* of the connections across the programs offered by MCBG. Within the orange circle is a small sample of programs conducted on the physical property of MCBG—both programs produced by MCBG and those produced by others. Within the blue circle is a sample of programs produced by MCBG and offered off-site in the community. The gray circle represents a sample of connections with other organizations, including government partnerships, that have reciprocal relationships with MCBG.