

Appendix A: To the Master Gardener Program Policies

Operating Procedure for Extension Agents with a County Master Gardener Association

Introduction

An Extension Service consumer horticulture educational program can be conducted by employing a variety of delivery methods (radio, television, newsletters, meetings, demonstrations, etc.). A Master Gardener volunteer (MGV) staff can be trained and utilized to enhance program delivery.

A successful Master Gardener (MG) program can be conducted with or without the formation or assistance from a county Master Gardener association. MGVs (as volunteer staff project managers working closely with the Extension agents) can perform vital management roles in the day to day operations of a MG program (refer to the Master Gardener program policies and the Master Gardener manual for details). Volunteer management is a critical component of the total MG program. When an agent fails to provide adequate time for volunteer management the return on training is reduced and volunteer retention rate is low. Volunteers sometimes attempt to form an association with the inappropriate goal of managing the MG program in order to fill the void in volunteer management.

Committee

Volunteers in some counties have elected to form a committee that obtains funds (non-dues) to produce a newsletter and provide social interaction among all MGVs. The role of the committee and the agents are essentially the same as for an association. The main advantage of this approach is that it is less formal and may not require the election of officers and the creation of bylaws.

MG Associations

An association composed of volunteer staff members can provide valuable support to individual MGVs. The decision to form or not to form an MG association is to be made by local MGVs. The formation of an association without a clear understanding by the Extension agent and/or the members of an association as to their roles and responsibilities can lead to confusion and reduce the quality and effectiveness of the consumer horticultural program. This document was prepared to clarify roles and relationships between a county MG association, MGVs, and the Extension Service.

A county MG association is a professional association whose membership comes from the volunteer staff of the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service. Individuals that elect to join an association and those that do not elect to join are still part of the volunteer staff of the Cooperative Extension Service. All MGVs work under the supervision of the local Master Gardener Coordinator (Extension agent) when performing volunteer duties and are expected to follow the guidelines and policies of the MG program.

Mission

A county MG association should direct its focus on enhancing the ability of its members to become more effective volunteers for the Cooperative Extension Service (rather than on education transfer directly to the gardening public or management of the MG program). **The selection, training, utilization, and evaluation of MGVs remains the responsibility of the local Extension agent and are not appropriate roles for an association to undertake.**

Possible roles for a county association include:

- * Raising issues of concern for program improvement
- * Providing leadership opportunities for its members
- * Facilitating communication between association members (newsletter, etc.)
- * Fund raising to support the association, consumer horticulture, and MG programs
- * Co-sponsoring events with the Extension Service and the MG program
- * Organizing field trips
- * Providing recognition for association members

These roles and activities are not the exclusive responsibility of an association. Extension agents should continue to conduct events, meetings, field trips, send newsletters, and provide volunteer recognition to its MG volunteer staff. Sponsorship (association, Extension, or both) of events should be clearly recognizable to program participants. Extension's educational programs are made available to members and nonmembers of an MG association.

Organization structure

Many MGVs are members of a garden club and/or civic group -- often in key leadership positions. It is understandable that individuals might expect a MG association to be organized and operate in a similar manner. However, a MG association is not a garden club or civic organization.

As a MGV, individuals are part of the volunteer staff of the Cooperative Extension Service and are serving in an official capacity as representatives of county, state, and federal government. While serving as an association member, they are not an official part of Extension's MG program but are part of a closely associated group whose actions can have positive or negative impacts on the Extension Service. The association and its members should consider the policies of the organization and government agencies they are connected to in deciding which activities they engage in and should abide by the policies of the organizations they represent.

A possible model to follow would be that of the Agricultural Agents Association (and/or other Extension professional associations) as to how they function and interact with the Extension Service. Many MGVs may have difficulty in understanding this unique role unless training is conducted to explain the role and mission of a professional association.

An association can elect officers and adopt a set of bylaws. A sample set of bylaws is available from the state MG coordinator. The Extension agent can assist with the initial organization of an association and can serve as an educational advisor to the group after they are organized. The agent can not be an association officer or perform the day to day activities of the association. He/she is expected to address issues, positions, and activities of the association that might compromise the integrity of the MG program.

Recruiting membership and collecting dues for an association is the responsibility of the association. Extension should not be expected to spend publicly appropriated funds (from tax dollars) to print materials (applications, forms, etc.) for an association. It is also inappropriate to include information on joining an association, or promoting an association event or activity in Extension newsletters or other correspondence when using Extension letterhead or postage. The members of an association are responsible for all expenses incurred in order to conduct association activities.

Funds

Funds received or raised by the MG program and the MG association should be kept separate. Training material fees collected from MGVs to participate in the MG program are public sector funds and should be dispersed through an Extension Service account. Dues collected or funds raised by an association are private sector funds and should be managed by the association officers. An agent should not serve as the treasurer of an MG association or be authorized to withdraw funds

from an association bank account. The Extension agent can present requests for financial assistance for a project to the association. If the funding is approved by the association, funds would be transferred from the association account to the Extension Service account.

An association can collect dues from individuals that choose to join the association. **Payment of dues can not be a requirement for participating in the Cooperative Extension Service MG program as a MGV.** Effort should be made to minimize dues. For example, the newsletter can be sent to individuals paying an annual subscription.

Liability

A MGV (as a agent of the University) is covered by the NC State University liability policies when performing volunteer service provided he/she is following a job description and is adhering to MG program policies. An MG association and its members are not covered under the liability policies since the activities of an association and its members are not considered official University duties.

Public perception

As a organization whose membership comes from Extension's volunteer staff, the MG association should consider how they are perceived by the public and the funding partners of Extension. If the MG association is perceived as a special interest garden club or civic group that is subsidized by tax dollars, the entire MG program and funding for Extension could be jeopardized. Activities such as endorsing a political candidate or a controversial zoning ordinance could have a negative effect on the MG program. Individuals can however take any position they chose provided they are not doing so as a MGV or member of an MG association.

The Master Gardener logo (trademarked) and Extension letterhead and logo should not be used when conducting MG association correspondence or activities. Signs at education events sponsored by Extension and on educational materials for distribution to the public should have Extension's logo on them and not the MG association.