



**Virginia Cooperative Extension**  
Virginia Tech • Virginia State University



# Extension Master Gardener Coordinator's Manual

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## Chapter 1: An Overview of Virginia's EMG Program

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### Introduction

This document is meant to be a guide as you move through building and coordinating Extension Master Gardener Programs in Virginia. The State Office is always available to assist and answer questions, please reach out directly to the State Coordinator or send a message to the general office email at [emgoffice@vt.edu](mailto:emgoffice@vt.edu).

For anyone starting a brand new Extension Master Gardener group, the State Office has additional resources to share about starting a new group not included in this manual.

*You can navigate through the chapters of this manual by clicking the document outline button to the left of your screen. If any of the links provided below are broken, incorrect, or out of date, please contact the State Coordinator.*

The following information is a brief introduction to the [Virginia Extension Master Gardener Program](#) and [Virginia Cooperative Extension](#).

### What is an Extension Master Gardener Volunteer?

The Extension Master Gardener volunteer (EMG) is an individual who, after receiving specialized training in horticulture through Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE), acts on behalf of VCE as a volunteer educator within their community. These volunteer educators serve as partners with VCE to promote, inform, and work with communities, leaders, industry,

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Virginia Cooperative Extension is a partnership of Virginia Tech, Virginia State University, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and local governments. Its programs and employment are open to all, regardless of age, color, disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, military status, or any other basis protected by law.

and individuals presenting programs on all aspects of horticulture to protect and enhance the environment, including turf, landscape, vegetables, trees and shrubs, and pest management practices.

The EMG training program prepares volunteers to implement research-based Cooperative Extension educational programs to address community issues. When an individual works as an EMG, he or she acts as a representative of Virginia Cooperative Extension, Virginia Tech, and Virginia State University.

## **What is the EMG program?**

Extension Master Gardener volunteers are trained volunteer educators. They work within their local communities to encourage and promote environmentally sound horticulture practices through sustainable landscape management education and training. As an educational outreach component of Virginia Cooperative Extension, the Master Gardener program brings the resources of Virginia's land-grant universities – Virginia Tech and Virginia State University – to the people of the commonwealth. All volunteers are trained and have at least 50 hours of horticultural classes and return at least 50 hours of volunteer community service through their local Extension office.

Since 1979, Virginia Extension Master Gardeners have served communities throughout the Commonwealth by providing unbiased and research-based horticultural information to home gardeners.

Master Gardeners provide a resource for all Extension program areas and for professionals from many other agencies. They provide communities with locally identified programs, including answers to individual questions via help desks and plant clinics; radio, newspaper, and online resources; educational programs to meet targeted needs; school and community gardens; urban tree planting programs; and guidance in making the natural environment accessible to all residents regardless of disabilities, incomes, or where they live.

## **Creation of the EMG Program**

The Extension Master Gardener program was created by Extension to meet an enormous increase in requests from home gardeners for unbiased, research-based horticultural information. This increase was a result of the urban and transient nature of modern American life. Originally, an Extension agent dealt with the questions of a few hundred farm families. In many regions, however, land that once constituted a single farm now encompasses several subdivisions, increasing the number of families an Extension office must serve by hundreds. In addition, people from all over the country and all corners of the world now call Virginia home; new residents are likely to be unfamiliar with the grasses, shrubs, trees, pests, etc. that comprise the microenvironment of their new urban, suburban, or rural homes. They often call their local Extension office for advice on what to plant and how to care for it.

Consequently, the Extension Master Gardener program was created in 1972 in the state of Washington. Since then, it has spread to 50 states, Puerto Rico, Canada, and South Korea. EMGs have become a vital part of Extension's ability to provide consumers with up-to-date, reliable knowledge so that they may enjoy and protect the value of the natural environment around their homes. In addition, Extension Master Gardeners work with professionals, such as teachers, activity therapists, and others who work with people, thus carrying the benefits of horticulture to a much broader population than homeowners alone. The EMG program has also become a fun and useful volunteer activity that has given its participants a sense of community spirit, accomplishment, and intellectual stimulation.

## **Mission & Vision of the EMG Program**

**The Mission of the Extension Master Gardener Program is:** Sharing Knowledge. Empowering Communities.

**The Vision of our program is:** To be the Virginia Cooperative Extension volunteer organization extending horticultural and environmental outreach across the Commonwealth.

## **What is Cooperative Extension?**

Cooperative Extension serves as a link between land- grant universities and the community by disseminating the latest information and research and providing outreach to the average citizen.

## **History of Cooperative Extension**

Prior to the Civil War, very few college curriculums addressed the problems of citizens who made their livelihood from agriculture. In 1862, Congress passed the Morrill Act, which provided for a university in every state that would educate citizens in agricultural and mechanical fields. These colleges are known today as “land-grant universities.”

Congress soon realized that to be effective, the educational function of land-grant universities must be supplemented with a research capability. Consequently, it passed the Hatch Act in 1887. This act provided for the establishment of facilities where colleges could conduct research into agricultural, mechanical, and related problems faced by rural citizenry. In Virginia, Extension Master Gardeners sometimes assist with the research done at these research stations.

The Second Morrill Act was passed in 1890. This Act required states to prove that race was not an admissions criteria for students. If that couldn't be proven, an additional land-grant university would have to be established to serve people of color. Virginia State University is an 1890 University established through this Act.

Finally, in order to spread the benefits of the land-grant universities throughout each state, Congress passed the Smith Lever Act of 1914. This act provided for the establishment of Cooperative Extension. As a result of the Smith Lever Act, there are now Cooperative Extension offices in every county in Virginia (and many cities) that serve to “extend” to the public the information developed on the campuses and research stations of the land-grant universities. In fact, Cooperative Extension agents are considered university faculty since their roles are primarily educational.

One provision of the Smith Lever Act is that the cities and counties being served by Cooperative Extension pay a portion of the operating costs of Cooperative Extension in that locality. The Act also provided federal funding for Cooperative Extension through the US Department of Agriculture. Because of this funding arrangement, Cooperative Extension is a true partnership between local, state, and the Federal government. Cooperative Extension Programs must reflect the needs for educational programs of the communities they serve and these needs are determined by the local units through the periodic application of a detailed situation analysis of the community.

## **Mission and Vision of VCE**

Mission Statement of VCE: "Virginia Cooperative Extension helps lead the engagement mission of Virginia Tech and Virginia State University, the commonwealth's land-grant universities. Building local relationships and collaborative partnerships, we help people put scientific knowledge to work through learning experiences that improve economic, environmental, and social well-being." You can read more about VCE's mission and core values on their webpage: <https://ext.vt.edu/about/mission.html>.

VCE is all about Virginians working with Virginians in communities, homes, and businesses. A product of cooperation among local, state, and federal governments, VCE operates 107 county/city offices to create a communication network among all the people of the Commonwealth. VCE representatives are Cooperative Extension educators, led by local agents and campus faculty, taking knowledge from the Virginia State and Virginia Tech land-grant universities and their nationwide sister institutions to everyday people facing everyday problems.

Helping people solve their own problems through educational programs is VCE's business. Help is provided through issue-based programs conducted in workshops, seminars and demonstrations, over the phone, in research-based publications, online, and in radio and TV programs to reach people in their homes, workplaces, and local communities. What is taught varies from place to place as local people participate in the design, implementation, and evaluation of needs-driven programming. Cooperative Extension is committed to providing access to unbiased, scientific information related to locally defined issues; a presence in local communities; the establishment of strong partnerships and collaborative coalitions; and innovative service to the Commonwealth.

## **Organization of VCE**

There are a number of components that make up the structure of VCE including the local offices and agents, local Extension Leadership Council, the district office, the state office, and Virginia Tech University.

### **Local Extension Unit**

The local Extension office is the local doorway to our land-grant universities for the public and Extension Master Gardeners. Each Extension office, or unit, in Virginia conducts programs in three program areas: Agriculture and Natural Resources (including horticulture), Family and Consumer Science (FCS), and 4-H Youth Development. An Extension agent is assigned to work with each area. Extension Master Gardeners generally work most closely with the Agriculture and Natural Resources (ANR) agent, but are encouraged to use their horticultural skills to conduct programs in cooperation with FCS and 4-H.

### **Extension Leadership Councils (ELCs)**

Each Extension office has a Leadership Council that is a partnership between local citizens and civic leaders who provide feedback and direction to ensure that Extension educational programs will be relevant in their community, will be forward thinking, and will combine VCE resources with others in an effective manner to meet the needs of the citizens. Many Extension agents ask Extension Master Gardeners to serve on these boards and others similar

in nature. Educational programs conducted by EMGs should be in line with the goals identified by the local ELC.

## **District and State Office**

Virginia's 107 Extension units are divided among [districts](#). District staff includes a district director who provides administrative and program development assistance to the local unit offices. These four districts are responsible to state-level administrators at the land-grant university. The state Extension administrators are liaisons between the state Extension service and the US Department of Agriculture, which oversees and evaluates state Extension programs.

## **Virginia Tech and Virginia State University**

Extension units are also closely linked to Virginia Tech and Virginia State University. In addition to administrative and program development assistance, the land-grant universities provide many other types of support to the local Extension office. This is essential, since no Extension agent can know the answer to every question posed by the public. Extension Specialists are university faculty who focus in speciality areas, such as horticulture, soils, turf, plant diseases, insect problems, etc.. Specialists provide in-service training, subject matter support (written and online resources), and other necessary types of support to agents in the field.

## **The State Extension Master Gardener Coordinator's Office**

In Virginia, most of the administrative and program development support for the EMG program comes from the State Office of the Extension Master Gardener Coordinator at Virginia Tech. The EMG State Office sits within the School of Plant & Environmental Sciences in the College of Agriculture & Life Sciences.

The State Extension Master Gardener Office provides the administrative support that keeps the Master Gardener Program running throughout the Commonwealth. The Office provides volunteer management assistance and support, develops programming material, resources, training materials, marketing and communications support, and more for Master Gardener Units across the state. They offer educational and administrative training each year, including Leadership Development Training, Master Gardener College, and webinars.

The Office of the State Master Gardener Coordinator also develops materials and publications, such as the *Virginia Cooperative Extension Master Gardener Coordinator Manual*, for use by coordinators administering local Extension Master Gardener programs and EMG volunteers who are coordinating education programs. *The Virginia Master Gardener Handbook* is also developed and maintained through this office. Finally, the office publishes the quarterly *InSeason* newsletter and maintains horticultural information on [VCE](#) and [EMG](#) web pages.

## **Volunteers in Extension**

Volunteer involvement is one of the most important and unique aspects of Cooperative Extension. This is in keeping with Extension's philosophy that active citizen participation in planning and implementation ensures program success. Volunteers working jointly with faculty and staff are a valuable resource and an integral part of the education mission of VCE. EMGs are part of this family of volunteers as they are education partners with VCE. EMGs are NOT a

clientele group of VCE. It is also important to note that Extension Master Gardener volunteers serve at the sole discretion of Virginia Cooperative Extension. VCE may at any time, for whatever reason, decide to terminate the volunteer's relationship with the organization or to make changes in the nature of their volunteer assignment.

Every year, VCE is joined by tens of thousands of volunteers, including Extension Master Gardeners, who contribute over one million hours and community contacts. VCE works closely with hundreds of private and public sector agencies and organizations to complement and supplement our resources so that Virginia is better served in this collaborative way.

The Extension Master Gardener program provides a resource for all VCE program areas and for professionals from many other agencies. EMGs provide communities with locally identified programs, including answers to individual questions via help desks and plant clinics; online tools, radio, and newspaper; educational programs to meet targeted needs, such as the establishment of community gardens for schools, low income, and elderly persons; education for the preservation of historic landscapes; urban tree planting programs; and guidance in making the natural environment accessible to all residents regardless of disabilities, incomes, or where they live.

## **VCE's Commitment to Diversity and Inclusion**

### **Statement from the VCE Directors**

"Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) values human diversity because it strengthens our system, our programs and our lives. In fact, it is our recognition of the power of diversity that drives us to reach out to diverse audiences across the state. Diversity is sought in the people that help us determine local and state needs; diversity is sought in the audiences to whom we deliver our programs; diversity is sought in our employees and our volunteers. So as our state becomes increasingly more diverse, we have a unique opportunity to shape a world where respect for diversity is commonplace.

Besides a moral and intellectual appreciation and desire for diversity, VCE also has a legal responsibility to offer equal access to educational programs and equal opportunity in employment for people without discrimination based on age, color, disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, or veteran status. VCE adheres to federal and state statutes, regulations, and Virginia Tech and Virginia State University policies regarding civil rights in our role as a cooperator with the United States Department of Agriculture, National Institute for Food and Agriculture.

Our Extension administrators, faculty, staff and volunteers are expected to ensure civil rights compliance and equal access to our programs. VCE willingly participates in Civil Rights Compliance reviews by USDA. VCE routinely offers civil rights and diversity training to its employees and Extension representatives are members of the College's Diversity Council. The Diversity Council provides college-wide leadership for promoting diversity in all forms, providing guidance in the recruitment and retention of employees, and providing support for the inclusion of all people in educational programs and services in the College. We invite your comments and ideas on how we can build on our on-going efforts to increase access and inclusion."



Sincerely, Edwin Jones  
Director, Virginia Cooperative Extension  
Associate Dean, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences

Ray McKinnie  
1890 Extension Administrator  
Dean, College of Agriculture, Virginia State University

## **What is Civil Rights Compliance?**

As a partner of USDA, and a recipient of federal funding, Extension programs must be handled in a manner that treats every customer and employee with fairness, equality, and respect. This applies to all aspects of the Extension programs including identifying needs, setting priorities, allocating resources, selecting and assigning staff, conducting programs, and getting feedback.

Each State Extension institution is responsible for establishing internal policies and guidelines to ensure that Extension programs and operations do not discriminate and are done without regard to race, color, gender, gender identity, gender expression, national origin, sex, age, or disability. Land grants and other institutions, including Extension offices and programs within those offices are expected to have available the appropriate documentation, records, and sources of information meeting the specific obligations of nondiscrimination and equal opportunity associated with USDA civil rights rules and regulations.

## **VCE Civil Rights Policies**

### **Equal Access Assurance**

VCE works with numerous organizations across the Commonwealth. Because VCE programs are non-discriminatory, the organizations with which VCE collaborates, and provides assistance to, cannot be discriminatory in its policies or membership. Virginia Cooperative Extension cannot provide significant assistance to, or collaborate with, any organization that discriminates. This guideline is also in alignment with VT Policy 1025, which states:

“Virginia Tech does not tolerate discrimination or harassment on the basis of age, color, disability, gender (including pregnancy), gender identity, gender expression, genetic information, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, veteran status, or any other basis protected by law. Such behavior is inconsistent with the university’s commitment to excellence and to a community in which mutual respect is a core value as articulated in the Virginia Tech Principles of Community. The prohibition against discrimination and harassment applies to all levels and areas of university operations and programs, to undergraduate and graduate students, administrators, faculty, staff, volunteers, vendors and contractors.”

### **Policy for Equal Access Assurance**

Virginia Cooperative Extension cannot provide significant assistance to, or collaborate with, any organization that discriminates. VCE has an obligation to inform organizations about this policy of non-discrimination. Unit Extension staff must have documentation on file about

groups or organizations in a collaborative relationship with VCE, or to which significant service is provided, certifying that discriminatory practices are not followed. The [Equal Access Assurance form](#) Template can be found in the manual appendix.

The preceding assurance should be obtained from the respective partner organization, and placed in the appropriate unit Civil Rights file. Other evidence of a partner's commitment to Civil Rights, such as their own respective policies or statements, can also be utilized in place of the above.

## Civil Rights Complaints

Individuals may have questions, concerns or complaints about VCE's policies or practices related to Equal Employment Opportunities/Affirmative Action or about program discrimination or accessibility.

VCE is committed to compliance with applicable federal, state, and local rules and regulations pertaining to the openness of our programs and employment opportunities to all. This is consistent with Virginia Tech's prohibition of discrimination against employees, students, or applicants on the basis of age, color, disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, genetic information, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, or veteran status. It is important that we promptly address any concerns about discrimination or harassment, including sexual harassment. Discrimination or harassment is addressed by Virginia Tech's Anti-Discrimination and Harassment Prevention Policy, Policy 1025.

Complaints related to civil rights compliance in Extension programs may be filed by any individual, group of program recipients, or potential program recipients. In addition, the public must be told of their right to file a discrimination complaint.

### Policy for Civil Rights Complaints

The public is told of the right to file a complaint through the use of two posters: 1) the USDA "And Justice for All" poster; and 2) the Virginia Tech Sexual and Discrimination Harassment poster. These posters must be visibly displayed in Extension meeting rooms and the main office. The USDA poster advises participants that they can file complaints with the Office of Civil Rights at USDA. This office will investigate and resolve complaints of discrimination in programs operated or assisted by USDA, including Cooperative Extension programs. The VT poster directs clients and employees to a number of resources on the campus.

Another means in which the public is told of this right to lodge a discrimination complaint is by providing clients the [VCE Discrimination Complaint Notification Template](#). The complaint notification template is for use by VCE employees when there is an allegation of a civil rights violation by program participants. This complaint notification should be provided to all Extension program participants on request or when a complaint is made known. The complaint notification offers the following contacts for persons that feel they have been denied access to services or programs on the basis of age, color, disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, genetic information, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, or veteran status:

- The individual providing the program, if they feel comfortable doing so
- The Extension District Director or other supervisor if not in an Extension district
- The CALS Director of Civil Rights Compliance



- The Virginia Tech Human Resources Office for Equity and Access
- United States Department of Agriculture at:  
USDA  
Director, Office of Civil Rights Room 326-W, Whitten Building  
14th and Independence Avenue SW  
Washington, DC 20250-9410  
or call USDA at (202) 720-5964

For specific information about complaints, visit: <https://www.usda.gov/oascr>

VCE encourages, but does not require, clients to try to resolve complaints with the Extension employee providing the program or service at the local level. However, if that is not possible, or if the client's complaint is not resolved to their satisfaction, then clients should be provided with the [VCE Discrimination Complaint Notification Template](#). Once an allegation has been made that contains any element of discrimination or harassment, the appropriate individuals in VCE and at VT will investigate the complaint.

## All Reasonable Efforts

The intent of the Civil Rights Act is that all people have the opportunity to participate in educational programs and employment opportunities in federally assisted programs. The intent of the Civil Rights Act and the means for achieving that intent are consistent with the Extension philosophy that its programs are open to all persons and that those programs will be designed to best meet their needs. A sincere effort must be made to encourage participation by underserved audiences and to overcome barriers and concerns that might interfere with their participation. It is not enough to simply announce the program is open to all. An effort must be made to tailor the program to meet the needs and concerns of the target audience. Examples of barriers to participation include means of publication, location of meetings, etc., not normally used by the target audience.

"All Reasonable Efforts" are a combination of actions designed to communicate to all persons that VCE-sponsored club and organization membership and program participation are open and that all are welcome and encouraged to become members or to participate in educational programs.

## Policy for "All Reasonable Efforts"

The minimum reasonable effort required by Extension staff include three steps:

1. Use of all available mass media – including social media, radio, newspaper, and television – to inform potential recipients of the program and of the opportunity to participate
2. Personal emails, letters, and circulars addressed to defined potential recipients inviting them to participate, including dates and places of meetings or other planned activities
3. Personal visits by the Extension staff member(s) to a representative number of defined potential recipients in the geographically defined area to encourage participation

Documentation is needed that "All Reasonable Efforts" have been made. Copies of mass media

releases and circular letters must meet requirements for 1 and 2 above. Personal visits may be documented by making a record for filing of personal visits including visitor, dates, person reached, responses, and other related information.

In addition, there is an expectation for affirmative action to achieve balanced participation and civil rights compliance in the form of “All Reasonable Efforts” to increase the level of minority participation in and integration of 4-H clubs, and other VCE-sponsored organizations.

The legal guidelines of eliminating discrimination in a state Cooperative Extension program require that, for each Extension sponsored club or organization whose membership consists of one race and services a community or area of interracial clientele, steps must be taken to assure that membership of such clubs is interracial in composition.

Extension assistance is to be discontinued to those clubs which remain all one race, unless it is established that “all reasonable effort” has been made to recruit individuals of racial groups not represented. In any such case, a record of effort made is required to be retained for audit purposes. “All Reasonable Efforts” should be documented and maintained in the unit’s central Civil Rights files.

## **Public Notification**

Public Notification is the process by which the public is advised of VCE programs, the requirements for non-discrimination, and the availability of reasonable accommodations for those needing them.

A series of communication methods are used to advise individuals and “grassroots” organizations about program availability on a nondiscriminatory basis and notify them of the procedures for filing a complaint.

## **Policy for Public Notification**

Communication methods must include:

- Display of the And Justice For All poster at all county/city, district, and state Extension offices
- Use of the VCE non-discrimination statement in letters, newsletters, and publications
- Use of the VCE ADA notice about accommodations on forms, applications, program announcements, and brochures
- Communication about Extension programs at the local level to ensure that all persons, especially those who previously may not have participated fully, know about the availability and effective use of Extension program services and are encouraged to participate
- Informing organizations and groups with which VCE cooperates of our non-discrimination provisions
- Use of non-sexist language and non-discriminatory language, photos, and graphics to convey the message of equal opportunity in all programming
- Provision of materials in alternative means of communication (Braille, large print, audiotape, interpretation, etc.) upon request

Through the use of newspaper, letters, radio and television messages, posters, etc., the public is notified in a manner that informs all eligible people of Extension programs, their equal access to programs, and their protection against discrimination in the conduct of such programs.

## **Limited English Proficiency**

Virginia Cooperative Extension is a recipient of USDA federal funding and therefore is obligated to take reasonable steps to ensure that those with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) have meaningful access to the programs, services and information provided by Extension. The most recent U.S. Census estimates that 16.3 percent of Virginia residents 5 years and over speak a language other than English at home.

VCE strives to comply with applicable federal, state, and local rules and regulations pertaining to the openness of our programs and employment opportunities to all. Title VI of the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 precludes discrimination on the basis of national origin. Due to the diversity of the population of the Commonwealth, and in the interest of serving those whose native language is not English, VCE will make reasonable efforts to provide alternative methods of educational delivery.

### **Policy for LEP**

Reasonable efforts will be made in identifying LEP persons who require language assistance. Reasonable alternative methods of educational delivery will be explored, and provided so as not to cause an undue burden on the agency. The following four-factor analysis will be used to effect the preceding:

- The number or proportion of LEP persons eligible to be served or likely to be encountered by the program or grantee/recipient
- The frequency with which LEP individuals come into contact with the program
- The nature and importance of the program, activity, or service provided by the program to people's lives
- The resources available to the grantee/recipient and costs

Any reasonable efforts made in the above regard should be documented and maintained in the unit civil rights files.

## **Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities**

The intent of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) is to limit actions or decisions that would adversely impact access to any programs, services, or benefits. Federal law and Virginia Tech's Anti-Discrimination and Harassment Prevention Policy 1025 prohibit discrimination or harassment of employees, clients, or applicants on the basis of a disability. In addition, retaliation against a person for asserting their rights under these laws and policies is not permitted.

Virginia Cooperative Extension complies with the Virginia Tech ADA policy. The purpose of this policy is to provide guidelines to the university community to assure compliance with the Virginia Tech Affirmative Action Plan, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Revised), the Americans with Disabilities Amendments Act (ADAAA), and Policy Memorandum 178, Accommodation of Disabilities. Additionally, this policy supports the intention of the Principles of Community and is a tool to increase access and inclusion. In Policy 4075, the university community refers to employees, students, Extension clients, and applicants for employment and admission.

## Policy for Accessibility

Virginia Tech and Virginia Cooperative Extension are committed to providing reasonable accommodations to members of the university community to enable them to participate as fully as possible in all aspects of the university's work, learning, programs, and other activities. View the VT Office for Equity and Accessibility's [accommodations page](#) for more information.

VCE employees should make all reasonable efforts to include all people regardless of disability in all programs, events and employment. Reasonable accommodations will be made whenever feasible. An approved ADA Statement must be used in all methods of promotion of VCE events and programs, including written, verbal, and electronic means for workshops, events, seminars, classes, and organizational meetings.

## VCE Civil Rights Compliance Guidelines

### Advisory Board Membership Policies and Demographics

All VCE advisory groups such as Extension Master Gardener Association Boards must have policies or bylaws in place that indicates that the group complies with VCE non-discrimination policies when it comes to membership of the board. Specifically there should be language in the organizational governance that indicates that the organization will strive to seek out advisory board members that will reflect the demographics, by race and gender, of the geographic area it serves.

### Extension Sponsored Club and Organization Demographics

For all Extension sponsored clubs, organizations and organized groups such as Extension Master Gardeners, the demographics of that group must be in parity with the geographic area that it serves. In other words, the racial and gender makeup of the group should reflect the same percentages as found in the general population from which Extension Master Gardeners are recruited. If 30 percent of the community that is served is African American, then 30% of the membership of the group should be African- American.

In order to document these records, it is required to annually document the race and gender make-up of the group using a Learning Groups Log ([VCE form #490-153](#)).

### Civil Rights Compliance of VCE Volunteer Organizations and Clubs

For all Extension sponsored clubs, organizations and organized groups such as Extension Master Gardeners, it is required that the Extension Master Gardener Coordinator annually complete [VCE form #490-156](#). This form requires the Coordinator to document whether the organization is in parity (has balanced membership) by race and gender. In addition, it is required to document on the form the "all reasonable efforts" methods used to bring the group into parity.

### Civil Rights Compliance Training of Volunteers

It is a requirement that all volunteers receive basic civil rights compliance training. As VCE volunteers, EMGs must agree to follow the VCE diversity and inclusion philosophy and civil rights goals. They must comply with many of the same policies that Extension faculty and staff comply with, including use of indicia statements, and public notification. A [training module](#) was created for this purpose.

## Contacts Collection and Reporting by MG Volunteers

All VCE volunteers are encouraged to collect and report educational contacts. Volunteers should be provided training by their local Agent and/or coordinator on what is a contact, what data is collected, and how it is reported.

## Mailing List Demographics

Part of the Unit civil rights compliance expectations is to maintain an annual tally (count) of the race and gender of clients on any mailing list. Both “snail mail” mailing lists as well as electronic (email) mailing lists are included in this requirement. For the Extension Master Gardener program, that could include mailing lists of EMG volunteers, clients that are part of an outreach effort of the EMG program, or perhaps clients that receive an EMG newsletter. The Mailing List Log ([VCE form #490-155](#)) should be used to document this information.

## Use of VCE Indicia Statements

Whenever any content is shared with the public, that content must include our VCE non-discrimination statement and the VCE ADA statement. These two statements are called our Indicia statements. This requirement includes communicating with the public via written as well as on-line means. So any EMG newsletter, flyer advertising an educational event, Facebook page, or Blog must include these two statements. The required statements can be found on the VCE Intranet in the [VCE Policies](#), civil rights section, or on the [Marketing page](#).

Whenever you create a flyer, brochure, or other document for public distribution, you must include the *full indicia statement (EEO Statement + Publication Statement)*. All advertising materials for Extension Master Gardener **events** must include the indicia and ADA statement for events.

*Please always confirm you're using the most recent indicia statement:*  
<https://sites.google.com/view/extintranet/policies>

## EMG Management

Local Master Gardener Coordinators (MGCs) serve as liaisons between the Office of the State Master Gardener Coordinator and the local EMG program. MGCs organize the local program so that through their efforts (or by delegation of responsibility to other individuals) training, supervision, and evaluation of EMG volunteers are provided. In addition, they ensure Extension Master Gardener programs are initiated and/or maintained in each participating unit so that the program serves as a resource for effective programming for all VCE program areas.

## VCE/VT Liability

EMGs represent VCE/VT in the local communities as volunteers. As such, the EMG volunteer is covered under VCE/VT liability coverage when acting on behalf of the university in approved activities. VCE/VT extends liability coverage to representatives of the university in conducting business related to/on behalf of the university. This includes coverage of EMGs volunteering on behalf of VCE, under the Commonwealth of Virginia self-insurance program, as authorized by Section 2.1-526.8 of the Code of Virginia. This insurance program covers employees and volunteers while participating in EMG activities approved by Extension personnel for cases of

negligence or liability only.

Any medical problem, however, arising from volunteer work for VCE/VT is the individual EMG's responsibility through their own personal health care coverage.

For EMG volunteers to maintain affiliation with VCE/VT, certain responsibilities must be met. First, program associates charged with the EMG management responsibilities (may be faculty, staff, or volunteers) must implement EMG Volunteer Policies and should follow VCE-recommended management techniques to recruit, train, and manage appropriate individuals to act on behalf of the university. This manual has been prepared to instruct and guide program associates with these responsibilities. Second, EMG activities must be approved through designated channels to ensure that they appropriately represent VCE/VT in the local community and thus are protected by VCE/VT liability. Third, all EMG volunteers must comply with policies to continue EMG status and all of the associated benefits.

Failure to follow and implement the EMG management techniques outlined in the EMG Policies and this manual could prevent VCE/VT from extending its liability coverage. This could result in personal liability for the outcomes of actions taken by those in charge of the local EMG educational programs. The following sections will provide detailed explanations for maintaining proper affiliation with VCE/VT.

## **VCE Recommended Management Techniques**

Those charged with EMG management responsibilities should follow VCE-recommended management techniques to recruit, train, and manage appropriate individuals to act on behalf of the university as EMGs. If implemented correctly, these VCE recommendations offer protection to those who manage EMG volunteers against claims of negligence.

Claims of negligence, or liability, are not just limited to freak accidents that can happen when EMGs work with the public, such as a public participant tripping on an exposed extension cord and injuring him/herself. Negligence can include placing individuals in inappropriate volunteer situations because proper screening did not occur, discrimination in selecting prospective EMGs, and improper volunteer dismissal, to name a few. The solution to these types of risk is to anticipate as many potential problems as possible and take steps to reduce the chances of those things happening. Asking "what if," then planning and acting appropriately is the best way to practice risk management.

Implementing the recommended management procedures for EMG volunteers can help avoid or minimize the chance of liability.

## **Recruiting and Screening**

**Risk:** Misinformed public; use of discriminatory selection practices for prospective EMGs; inappropriate matching of volunteers and jobs; negligent selection, failure to meet program compliance; doubt of reasonable effort.

**Preventative Practice:** Use a nondiscrimination statement on applications and promotional materials to keep the public informed; implement nondiscriminatory acceptance and dismissal practices, such as recruitment with job descriptions and predetermined screening criteria to select appropriate volunteers with necessary skills and interests; reference checks to ensure that individuals are appropriate for the job for which they applied, such as working with children; and documentation and use of a planned recruitment strategy to ensure program compliance and establish reasonable effort.



## Providing Proper Orientation and Training

**Risk:** Without orientation and training, there is a risk of misinformed volunteers, volunteers with inappropriate expectations, volunteers who are uninformed and make decisions that may have negative consequences (i.e., inappropriate pesticide recommendations because the volunteer is unaware of proper procedure), and the risk of accidents increases.

**Preventative Practice:** Properly orient and train EMGs about VCE, proper procedures, and expected results. Be sure to specify duties to be performed and how to accomplish them, as well as acts not to be performed. Training should be sure to cover duties to be performed, methods for proper performance of the duties, tasks not to be undertaken without specific instruction, dangers to be aware of and avoided, and proper procedure for emergencies, such as first aid and what should be done/said.

## Recordkeeping

**Risk:** VCE/VT activities cannot be substantiated because improper documentation places doubt on who actually participated, who was representing the university, what was done improperly, etc., causing substantial risk of personal liability.

**Preventative Practice:** Document EMG projects in an organized fashion, including who, where, how, pictures, written responsibilities, job descriptions, and agent approval of projects. The more documentation we have, the better. Verbal agreements are not enough.

These are just several examples of ways in which potential liability risks can be minimized through proper planning. When VCE recommendations are followed, the chance of liability is decreased and affiliation with VCE/VT is not questioned. Please refer to cited chapters for more detailed information on each of the above topics.

## Appropriate EMG Activities

Activities that involve EMG volunteers in VCE educational program implementation should be planned and organized so as to ensure liability protection and to avoid risk of liability charges. First, ensure that activities of EMGs are conducted on behalf of the university, are in accordance with the mission and goals of VCE, fit within the Extension Agents Plan of Work, and are approved activities that fall within the VCE/VT liability shield. Second, plan the events so that risks to the public, faculty, staff, volunteers, and VCE/VT are minimized.

To ensure that appropriate EMG activities are chosen, local coordinators should work with VCE staff to plan EMG volunteer opportunities that follow the educational program plan for the unit. Individuals planning EMG projects and activities outside of the unit's educational program plan should communicate with the local coordinator and VCE staff to review the activity and ensure that it is appropriate to be conducted under the auspices of VCE/VT. Only if the activity has received approval from a qualified VCE staff is the project considered approved and appropriate for EMGs to conduct.

Furthermore, VCE programs that require the signing of a contract or facilities use agreement (such as a bus rental or holding a class in a hotel or school classroom) must receive state level approval and the contract must be signed by the State VCE Office. For further details, please contact the State EMG Office.

Projects and activities that are implemented without approval from VCE are not considered EMG activities and do not count as EMG volunteered time, as VCE was unaware of the event and had not approved it as appropriate. The EMG name and individual name tags should not be used with unapproved programs. Unapproved events will not carry VCE/VT liability, and participants become personally responsible in case of accident or mishap.

To ensure that EMG activities and events are conducted with minimal risk to planners and participants, carefully plan events and identify risks and dangers associated with the various volunteer jobs. Ask questions, such as:

- What might go wrong while volunteers are working?
- What accidents might occur due to equipment use?
- Who are EMG clients, and what are their special needs or limitations?

In thinking about risk, review the past history of a problem situation. Involve volunteers who have had direct experience in performing the work in developing the listing of risks.

Reducing risk may involve rewriting volunteer job descriptions to generate volunteers who are capable of dealing with the potential risks that are identified. Tailor the “qualifications” section of the job description to describe the skills, knowledge, and physical ability needed to avoid or deal with the dangers that have been uncovered.

All of these steps will help to ensure that EMGs are acting appropriately on behalf of VCE/VT and that the risk of any accident or liability is minimized.

*EMG volunteer activities with any VCE agent in any program area count toward their EMG service with prior approval.*

Responsibility resides with EMGs to act appropriately on behalf of VCE. Volunteers who wish to remain affiliated with VCE in the capacity as an EMG must follow the policies and meet the annual criteria specified, including [Standards of Conduct](#) and the non-discrimination policy. If EMGs violate the policies, they are subject to dismissal and could possibly be held personally liable for their actions.

## **Implementing VCE Policies and Recommended Management Techniques**

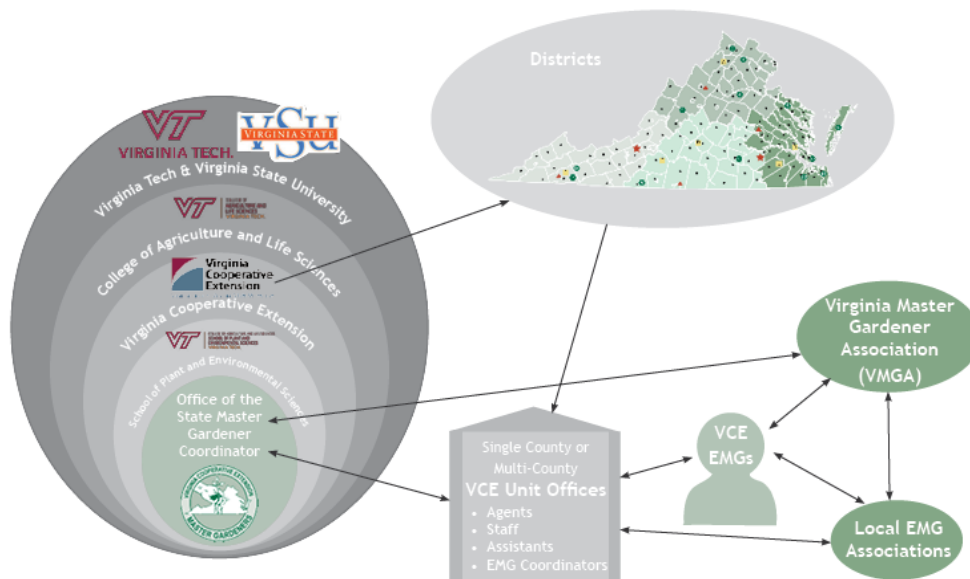
As stated earlier, failure to employ the management techniques outlined in the volunteer policies and this manual could result in personal liability for the outcomes of actions taken by those in charge of the EMG volunteers.

Local coordinators should be very familiar with the EMG Volunteer Policies which clearly states all the ‘rules’ you need to play by. [Emergency response cards](#) should be administered to individual EMGs during initial training so that they are informed of proper procedure in the event of an accident. All EMGs should be informed of all policies, including the VCE Pesticide Policy Statement prior to and at the commencement of volunteering to be sure that they have adequate understanding of their responsibilities. Individuals with EMG management responsibilities should use this EMG Coordinator Manual as a reference and guide for appropriately managing local EMG groups and maintaining affiliation with VCE and VT.

## EMG Policies

The Virginia Cooperative Extension Master Gardener Volunteer Policies were developed as a collaboration with Extension agents and VCE Master Gardeners. These policies are an effort to

### Organization of Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) and the Extension Master Gardener Program (EMG)



establish the baselines for managing the VCE Master Gardener volunteers in Virginia. Local groups are welcome to build on these policies so that the needs of the local community are met. Local guidelines take precedence as long as these policies are maintained as the minimum standard in every unit with VCE Master Gardeners in Virginia.

## Extension Master Gardener Volunteers

An EMG is an individual who acts on behalf of VCE as a volunteer educator within their community after receiving specialized training in environmental horticulture through cooperative programming with VCE. These volunteer educators serve as partners with VCE to promote; inform; and work with communities, leaders, industry, and individuals by presenting programs on all aspects of horticulture to protect and enhance the environment, including turf, landscape, vegetables, trees and shrubs, and pest management practices.

### What is the official title?

After completion of the requirements to become an EMG volunteer, the official title shall be Virginia Cooperative Extension Master Gardener (usually shortened to Extension Master Gardener). Use of this title is a privilege, and this title is to be used only by individuals trained as an EMG while volunteering under the auspices of VCE. This relationship should be clearly stated in name tags, signs, etc. The EMG Coordinator serves as the immediate supervisor for EMGs. The ultimate responsibility for EMG volunteers and the ability to approve activities and projects falls to the local Extension agent.

EMGs work under the guidance of VCE to provide unbiased, research-based, environmentally-sound, horticulture information to the public; and any implied commercial endorsement resulting from use of the EMG title is improper. Therefore, the title may not be used for commercial publicity or private business. Participating in a commercial activity, association with commercial products, or giving implied VCE endorsements to any product or place of business is a violation of EMG policies. EMGs may only identify themselves as such while volunteering in conjunction with official/approved VCE programs or activities, such as a plant clinic conducted at a retail store, NOT for business or personal gain. EMG training and experience may be given as qualifications when seeking employment; however once employed, credentials may not be displayed by the EMG or the employer. Individuals who wish to use their horticulture training for distinction in the workplace should pursue Virginia Nursery and Landscape Association [certification by exam](#), as the VNLA course work is very similar in nature to the EMG training.

There are five levels of EMG status. Each status category is determined by level of training and internship (community education service) experience. The levels include: EMG Trainee, EMG Intern, EMG, Advanced EMG, and Emeritus EMG.

### VCE Master Gardener Trainee

One who is currently in classroom training to become an EMG but has not yet taken (or satisfactorily passed) the course final examination.

### VCE Master Gardener Intern

One who has completed the EMG classroom training requirement, achieved 70 percent or better cumulative average on the final examination, and is currently fulfilling the initial internship experience of 50 hours educational efforts/work time.

### VCE Master Gardener

One who has completed the EMG training – classroom and internship – and is actively volunteering with VCE and thus, fulfilling the requirements necessary to remain active. When a person ceases active volunteering with VCE and continued education, he or she also relinquishes the title of EMG. A temporary “inactive” status, however, is available for a one or two year period upon request of the individual and approval of the local coordinator. Coordinators may choose to review this status annually and may require additional training to reactivate an individual to EMG status.

### Advanced VCE Master Gardener

One who has received specialized training in any of the advanced-level EMG training programs and has completed the program requirements. Specialized training is available in various areas including arboriculture (EMG Tree Steward), landscape management and firewise practices (EMG Land Care Steward), and water quality (EMG Water Steward). These advanced training modules provide EMG volunteer educators the opportunity to expand the influence of VCE through leadership in their communities and enables EMGs to get involved in and lead programs concerning a community's greatest assets.

### Emeritus VCE Master Gardener

A dedicated EMG who “retires” due to health or other reasons after 1000 hours of service or as determined by the coordinator. This is a high honor status and should have limited use. This title is specifically for individuals who can no longer complete the requirements for remaining

active EMGs, but who have earned continued affiliation with VCE. Emeritus volunteers do not need to complete the standard training and screening requirements as long as they are not volunteering within the community. They can attend meetings, continuing education, etc. but should not interact with the public on behalf of VCE unless their background screening is up to date.

## Inactive Status

An “inactive” status is available for a one- or two-year period upon request of the individual and approval of the local coordinator. Coordinators may choose to review this status annually and may require additional training to reactivate an individual to active status.

## Volunteer Contribution Areas

EMG volunteer hours should be recorded in the following areas. Twenty (20) hours of educational programming and/or volunteer management efforts are required annually. A minimum of eight (8) hours of continuing education training is required annually. Travel time should be counted as part of the hours logged for any of the below contribution areas.

### *Educational Efforts*

Activities or programs in which the EMG educates the public. This includes presentations at demonstration sites; presentations at fairs, booths, etc.; plant clinics; and educational presentations to identified audiences, such as garden clubs, school groups, homeowner associations, church groups, etc. This also includes training of other non EMG volunteers or identified groups of volunteers to assist EMGs in delivering a program. Work to construct or develop a site used for educational programming, such as a water-wise landscape demonstration garden, qualifies as educational efforts if the educational program has been designed and the work is in preparation for implementation. **Educational efforts include the time spent planning, implementing, evaluating, and travel time to educational programming.** To determine if activities are appropriate educational programming, ask the questions: “Would an Extension agent do this himself or herself?” and “Does this activity contribute to the goals and mission of the local Extension program set forth by the local situation analysis?”

### *Volunteer Management Time*

Time spent on volunteer development, training and other management roles. This may include: general EMG business meetings; planning and supervising EMG training classes; working on the EMG group newsletter or social media; communication efforts; attending association meetings; and any other activities that maintain and support the effectiveness of EMGs. Volunteer Management Time does not include management activities associated with planning, implementing or reporting on specific public educational programming that is reported under education programming time.

### *Continuing education*

Time spent in personal education to increase skills and knowledge; for example, advanced training, education conferences, or other settings that qualify as continuing education.

## The Annual Renewal Process

In order to remain an EMG, each individual who has completed the initial 50 hours of training and 50 hours of volunteer internship must continue to volunteer and receive training each year. EMG Volunteer Policies require that EMGs volunteer a minimum of 20 hours of service and participate in 8 hours of continuing education to maintain active EMG status.

Annual re-enrollment includes signing of a volunteer agreement, standards of conduct, a voluntary criminal disclosure, and confirmation of contact information. This can be done through Better Impact or paper forms. Paper forms should be retained at the Extension office.

## EMG Agreements

Extension Master Gardeners are representatives of Virginia Cooperative Extension and are expected to uphold certain standards of behavior. In order to understand what is expected as an Extension Master Gardener, all volunteers are required to read and agree to the following:

### EMG Volunteer Agreement

If accepted into the Virginia Cooperative Extension Master Gardener Program, I agree to:

1. **For trainees:** Attend all required training sessions and make up any missed sessions if applicable. Commit to complete the training and 50 hours minimum volunteer hours as an EMG Intern within 18 months of completion of training.
1. **For active EMGs:** Complete 20 hours minimum volunteer hours and 8 hours of continuing education in order to remain as an Extension Master Gardener.
2. Share unbiased, research-based horticulture information approved by Virginia Tech/Virginia State/Virginia Cooperative Extension.
3. Adhere to the printed recommendations provided by the Extension specialists at Virginia Tech and published as *The Pest Management Guide for Home Grounds and Animals* (PMG) when providing chemical pest control recommendations.
4. Refer all questions regarding commercial crop production or pest control of such crops to the Extension Agent.
5. Not use my EMG nametag, certificate, or title in direct or implied endorsement of any product or service or for personal financial gain.
6. Acknowledge that I have received an explanation of the Virginia Tech/VCE liability coverage for volunteers. I understand that any medical problem arising from volunteer work for Virginia Tech/VCE is my responsibility through my personal health care coverage and I will file any claim with my own personal insurance.
7. Not discriminate on the basis of age, color, disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, veteran status, or any other basis protected by law.
8. Acknowledge that I am volunteering for and thereby represent the local Extension Unit with the understanding that the local VCE Agent or Representative is ultimately responsible for all locally approved EMG projects and continuing education credits.
9. Abide by policies, procedures, and guidelines of the EMG Program as outlined in Chapter 1 of The EMG Training Handbook.

### EMG Standards of Conduct

Virginia Extension Master Gardeners will:

- Act in accordance with the policies and guidelines laid out in the Virginia Master Gardener Handbook.
- Accept supervision and support from the local Virginia Cooperative Extension Unit Office.
- Accept supervision and support from the Extension Master Gardener (EMG) State Office.



- Work cooperatively and collaboratively with the local extension agent and/or local EMG coordinator on VCE locally approved projects and initiatives.
- Present a positive public image that speaks well of the EMG program and its sponsoring agency, Virginia Cooperative Extension.
- Comply with all applicable policies of Virginia Cooperative Extension, including the non-discrimination policy, and make all reasonable efforts to reach underrepresented audiences with EMG programs.
- Maintain and report accurate records relating to training, volunteering, and continuing education efforts.
- Be respectful and courteous to all others in communications and interactions.
- Actively participate as a positive team member with other individuals within the EMG program.
- Be aware and respectful of the Virginia Tech Principles of Community.

## **Dismissing an EMG**

If an individual indicates that they do not wish to meet the annual re-enrollment requirements to maintain active status, then they should no longer be considered an EMG. The individual's name is to be removed from the active list of volunteers. Notification to the individual should be sent stating the understood intent to withdraw and thanking the individual for service contributed.

An EMG can be relieved of the title and privileges at any time, at the discretion of the local coordinator, Extension agent, Unit Coordinator, and the Extension District Director, in the event that the EMG demonstrates actions that are in conflict with the mission and goals of VCE. Examples of conflict include, but are not limited to, misuse of the EMG title and failure to comply with EMG policies.

## **Procedure for Due Process**

An EMG accused of violating volunteer policy should meet with the local coordinator and/or Extension agent and be given the opportunity to share their version of the event. If this explanation is satisfactory to the agent, and the volunteer has not previously violated policy, the issue can be dismissed. If the EMG has recurring incidents, he/she should be issued a written warning, and this documentation should be brought to the attention of the Unit Coordinator and District Director, in the event that future problems arise. If the outcome of this situation is not satisfactory to both parties, the Unit Coordinator and District Director should become involved. If the volunteer continues to violate policy and ignores suggested solutions that result from these negotiations, the District Director should become involved and recommendations for dismissing the volunteer should be approved and carried out. All parties should receive written notification of this outcome. The name tags that are issued by VCE may be requested to be returned at the discretion of the local agent.

## **Relocation**

EMGs who have completed their classroom training and internships in Virginia and received a positive recommendation from their local coordinator prior to moving to another part of the state are eligible to become volunteers in the locale of their new residency. They may be required to take additional coursework also required of all local EMGs in the new locality and will be subject to the guidelines of the new locale. Additional coursework is left to the discretion of the local coordinator and Extension Agent.

EMGs who have not completed their internship prior to moving may be required to pass the local exam and complete additional coursework prior to becoming volunteers in their new localities.

EMGs moving from out-of-state as well as returning EMGs may be required to complete the entire EMG training prior to volunteering in Virginia, depending on their demonstrated knowledge and skills in this geographic area. Any new volunteer coming into Virginia will need a background screening and to complete their risk management and civil rights trainings.

## **Middle-Management**

The EMG effort fosters volunteerism and leadership development. A well-managed volunteer group should be able to function without the coordinator being solely responsible for completing all EMG tasks, such as reporting, coordinating training, teaching classes, coordinating educational programs, etc.

The coordinator should primarily act as a manager and focus on management and delegation of responsibility. For example, the coordinator should delegate responsibilities so that other EMGs receive individual responsibility, such as collecting hours, coordinating training programs, etc., and report back to the coordinator to communicate actions taken and results accomplished.

Volunteers benefit by expanding their knowledge, skills, and abilities to have a sustained impact on their community. Middle-management is an integral part of the volunteering, yielding the capability to temporarily sustain programming during unforeseeable events (i.e., loss of the coordinator due to career change).

## **Public Distribution of Educational Materials Developed by EMGs**

Educational materials developed by EMGs for public distribution must be approved by the appropriate local and/or state Extension faculty. The Coordinator or Agent should ensure all necessary statements have been included.

## **Contributions**

EMGs may become recipients of gifts as a result of time spent giving talks, slide presentations, demonstrations, etc. In general, these gifts should be received on behalf of the local association or local VCE office (and not the individual) for the furtherance of the EMG mission.

## **Support Materials Provided by the State EMG Office**

You can contact the State EMG Coordinator's Office at Virginia Tech to obtain needed materials, such as those listed below:

### **Training Materials**

The State EMG Office has created a training template in Canvas that can be used for EMG training, whether classes are in person, hybrid, or online.

### **Certificates**

Certificates are available to acknowledge EMG achievements. It is not mandatory that these certificates be used; however, if they are not requested, locally developed certificates must be provided by the unit office. The EMG Intern certificate acknowledges satisfactory

completion of the classroom instruction and examination and shows the number of field experience hours that must be completed as an intern before becoming an EMG (minimum of 50 hours). The EMG certificate acknowledges completion of all requirements to become an EMG, including the classroom instruction, examination, and 50 hours minimum internship of educational programming. These certificates are ordered through online form submission: <https://mastergardener.ext.vt.edu/order/order-certificates/>

## Name Tags

During classroom training and internship, blank name tags can be ordered from the State EMG Office. Please submit requests for blank name tags to the State Office via email.

After successful completion of the training (training classes and internship), volunteers that are “expected to be continuous, long-term contributors to VCE” should be ordered a VCE engraved name tag with the title “Master Gardener Volunteer.” Name tags must be ordered online through the Extension Unit Office. To submit an order, go to <https://sites.google.com/view/extintranet/marketing> and follow the link provided under ‘Quick Links’ at the bottom of the page.

## Recognition

At the completion of the initial internship (minimum of 50 hours of training and 50 hours of service), individuals receive the official EMG title, certificate, and name tag.

EMG volunteer educators are recognized at the state level for their service as EMGs and are given awards for the following volunteer hour milestones: 250, 500, 1000, and every subsequent 1000 hours earned. All awards from the State EMG Coordinator’s Office are presented at the annual EMG College. Awards for individuals not in attendance are sent to the local coordinator for presentation. We encourage local groups to recognize EMGs for outstanding service or contributions in addition to any state level awards they receive.

## Liability Coverage for EMG Activities

EMGs are covered by VCE under the Commonwealth of Virginia self-insurance program, as authorized by Section 2.1-526.8 of the Code of Virginia, which is based on a comprehensive general liability manuscript policy form. **This insurance program covers employees and volunteers while participating in EMG programs approved by Extension personnel for cases of negligence or liability only.**

Coordinators should review with EMGs the specifics of the VCE liability coverage to ensure that they understand its significance and purpose. Any medical problem arising from volunteer work for VCE/VT is the individual EMG’s responsibility through their personal health-care coverage.

Annual team action plan, scrapbooks, attendance sheets, event promotion fliers, and other archival information that indicate EMGs are representatives of VCE/VT in conjunction with data in BetterImpact will be considered appropriate documentation in the event that a liability claim is made.

# Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Program Compliance

EMGs will comply with established VCE policy in recruitment, screening, and training of EMG volunteers and in implementing educational programming. These VCE policies apply to Extension staff and volunteers, such as EMGs.

Additional details and other VCE policies may be found at:

<https://sites.google.com/view/extintranet/policies>

## Equal Opportunity (EO)

**Definition:** All personnel activities are conducted in a manner that assures equal opportunity for all, based solely on individual merit and fitness of applicants and employees, related to specific jobs and without regard to race, ethnicity, religion, gender, gender identity, gender expression, age, national origin, disability, political affiliation, or other non-merit factors.

**Policy:** Extension classified employees are covered by and subject to the provisions of the State Personnel Act and all other rules and regulations applicable to Virginia Tech. VCE operates in accordance with the provisions outlined in the Classified Employee Handbook. The Commonwealth of Virginia has established rules of personal conduct and standards of acceptable work performance for its employees. Violations of the established rules or unacceptable work performance may result in the imposition of disciplinary action. Such action is designed, and is to be used, as a corrective measure and shall not be based on an employee's race, ethnicity, religion, national origin, political affiliation, disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, veteran status, or age. Extension Faculty members are governed by the employment procedures of the university of their affiliation. Reference should be made to the Faculty Handbook of the respective university for information on grievance procedures and other important topics.

The following EEO Statement, "Virginia Cooperative Extension programs and employment are open to all, regardless of age, color, disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, veteran status, or any other basis protected by law. An equal opportunity/affirmative action employer" should be on all documents which are distributed publicly. It is also required as part of the approved uniform letterhead.

## Affirmative Action (AA)

**Definition:** A set of specific and result-oriented procedures designed to correct differential treatment of individuals or groups of people. Progressive steps taken to achieve compliance with Civil Rights, Equal Employment Opportunity rules, laws, and regulations.

**Policy:** VCE is an affirmative action organization and actively recruits minorities and women in employment and programs. It is the responsibility of each employee to participate in the VCE affirmative action plan by assisting in recruitment and by helping to create an open, multicultural environment. Supervisory employees will follow affirmative action guidelines in selecting and supervising staff and will be evaluated on results achieved.

## Sexual Harassment

**Definition:** Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute sexual harassment when: submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual's employment, submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as the basis for employment decisions affecting such individual, or such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment.

**Policy:** Sexual harassment is a form of gender discrimination involving unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature which interferes with the education or work of others. Sexual harassment violates university policy as well as state and federal laws and can result in disciplinary action for employee offenders as severe as dismissal. In addition to university sanction, persons who engage in sexual harassment may be subject to civil or criminal action.

## Program Compliance

**Definition:** Virginia Cooperative Extension programs are planned and conducted in response to issues affecting the social, economic, and cultural well-being of the people of the Commonwealth. Programs are conducted in accordance with the respective resources and staff competencies of the two institutions. Virginia Cooperative Extension is committed to the intent of Title VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title IX of the 1972 Education Amendments, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and other related acts.

**Policy:** All VCE personnel have the responsibility for promoting balanced programs, regardless of the program area to which they are assigned. Balanced membership is defined as the condition existing when the number of members of the non-majority race or gender reaches 75 percent of the number of the non-majority members that the group would have if its racial or gender composition were exactly proportional to that of the community. This is to be used as a guide to assist Extension personnel in measuring progress toward achieving a fully integrated Extension program.

Documentation is defined as written records which reflect adequately the reasonable efforts made by VCE personnel and sponsored groups to balance membership. Handwritten notes indicating dates, names, places, and other pertinent facts constitute documentation. Such documentation should be retained for a period of three years from the original date. The reasonable efforts made by volunteers will be similarly documented. Documentation will be retained at the unit level for review by state and USDA Extension staff members for three years.

Reasonable efforts consist of a combination of actions designed to communicate to all persons that memberships are open, that non-members are welcomed and encouraged to become members, and that VCE subscribes to a balanced membership philosophy.

## Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

**Definition:** A federal anti-discrimination statute designed to remove barriers which prevent qualified individuals with disabilities from enjoying the same employment opportunities that are available to persons without disabilities.

**Policy:** Extension offices must make their programs available to the disabled. These guidelines should be followed: 1) If Extension offices are not accessible to the disabled, every effort will be made to provide services in an alternative location. 2) Consider the accessibility of meeting rooms that are used to conduct classes and meetings. Choose only accessible rooms if at all possible. 3) It is not mandatory to remodel public buildings if the services can be provided elsewhere; however, if remodeling is to be done, the remodeled areas must be accessible to the disabled. 4) All new construction must be accessible to the disabled. 5) No interested parties may be denied services because of disability unless it is impractical to accommodate their needs or if accommodating them would create an unacceptable health or safety risk. Every reasonable effort must be made to design and deliver Extension programs that encourage participation of individuals with special needs.

The following ADA Statement must be used in all methods of promotion of VCE events and programs, including written, verbal and electronic means for workshops, events, seminars, classes and organizational meetings:

“If you are a person with a disability and desire any assistive devices, services or other accommodations to participate in this activity, please contact (name, office) at (phone number/TDD\*) during business hours of \_\_am. and \_\_p.m. to discuss accommodations five days prior to the event. \*TDD number is (800) 828-1120.”

For job listings, advertisements, or other recruiting materials the following ADA Statement must be included:

“Individuals with disabilities desiring accommodations in the application process should notify (name, office) at (phone number/TDD\*) by the application deadline. \*TDD number is (800) 828-1120.”

## Working with Youth

Any EMG that works with youth, must receive special training from their local 4-H agent. This training includes orientation to the 4-H program, introduction to the “Above Suspicion” policy and explanation of the 4-H enrollment forms. It is the EMGs responsibility to inform their agent of youth program activities. Volunteer time and number of youth contacts should be reported to the 4-H Agent and to the EMG coordinator or record keeper. Only horticulture-related educational projects can count towards EMG programming time.

## VCE Pesticide Policy Statement

VIRGINIA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION (VCE) PESTICIDE POLICY STATEMENT #93-001  
(revised Feb. 2020)

*To download this document, click [here](#) (see Volunteer Policies section):*

VCE Master Gardeners (VCE-MGs) must comply with established Extension policy.

### **Extension pesticide policy involving VCE-MGs**

This pesticide policy statement has been written for the purpose of helping VCE faculty and staff as well as volunteers working under the umbrella of VCE. The intent of this statement is to prevent pesticide misuse and/or misinformation, and protect the public from potential harm associated with these mistakes.

VCE-MGs are defined as volunteer Extension representatives who work with horticulture and



urban agricultural programs through the local Extension units. VCE-MGs come under this policy because they often provide recommendations for the use of chemical controls for pest species. They might also be involved in pest control in local demonstration plots and exhibits. This policy statement addresses volunteers who provide information involving chemical pest control recommendations and those who use pesticides.

### **Insurance coverage for VCE-MG activities**

VCE-MGs are covered under the Commonwealth of Virginia Risk Management Plan while performing authorized volunteer activities for VCE. VCE-MGs are **not** covered under this plan for pesticide use or pest control recommendations conducted outside of VCE programs.

### **VCE-MGs providing chemical pest control recommendations**

VCE-MGs providing chemical pest control recommendations must adhere to the printed recommendations provided by the pest control specialists at Virginia Tech, and made available as numbered VCE publications such as the *Pest Management Guide for Home Grounds and Animals* (PMG). The PMG is printed every year with updates provided by the authors between printings as necessary. VCE-MGs must be instructed by VCE personnel or other VCE-MG leaders on how to use the PMG. Its use should not involve changing or adding to the chemical pest control recommendations in any way. VCE-MGs are **not** permitted to provide recommendations to other groups, such as agricultural producers, nor are they permitted to use non-homeowner VCE publications for recommendations to any group. Furthermore, VCE-MGs must be provided with training on pesticide safety and pest control as outlined in the VCE Master Gardener Handbook.

Although there are many other sources of pesticide recommendations available, many are proprietary in nature (e.g. pesticide company literature, the Ortho Problem Solver™) and should **not** be used as a replacement for VCE publications. They can be used as a reference, but any official recommendation to the public **must** come from current, numbered VCE publications.

Many VCE-MGs have decided to become certified as private pesticide applicators. However, this certification is **not** required by VCE-MGs *in their roles as VCE volunteers*. Private pesticide applicator certification is established for those using restricted-use pesticides, and in the business of raising agricultural commodities on land owned or leased by the applicator or their employer.

### **VCE-MGs applying pesticides as part of their volunteer activities**

It is possible that some VCE-MGs are involved in the application of pesticides in demonstration plots or exhibits as part of their volunteer activities. In these cases, they are required to be certified as either commercial pesticide applicators or registered technicians as required by the Virginia Pesticide Control Act. They must be certified or trained in an applicator category associated with their volunteer activities [most likely Ornamental Pest Control (Category 3A), Turf Pest Control (Category 3B) and/or Agricultural Pest Control-Plant (Category 1A)]. New pesticide applicators are required to start as registered technicians. The registered technician requirement involves a minimum of 40 hours of on-the-job training before they can take the registered technician exam. Once a registered technician has accumulated one year in service, they can remain registered technicians, or they may take the category exam(s) to become a certified commercial pesticide applicator. Only persons with one year's experience as a registered technician or equivalent experience or training can become a certified commercial pesticide applicator. To maintain certification, all pesticide applicators must recertify every two years by attending approved training courses.

This process of certification can be burdensome for volunteers. Many VCE-MGs will find that it is not worth the effort to get involved in the application of pesticides as a VCE-MG activity. It is best that these activities be left to VCE agents and employees who are already certified to apply pesticides under the laws of the Commonwealth of Virginia. If a VCE-MG is **not** a certified commercial pesticide applicator or registered technician, then they should **not** apply pesticides in the role of a VCE-MG volunteer.

### **Further clarification**

Because this policy can be complicated, there may be the need for further clarification. For more information, VCE-MGs should contact their local VCE-MG coordinators or appropriate Extension agents. If further clarification is needed, agents should contact one of the two persons listed below:

VCE-MG Training: Pesticide Education Program

Mr. David D. Close  
Director, EMG Program  
Virginia Tech  
Saunders 401-C  
Blacksburg, VA 24061  
(540) 231-4026  
dclose@vt.edu

Dr. Daniel Frank  
Director, Virginia Tech Pesticide Programs  
Virginia Tech  
302 Agnew Hall  
Blacksburg, VA 24061  
(540)231-6543  
dlfrank@vt.edu

## **Chapter 2: The Local EMG Coordinator**

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### **Introduction**

The coordination of EMGs involves a fair amount of management on a regular basis. Determining the needs of your served locality must be determined. Once needs are established, then the following actions must follow: Job descriptions must be written. Recruitment and training must be conducted. Interns and active EMGs must be placed in volunteer opportunities under the direction of Extension agents so that the volunteer commitment is completed and local program goals are achieved. Records must be kept through Better Impact and maintained so that all volunteers are fairly recognized.

Continuing education (CE) opportunities must be made available to EMGs. Most importantly, communication must be maintained between VCE staff and all volunteers, and everyone must understand their role within the unit. The individual responsible for orchestrating the teamwork of the EMG program is the local EMG coordinator (MGC).

### **Primary MGC Responsibilities**

The primary responsibilities of all local MGCs are:

- Set the positive standard for expectations and achievements among EMG volunteers. Maintain a belief in the ability of others and the appropriateness of volunteers sharing in the ownership of the VCE educational programs.
- Meet regularly with the basic management teams/committees to delegate responsibilities related to managing EMG volunteers.
- Meet regularly with the basic educational program teams/committees and agents who are responsible for programming (Plant Clinics, Horticultural Therapy, Water Quality, 4-H/Youth Gardening, etc.) to facilitate implementation of VCE educational programming.
- Ensure that a quality training program is implemented.
- Foster continued growth of EMGs through volunteer job placement, skill development and training, and recognition.
- Attend periodic coordinator training opportunities available through the State Office.
- Train incoming volunteer coordinator.
- Communicate regularly with appropriate personnel at the local Extension office on all issues regarding EMGs.
- Oversee EMG's monthly reporting of volunteer hours and contacts in Better Impact. Annual review of cumulative hours and contacts to document EMG accomplishments and review each individual's eligibility for continuation in the program.
- Facilitate and ensure the reporting of EMG activities, accomplishments, and impacts to the local Extension office and the State Office for inclusion in annual reports.
- Work with advisory groups (i.e., ELC), agents, and EMGs to ensure that the local EMG educational programs meet the needs of the local community in keeping with the mission and goals of VCE.
- Act as a liaison between the State EMG Coordinator and the local unit.

## **Additional Responsibilities by Local Title**

There are a number of components that make up the structure of VCE including the local offices and agents, 4-H educational centers, local Extension Leadership Council, the district office, the state office, Virginia Tech, and Virginia State University.

In addition to the primary coordinator responsibilities, coordinators have varying levels of programming and reporting responsibilities, depending on the coordinator title. The title of the position will also affect how the position is filled, reviewed, and rotated. A local EMG coordinator is either a locally paid Extension agent, locally paid technician or the equivalent, or a volunteer who has stepped forward to fill the role.

### **The Locally Paid Agent Coordinator**

The local coordinator who is also a locally paid Extension agent is responsible for planning the VCE environmental horticulture educational program for their county(ies). This requires a plan of goals and objectives, specific outcomes, a method for implementation by EMG volunteers and a plan for program evaluation. Working with EMGs requires volunteer job descriptions, recordkeeping and reporting details for specific projects or components within the educational program plan. This coordinator has the authority to sign off and approve of additional volunteer project proposals and continuing education training events. Agents in this position may recruit a local volunteer coordinator to supplement their management efforts. By the nature of the job description, however, the agent must retain final responsibility for coordinator duties.

The agent coordinator is responsible for completing an annual personal action plan (signing on to the VCE Plan of Work) and final annual report for VCE. This documents the educational programming that he/she plans to do for the year, then provides a report on what was accomplished in regard to the plan.

The agent's personal action plan covers the educational programs that EMGs should be involved in planning, implementing, and evaluating. The final report for the program year will rely on the accuracy of reports generated from the VMS, hence the importance for accurate and up-to-date volunteer submissions. Summaries of what EMGs accomplish in the local communities and the achievements of collective educational programming should comprise the bulk of this agent's final report. Because of the local funding for this agent's position, the agent coordinator will submit local reports on a more frequent basis that more closely monitor the local achievements of EMGs. Future funding of this position is contingent on the quality of the reports and the effectiveness of the individual in implementing programs that fit the needs of the local community.

There will typically be little rotation in the local coordinator who is a locally paid Extension agent, since the position is a permanent, paid job (subject to funding). Review of the individual by the VCE District Director will occur annually. Hence, it is extremely important for volunteers to effectively communicate with the coordinator and their supervisors to ensure that the job responsibilities are being satisfactorily met. If a local volunteer coordinator partners with the agent coordinator, their responsibility and position rotation will be similar to the volunteer coordinator (see "Volunteer Coordinator" section below). In the event that conflicts arise and one-on-one discussions cannot resolve the problems, the local Extension Unit Coordinator or the relevant District Director should become involved.

## **The Locally Paid Non-Agent Coordinator**

The locally paid non-agent individual who is the local coordinator has the same responsibility for training and management of EMG volunteers as the locally funded agent coordinator, but has fewer responsibilities for the development of environmental horticulture education programs.

This coordinator is also responsible for being the liaison between the EMG volunteers and the local agents. Once programming plans are solidified, this coordinator oversees program management details to ensure that volunteer needs and responsibilities are met. The local non-agent coordinator approves continuing education events and may possess the authority to sign off and approve of volunteer project proposals, if designated by the local Unit Coordinator to do so. Because of the funding source for this position, the individual may have to submit local reports on a more frequent basis that more closely monitor the local achievements of EMGs. Future funding of this position is usually contingent on the quality of the reports, as well as the program impact and effectiveness of the individual in assisting educational program implementation in the unit service area.

There may be little or no turnover for the locally paid, non-agent local coordinator since the position is a permanent, paid job (subject to local funding). Sometimes, the position is temporary and heavily depends on results, achievements, and outcomes of the EMG educational programs for continuation of the position. Review of the individual will most likely occur annually. Again, it is extremely important for volunteers to effectively communicate with the coordinator and his/her supervisors to ensure that the job responsibilities are being satisfactorily met. In the event that conflicts arise and one-on-one discussions cannot

resolve the problems, discussions should occur with the individual's supervisor, which could be an agent, the local Extension Unit Coordinator, or the relevant District Director.

## **Local Volunteer Coordinator**

The volunteer MGC is a local volunteer who has responsibility for EMG training and management. Volunteer MGCs do not have the authority to authorize an educational program as VCE-sponsored. The volunteer EMG coordinator is neither required to plan the educational programming for the local county(ies), nor to complete the VCE personal action plan and Plan of Work final report. However, the volunteer MGC will work closely with agents and other EMGs in developing plans to be authorized by the agent.

The local volunteer MGC is responsible for overseeing EMG volunteer reporting in Better Impact and provides this data to the senior Agriculture & Natural Resources (ANR) agent for local and state-level Extension reports.

This coordinator is also responsible for being the liaison between the EMG volunteers and the local agent to see that volunteers are placed in Extension-approved volunteer opportunities. Once programming plans are solidified, this coordinator works among the EMG organizational teams to ensure that volunteer needs and responsibilities are met and oversees the management details. The volunteer coordinator is especially dependent on delegation of responsibility to the various EMG teams because of the nature of the position. Although this coordinator does not have the authority to sign off and approve of volunteer project proposals, he/she can approve continuing education events.

There should be consistent, planned rotation for the local coordinator who is a volunteer, since it is a volunteer job with enormous responsibility. Volunteer coordinators should serve a minimum one-year term/maximum two- year term to provide continuity in leadership while allowing for new ideas and fresh perspectives (a two- year term is recommended for providing continuity in leadership, although a one-year term is acceptable). Implied in the length of term is that the individual spends the year prior to taking office in training for the position and the year following service in an ex officio capacity to advise and train the incoming coordinator. Thus, the position is a 3 to 4 year commitment. Review of the individual should occur on the first anniversary of the position assumption and be conducted by a team of EMGs and VCE faculty and staff. Sometimes the individuals filling the position love the challenge, responsibility, and leadership and are willing to continue for several more years, while others are temporary placeholders with little interest in the responsibility.

If, upon the second anniversary and favorable review, the coordinator wishes to continue in the position and/ or no one else has stepped forward with an interest in the position, the coordinator may be allowed to continue for a second term. No more than two consecutive terms should be served by the same coordinator to avoid a misplaced perception of personal program ownership. All outgoing coordinators should train their successors and should act in an ex officio position for the year following rotation.

## **Suggestions for Selecting Volunteer Local Coordinators**

The volunteer local coordinator position is one with an enormous responsibility, as compared with many EMG jobs. Not every EMG will want or is qualified to be the volunteer coordinator. EMGs who have demonstrated consistent willingness and ability to lead other volunteers (i.e., have effectively served as the association president, have been the recruitment and training coordinator, etc.) should be prime candidates considered for the position. A volunteer

coordinator should have at least a few years of experience as an active Extension Master Gardener before taking on this role. In the event that a volunteer coordinator position is created, a team consisting of EMGs, VCE faculty and staff, and the local association officers should be formed to develop the job description, advertise the position, review and screen candidates, and name the volunteer coordinator. This same team should work together to review and evaluate the individual at the first and/or second anniversary of the position and also nominate and/or groom a successor.

Because of constant rotation of volunteer local coordinators, individuals acting in this capacity should seek management training for continuing education hours during tenure as the volunteer coordinator. The State EMG Coordinator's Office at Virginia Tech sponsors periodic coordinator training events that will meet this requirement. In addition, new coordinator training and update meetings are offered as needed. These sessions and other appropriate training opportunities are announced to local coordinators through email by listserv.

*The agent/coordinator listserv has been set up specifically for coordinators to discuss program policy and programming issues. The State Coordinator uses the list as a primary means of communicating with agents and local coordinators, such as announcing upcoming events, grant programs, etc. Participation in the discussion is limited to extension agents and local coordinators. Contact the State Coordinator to be added to the listserv.*

As with other local coordinators, it is extremely important for EMG volunteers to effectively communicate with the volunteer local coordinator and their supervisors to ensure that the job responsibilities are being satisfactorily met. In the event that conflicts arise and one-on-one discussions cannot resolve the problems, discussion should occur with the volunteer's supervisor, which could be an agent/EMG advisor, the local Extension Unit Coordinator, or the relevant District Director, or the team responsible for naming the coordinator.

## Support for Local Coordinators

There are many resources available to the local coordinator:

The EMG Coordinator Manual is the guide to being a local coordinator and managing the volunteers.

- The main resource for all related forms, support materials, special publications etc. for new Coordinators is the Virginia Master Gardener Program website: <https://mastergardener.ext.vt.edu/coordinators/>. This website provides up-to-date resources in a secure password protected section headed "Master Gardener Coordinator". If you need the password, please contact the State EMG Coordinator.
- Coordinator training is offered periodically at different locations around the Commonwealth and is sponsored by the State EMG Coordinator's Office, Virginia Tech, in order to keep veteran coordinators up-to-date and to train new coordinators for the basics of their duties.
- Regular communication from the State EMG Coordinator's Office listserv, an email discussion list specifically for agents and coordinators. Contact the State Coordinator to be added to this listserv.
- The State EMG Coordinator is available for problem-solving consultation and resource development.
- Additional support for the local coordinator includes VCE agents (to assist with responsibilities of public speaking, recognition, planning, and job descriptions),



experienced volunteers (delegating, teaching, developing new ideas), VCE office staff (problem solving, resource location), volunteers (contacts within the community; skills, such as computer, speaking, asking, etc.), and other groups within the community (for project collaboration and resourcing).

## **Facilitating Successful Volunteers**

The EMG effort fosters volunteerism and leadership development. A well-managed group will be able to function without the coordinator being solely responsible for the completion of all EMG management tasks, such as reporting, coordinating training, teaching classes, and coordinating educational programs.

The coordinator should primarily act as a manager and focus on management and delegation of responsibility. For example, the coordinator should delegate responsibilities so that other EMGs receive individual responsibility, such as coordinating training programs, and report back to the coordinator to communicate actions taken and results accomplished. Volunteers benefit by expanding their knowledge, skills, and abilities to have a sustained impact on their community. Middle-management is an integral part of volunteer coordination, yielding the capability to temporarily sustain programming during unforeseeable events (i.e., loss of the coordinator due to career change).

Local EMG coordinators have certain key responsibilities as outlined in the first section of this chapter. To be most effective, their efforts must primarily focus on facilitating and coordinating teamwork, as opposed to assuming personal responsibility for everything, to ensure that program responsibilities are met and that volunteers are motivated and satisfied. In order to be an effective local coordinator, the individual must develop in EMG volunteers a sense of shared program ownership.

## **Developing a Sense of Shared Ownership**

The atmosphere and environment of the local volunteer structure will largely determine whether or not individuals continue to volunteer as EMGs. There are three major factors that contribute to a fulfilling EMG experience, including worthwhile volunteer jobs, good volunteer management, and a positive organizational climate. The third factor, a positive organizational climate, is most influenced by the interaction of VCE staff with volunteers, such as EMGs.

Coordinators, especially volunteer and technician level coordinators, play a critical role as the facilitator and mediator between local VCE staff and volunteer EMGs.

The ability of the local coordinator to function in this capacity often sets the tone for the entire organization and can significantly affect volunteer interest in continuing to volunteer.

Behavior of the local coordinator profoundly impacts and is critical to the process of building ownership for EMGs. If the coordinator makes all decisions, then EMGs have no opportunity to become involved in the decision making process that is so integral to developing ownership in the program. It is also probable that, if the local coordinator is making all management decisions, local VCE staff will make all decisions for EMG-implemented educational programs. If EMGs do not feel that they are involved in making the decisions that affect their roles as volunteers or that their voices are not heard by the decision makers, they will be unsatisfied and unwilling to continue. This is the same as having a supervisor in a paid position who makes

decisions that impact the employee without letting the employee have any say whatsoever in their future. The employee simply resigns and finds another job. Volunteers will simply stop volunteering.

A pleasant and positive climate for volunteers is largely built through shared ownership in VCE educational programming and recognition and respect of EMGs as volunteers. Shared ownership means that all partners can express their ideas about where the programs should be going and how it should be getting there. Shared ownership enhances the EMG volunteer experience and contributes to successful volunteer management. It keeps EMGs in sync with staff and results in better planned programs that are more effective at meeting the goals of VCE.

EMGs very often have previous experiences as volunteers with VCE or some other agency that has led them to expect that the program leader will retain complete control. Even if the current situation is not meeting expectations or maximizing the use of their talents, EMGs may be hesitant to change that control and instead may discontinue volunteering if dissatisfied. If EMGs see changes that might be made or have suggestions for other projects or activities, they will offer the suggestions very tentatively, if at all.

To change this tendency, local coordinators, whether volunteer or paid, should work carefully to involve EMGs in the decision-making process in relation to management and EMG-implemented educational programs. Behaviors of the local coordinator will communicate to EMG volunteers whether or not their input is welcome and valuable, which will in turn affect the way other VCE staff treat EMGs.

The following behavior recommendations are guidelines for local coordinators and staff seeking and encouraging EMG input.

- Seek input from all partners, including volunteers, faculty, and staff.
- When encouraging individuals to come up with ideas, allow plenty of time to give people a fair chance to think through the situation and form ideas. Avoid presenting ideas first, and then asking if anyone else has other ideas.
- Use techniques such as brainstorming to stimulate thinking and creativity, especially when working with groups that are not accustomed to making suggestions or when a rather complex problem is at hand. Share the ideas that result.
- Avoid throwing too many problems out at once, and allow individuals time to think through the problems at hand.
- Hear the resulting ideas, and make it very clear that other people's ideas are welcome. Give positive feedback that you have really heard and understood the ideas. Positive feedback reactions include:
  - Acknowledging the idea: "That's a possibility that we really need to look into."
  - Clarifying the idea: "I'm not sure we really understand. What do you mean by...?"
  - Listing the idea: "Let's put that down on the blackboard so we don't forget it."
  - Enlarging upon the idea: "That's a good start. How can we take it further?"
- Avoid negative signals, such as frowning, showing tenseness, or showing slight irritability, when someone makes a suggestion. These signals, even if innocent (i.e., frowning because of a headache), may communicate that control is not being shared and may keep others from presenting further ideas.
- Use tact when evaluating ideas. Apply the same evaluation process to all ideas, regardless of their source. Give each idea full attention and avoid automatic discounting because of previous experience. Encourage the group to think about

advantages and disadvantages of ideas, why they did or did not work previously, and how the ideas can be modified to work better. Consider new ideas through different perspectives, such as through the clientele, before being blinded by self-perspective.

- Show that others' ideas are being used in many ways. Even though there is no written record of whose idea is used, there is usually an unspoken record. If ideas are coming only from one source, others may feel it is useless to provide ideas and will stop making suggestions. Help other people make their ideas better without taking ownership away from them.
- Provide for involvement of EMGs in implementation of ideas. Identify whose role it will be to take action or make decisions. These responsibilities should be divided among members so that it is not just assumed that the team chair will handle them.

## **Staff Developing EMG Ownership**

As local coordinators practice these behaviors and successfully direct volunteers in decision making processes, VCE staff will feel more comfortable about involving EMGs in the planning of VCE educational programs. EMGs should always be involved in planning the work that they are asked to implement.

When EMGs feel as equal partners with staff who plan the management and educational programs, they feel a sense of shared ownership. Establishing ownership involves actions and words from both the program planners and the volunteers. It is not the sole prerogative of one partner to design the program and to expect others to carry out that design.

Involvement must begin at the start of the planning process. Most EMGs have a very basic understanding, at best, of the VCE plan of work, program area objectives, and educational programming responsibilities of certain VCE staff. Planning sessions should present the total picture about the program, the expected results, and the proposed role of the EMG. Planners may present ideas for specific EMG activities or about various functions of EMGs in program implementation, but allow for refinement and alternative roles. While it is important to involve EMGs in program planning and allow for their input, it is also important to remember that an appropriate VCE staff member has to be sure that VCE can be comfortable with the program that results if VCE is going to be responsible for it. In other words, activities implemented by EMGs must be appropriate VCE activities, meeting VCE goals. This does not mean, however, that the VCE agent has to plan the entire activity or educational program without EMG input.

## **Communication**

EMGs should receive consistent, regular communications from program leaders. Newsletters and/or emails that include the latest reports from the managing teams, the local coordinator, and the Extension office usually are the preferred means of communication for EMG groups. Once there is a decided means of communication, the responsibility should be delegated to an individual and the job description adjusted accordingly. Better Impact can be used for emailing the EMG group. Emails can be sent by full admins as well as limited admins with communication privileges.

Be well prepared to listen to EMG volunteers. Let go of personal considerations, emptying the mind of personal thoughts and opinions. Listen with undivided attention to understand what the speaker is feeling. Use eye contact, head nodding, and appropriate sounds that let the speaker know that someone is listening. Observe pauses and silences without interrupting.

Repeat words or phrases and paraphrase the speaker's presentation, including both facts and feelings. Do not judge or evaluate, but describe empathetically what the speaker has said about what has happened or how he/she felt or feels.

The latter skill assists in conflict resolution situations. People who are stuck in conflict cannot find solutions if they have not expressed their concerns. Listening to their telling of the situation so that they are heard often results in creative response to the conflict. It empowers the person in conflict to resolve the problem on their own.

All of these steps will help involve EMGs in planning the work they are responsible for implementing. If these steps are not practiced and EMGs are told what to do with no input in the process, their sense of belonging to the program will decrease. EMGs are likely to offer resistance when asked to volunteer in certain roles and they will attempt increasing numbers of activities outside of the local unit's educational program plan. While they might contribute in this manner to the overall mission and goals of VCE, they are not assisting VCE agents in implementing their educational programs for the local community, as is the intention and purpose for recruiting and training EMG volunteers.

## **Delegation**

There are very few tasks that local coordinators will individually handle, although they are ultimately responsible for seeing that all responsibilities are met. The nuts and bolts of EMG business must be delegated.

When the local coordinator delegates responsibility for a task, he/she is not completely absolved from the responsibility. The local coordinator should provide necessary support when tasks are carried out. Checkpoints and benchmarks should be established at the time responsibility is delegated, and a system to be used for reporting and follow up should be agreed on at the very beginning. Once delegated, a task should not be taken back without a very good reason. When delegating responsibility, be clear about expectations from the very beginning. Plan ahead, and use newsletters, meetings, phone calls, etc. to keep people informed.

### **Advantages of Delegation**

- Reduces workload per individual
- Aids in the development of leaders (delegates learn to make decisions independently)
- Enhances morale and creativity: delegates are motivated to put more effort and ingenuity into solving problems.
- Develops quicker and higher quality decisions: delegates usually do not need the supervisor's approval to make day-to-day decisions; higher quality because people close to the problem are making the decisions.
- Encourages more trusting work relations: the delegation of important responsibilities itself communicates trust; when delegates carry out their assignments well, the supervisor develops more trust in them

### **Suggestions for Effective Delegation**

- Assign duties to the right people by delegating to those who are capable, responsible, and well-motivated

- Retain some important tasks for yourself (certain critical decisions should be handled only by the leader)
- Recognize that managers cannot delegate final accountability (the manager is held accountable for whether or not the assignment gets accomplished)
- Measure progress on a delegated task; establish milestones to check progress
- Grant sufficient authority to accomplish delegated tasks; authority can be granted at a number of levels; consider the delegate's skill and experience, and grant enough authority for the subordinate to accomplish the task)

## Identifying Individuals for Delegation

- Be continuously observant of who takes initiative and completes work
- Read responses on surveys/applications for indication of interest
- Test people with small tasks first
- Ask team leaders who their best people are who are capable for handling additional responsibility

## Ensuring Volunteer Success through Effective Delegation Techniques

*Gene Sharratt, Ph.D., Reprinted with Permission from "Voluntary Action Leadership," Winter-1988-1989, published by The Points of Light Foundation*

The ability to delegate responsibility is an essential skill demonstrated by effective volunteer managers. Successful volunteer leaders have the capacity to match the strengths of volunteers with the demands and requirements of the workplace. In delegating effectively, volunteer leaders make an important contribution to the advancement of their organizations, to the personal and professional growth of their volunteers, and to their own management success.

Correspondingly, volunteer managers who fail to delegate purposefully and efficiently not only stifle the growth of their volunteers, but also hamper organizational productivity. For many volunteer leaders, the failure to delegate is seen as their single most significant deficiency.

Volunteer leaders fail to delegate for some of the following reasons:

- Personal insecurities or fear of their own weaknesses being exposed
- Belief in the "I can do it better myself" fallacy
- Lack of experience or training in effective delegation techniques
- Ineffective interpersonal communication skills
- Fear of criticism from superiors for mistakes
- Unwillingness to provide the training necessary for volunteers to learn new job skills

The obstacles to effective delegation can be overcome by understanding some of the steps used by successful volunteer leaders. These steps are designed for both beginning and experienced volunteer managers.

## Techniques

The following "techniques of effective delegation" will assist volunteer leaders in their search for success:

- Assess the work requirements and abilities of volunteers. Do they have the skills to assume the new responsibilities? If not, what must you do to train them? Do their skills provide the right “match” between the tasks required and the ability to accomplish your demands?
- Communicate your expectations clearly. Specifically state what it is you need to accomplish. Is there a time requirement? Describe what it is you want done, by what time, and to what standards. This not only helps you achieve your goals, but also provides the necessary guidelines for volunteers to be successful.
- Assess their understanding. Ask volunteers to explain assignments as they understand them. What areas are still unclear? Have you accurately communicated the tasks to be accomplished?
- Build confidence and success. This can be easily accomplished by providing challenging, yet responsible, work-related projects. Help volunteers gain confidence by giving them tasks in which they can exercise their personal and professional judgment, while enjoying the strong probability of meeting your demands.
- Encourage decisions and suggestions. Volunteers will often avoid taking responsibility because they are unsure of their skills. To counter this, elicit suggestions and reinforce the initiative they display in making decisions. Remember people support what they help develop.
- Be responsible and flexible. Effective volunteer leaders keep assignments within reasonable expectations of what can be accomplished, both in time and in quantity. Anticipate interruptions and obstacles, and make adjustments where necessary.
- Build openness and accessibility. Recognize that volunteers may be reluctant to report unfinished projects or failures to you. Encourage them to bring problems to you early.
- Provide responsibility. When you delegate a task, be sure you give the responsibility and authority that goes with it. Without the proper resources and support, volunteers and the delegated projects are doomed to failure. When you provide opportunities for volunteers to contribute to projects, their confidence and enthusiasm for these projects increase.
- Monitor progress. Check with volunteers on the progress of their assignments. Do not wait until the project due date to evaluate its success. Your interest in monitoring the progress of the assignment reflects your concern for the volunteer performance. Effective volunteer leaders know that they have to “inspect what they expect.”
- Expect improvement, not perfection. If tasks or assignments can only be done one way and that way is your way, then you are much better off to do it yourself. Otherwise, you will continually set volunteers up for failure and stifle their willingness to risk displaying initiative. In addition, it should be remembered that “success is improvement, not perfection.”
- Provide feedback and recognition. The most important motivation for people is feedback on their efforts. However, all too often, volunteer leaders forget to compliment their volunteers for specific task completion. Verbal compliments are effective and appreciated, but for some volunteers written messages count double. Remember that when you let those around you shine, you shine with them.
- Delegating effectively comes through practice and hard work, but rewards are well worth the investment.

## **Building and Maintaining a Positive Volunteer Atmosphere**

As the local coordinator facilitates the tasks of managing the local programs, key behaviors will develop a positive volunteer atmosphere. Earlier sections of this chapter discussed at



length the importance of building a sense of shared ownership among volunteers and program planners. Local coordinators should continuously work to integrate new interns and EMGs into the work of VCE and through planning, delegation, and feedback, build an atmosphere that encourages all to work together toward common goals.

Local coordinators should encourage volunteers to get to know each other so good working relationships can be formed. Involving EMGs in the recruitment process, such as through the Recruitment and Training Team, and asking EMGs to be involved in orienting and training new volunteers will help volunteers get to know each other early on. Everyone should be constantly encouraged to wear their VCE name tags to promote learning of names and to build the habit of wearing the name badge. Mentor systems, such as pairing one or more EMGs with trainees for a defined period of time for given work assignments, have many benefits, including enhanced training experiences, development of working relationships, and opportunities to get to know others.

Maintain a system of rotating responsibilities to new people. Ultimately, rotation of responsibility promotes shared responsibility of the program and fosters a positive atmosphere for volunteers. Rotation also gives new volunteers an opportunity for leadership training and avoids loss of experienced EMGs to burnout.

The cumulative efforts of the local coordinator will greatly influence the atmosphere of the local unit. A positive and fair atmosphere can contribute greatly to retaining volunteers for many years; likewise, a negative atmosphere will likely turn volunteers away.

## **Conflict Resolution**

Managing volunteers will not be without its challenges. Conflicts will arise for various reasons, including personal conflicts among faculty, staff, and volunteers; personality or leadership style differences, differences in opinions or judgments, etc. Some conflicts can be resolved by transferring individuals to other jobs that alleviate the source of conflict. Other problems can be talked through until a suitable compromise or solution is reached. Extreme situations may even call for dismissal of volunteers.

The local coordinator should possess the skills to mediate such conflicts, find appropriate solutions, and follow up with required actions. If the local coordinator needs additional assistance with the situation, he/she should follow the local chain of command (Extension Agent advisor, Unit Coordinator, District Director). The State EMG Coordinator can also assist in mediating conflicts related to EMG volunteering within the local units.

## **Dismissal of Volunteers**

Dismissal of volunteers is an unpleasant job that few are willing to consider. There are, however, circumstances that cause or result in consideration of volunteer dismissal. An EMG can be relieved of the title and privileges at any time, at the discretion of the local coordinator, Extension agent, Unit Coordinator, and the Extension District Director, in the event that the EMG demonstrates actions that are in conflict with the mission and goals of VCE. Examples of conflict include, but are not limited to, misuse of the EMG title and failure to comply with EMG policies.

For example, a volunteer may repeatedly violate EMG policy regarding proper use of the EMG title. Violations should be documented at the time of each incident and included in individual EMG personnel files.

Documentation should result in one-on-one discussion with the individual, review of the policy in violation, and documentation of the discussion. Repeated incidents should be taken up following the local chain of command.

## **Procedure for due process**

An EMG accused of violating policy should meet with the local EMG coordinator and/or Extension agent and be given the opportunity to share their version of the event. If this explanation is satisfactory to the agent and the EMG has not previously violated program policy, the issue may be dismissed. If the EMG has recurring incidents, he/she should be issued a written warning, and this documentation should be brought to the attention of the Unit Coordinator and District Director, in the event that future problems arise. If the outcome of this situation is not satisfactory to both parties, the Unit Coordinator and District Director should become involved. If the volunteer continues to violate policy and ignores suggested solutions that result from these negotiations, the District Director should become involved and recommendation for firing/ dismissing the volunteer should be approved and carried out. All parties should receive written notification of this outcome.

## **Preventive Action**

The following actions can minimize problems.

- A formal screening and selection process (application forms, interviews, reference checks, and rating systems).
- Volunteer job descriptions.
- Orientation of new volunteers.
- Volunteer handbook that describes behavior guidelines, expectations, and policies.
- Adequate supervision and coordination of volunteer programs.
- Clearly defined relationship between volunteers and staff.
- Special training for Extension personnel who work with volunteers
- Be prepared: Anticipate and develop policies before a problem occurs.
- Establish policies under which a volunteer may be placed on probation, suspended, or dismissed. Use the Standards of Conduct as a guide.
- Develop a written graduated system of punishment (e.g., warning, suspension, termination) and fair enforcement policies. Share with all volunteers as part of their training.
- Alternatives to Dismissal: Dismiss a volunteer as a last resort. Many situations do not require such drastic action
  - Remind the volunteer that policies and procedures must be followed.
  - Retrain a volunteer who needs a refresher course or more extensive training.
  - Re-motivate a volunteer who is suffering from boredom or loss of enthusiasm.
  - Reassign a volunteer who is mismatched to the job or to co-workers.
  - Refer a volunteer to another program area to which he/she is more suited.
  - Retire a volunteer with honor, if that volunteer indeed has been an honorably serving part of your volunteer team.

## Before Dismissal

Never dismiss a volunteer on the spot. A formal system for dismissing volunteers is needed to ensure fairness.

- Give warning. Notify volunteers (in both verbal and written communication) when they violate policies.
- Investigate the alleged offense(s). This includes documenting the volunteer's side of the story and any proof of policy violation.
- Consider developing an action plan to correct the problem, depending on the seriousness of the offense(s). Each item of the action plan will have specific dates for accomplishment. Develop the plan with input from the volunteer
- Allow the volunteer to appeal rulings.
- Consider using a committee of peer volunteers to aid in the process.

## The Dismissal Interview

This should be done personally by the Extension agent and/or Volunteer Coordinator.

- Be quick, direct, and absolute.
- Announce, don't argue. The trial has already been conducted
- Do not attempt to counsel. If counseling were an alternative, it would have been done earlier in the process.
- Confirm termination with a written letter, and settle any unfinished business needed to end the volunteer's relationship with the agency.

# Chapter 3: Recruiting EMG Trainees

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## Introduction

Once educational program activities have been planned, the next step is recruiting volunteers for EMG volunteer opportunities. This step is crucial to success and requires careful thinking and planning. Specific job descriptions for volunteer roles have been developed, so now individuals interested in and appropriate for filling these volunteer roles must be found. Potential volunteers are everywhere, but the recruitment process is key to finding the most skilled and dedicated volunteers to get the jobs done. The following chapter will assist in developing a recruitment plan for connecting new, appropriate volunteers to local EMG units to accomplish the goals and missions being pursued.

*Recruit for quality, committed volunteers, not large numbers of trainees!*

The object of recruitment is not to fill a classroom or to have a large number of volunteers, but to find appropriate volunteers who are truly committed to volunteering. Appropriate volunteers are willing and interested in assisting VCE in educating and improving their communities through horticulture; will fulfill their initial obligation of 100 hours of training and internship; and ideally will stay with the unit for many years to come, working to manage and sustain the educational programs. Some EMG groups have had problems getting 85 percent of recruited trainees (the recommended training completion rate) to complete the entire first year (50 hours of training and 50 hours of volunteer internship) when little planning and thought has gone into recruitment and selection. When this happens, candidates who are poor matches for the program are accepted; these candidates will take the training but oftentimes do not complete the volunteer service. Ideal candidates should be available for, and have an interest in, volunteering in some area of the local Extension environmental horticulture program, such as answering customer questions, leading 4-H/ youth garden programs, working with water quality education, or organizing garden education as it relates to foods and nutrition.

*Extension Master Gardeners are expected to assist with EMG volunteer management.*

Being an EMG is not for everyone, so it is essential to make a recruitment plan to select appropriate volunteers. While many people may be interested in learning more about horticulture, not everyone is interested in volunteering, becoming an education partner of VCE, and educating the community about environmentally- sound horticulture. Not everyone can make the time commitment required. Some individuals feel they should not have to be responsible for assisting with EMG volunteer management. However, the essence of becoming an EMG is all of those things, and only those individuals interested in and committed to these tasks should be recruited. During the recruitment process convey the goals and objectives of VCE and the ways in which EMGs work towards meeting them. Understanding the role of an EMG within VCE will help candidates determine if volunteering within the program is a good fit.

It is also important to understand that recruitment is a continuous process as long as there are volunteer opportunities and job descriptions that need filling. Recruitment is not an annual event to find students for EMG horticulture training. Instead, recruitment frequency is determined by the number and types of volunteer opportunities available, which determines the number of volunteers, the skills and abilities required for the volunteer opportunities, and training class size. Keep in mind that some volunteers will stay for many years, and others will move on after completing their initial internship. The number of veteran volunteers who remain each year will affect the number of additional volunteers that need to be recruited to fill the volunteer opportunities. Veteran volunteers, through their new projects in support of educational programs, often expand the number and nature of volunteer recruits needed. It is important to realize that it may not be necessary to recruit additional volunteers on an annual basis, but only when there are more volunteer opportunities than trained volunteers available to fill them.

*There is not a size limit on the local unit because the number of volunteers is defined by the need and support available from the community and the local office, as well as the interest of the volunteers. Therefore, training class size is not relative to how large an audience can be handled in lectures, rather how many jobs there are for volunteers and how well responsibility is delegated.*

*All nondiscrimination policies must be followed throughout the recruitment process.*

## **Recruitment and Training Team**

Recruitment and training responsibilities should be delegated to a group of committed EMGs that form the Recruitment and Training (R&T) team. The R&T team has several responsibilities that will be further explained in this chapter and others.

Primary recruitment responsibilities include:

- Developing promotional materials for seeking applicants
- Launching the application
- Soliciting applicants from diverse audiences
- Screening applications with a committee of peers
- Conducting interviews of selected applicants
- Making final selection of applicants and signing volunteer commitment agreements
- Properly notifying all applicants when they are accepted/rejected

This team, supervised by the local agent or coordinator, will be responsible for training the new volunteers, including developing the training program, coordinating speakers, ordering books, facilitating training classes, and other tasks related to training of new EMGs. A team leader, or the team as a whole, should communicate regularly with the local EMG coordinator to determine what specific job descriptions are prepared by the local coordinator, local agents, and the educational program team. The R&T team should develop a recruitment strategy before recruitment actually begins. This team should also ensure that recruitment activities and processes comply with Extension policy, as discussed earlier in this chapter, and bring in appropriate volunteers for accomplishing the goals of the local group.

For the first year, as the EMG group gets started, the coordinator might work closely with the planning committee to accomplish these tasks. However, as the EMG volunteers grow, it will be most efficient to form a team responsible specifically for recruitment and training of new volunteers. The R&T team should have the creativity, energy, and time needed for planning and implementing recruitment and training.

By delegating the responsibilities of recruitment and training to a group of volunteers that the coordinator advises and supervises, the coordinator is now able to expand program development, problem solving, and other management responsibilities.

However, it is the coordinator's responsibility to ensure the recruitment of new members of this team, make sure they understand exactly what they are supposed to do, and periodically check to ensure that they are achieving what they set out to do. The following information on recruitment and the chapter on training will assist the coordinator and the R&T team in fulfilling their respective responsibilities. The coordinator should provide a copy of these materials for each member and go over it with them before the team assumes responsibility for recruitment and training.

## Importance of Marketing the EMG Volunteer Opportunities

Marketing to generate interest in becoming an EMG volunteer for the right reasons will do much for recruiting appropriate volunteers to fill the positions that are available. People must first want to be a part of VCE before they will be motivated to volunteer as an EMG. Public interest in VCE can be built through generalized, positive public relations that help the community learn about VCE and the EMG volunteers.

Marketing materials developed for the purpose of recruitment must be carefully planned and worded. Since there are many opportunities for people to make contributions to their communities and it is becoming increasingly difficult to find people willing to volunteer on a long-term basis, as with the EMGs, marketing endeavors must articulate why EMG volunteer opportunities are unique from all of the others available. It is important to understand and take into consideration current social trends and their effects on volunteering, as well as factors that influence volunteering as an EMG, such as demographics, voluntary activity, societal and personal benefits, and the influence of others.

With this information in mind, successful recruitment materials can use the strategy of selling two “products.” In this case, the products are the opportunity to provide community education about environmentally-sound horticulture and the opportunity to gain personal knowledge and skills by applying horticultural information. It is appropriate to expand on the extent and nature of the horticultural training (refer to sample recruitment ad below), but do not imply that it is the purpose of joining the group.

Thus when preparing recruitment advertisement materials, the Recruitment & Training team should work carefully with the Public Relations team to develop appropriate marketing materials that correctly promote EMG volunteer opportunities as a chance to build the local community through education about environmentally-sound horticulture; to practice and teach environmental stewardship; to improve quality of life through horticulture for everyone, including the elderly or physically challenged; or whatever the job opportunity might be. EMG volunteer opportunities are a way to increase individual knowledge of horticulture through activities that help the community.

Materials should explain that to join VCE as an EMG is to join a local group of volunteers that is part of a state group that is part of a national group of distinguished volunteers recognized for their knowledge, skills, and for the significance of the work that they do in improving their communities through horticulture.

## Recruitment

Recruitment is an important part of any EMG program. Announcements can be made using social media, newspapers, radio, TV spots, posters, pamphlets, and other forms of communication. EMG training information should give information on what it means to be an EMG, including expectations of volunteers, time commitment, understanding that there are no prerequisites to become an EMG. Be clear about dates and times of training. Even if not everyone who sees your advertisements applies to be an EMG, this is great exposure for your program and will increase visibility of EMGs and VCE.



Applicants will likely have varying levels of skills, interests, and prior training that can create a diverse group of volunteers and have positive impacts, such as increased contacts in the community and additional skills available within the group to implement programs. No one should be turned away because of lack of gardening knowledge or experience. If they have a desire to learn and want to give back to their community, they are qualified to become an EMG. This inclusive language is an important part of recruitment.

Directly reaching out to specific organizations or groups in your community is another way of recruiting volunteers. Who are your EMG and VCE community partners? Are they connected to segments of the community who may be interested in gardening and working as an EMG? Even if these connections don't lead to new EMGs, they may help you build new community partnerships and establish new projects and programs.

## Developing Screening Criteria

Prior to creating and mailing out applications, screening criteria should be prepared in anticipation of reviewing returned, completed applications. Screening is a process that assists in identifying suitable volunteers, then placing them.

*EMGs are not VCE clientele, but are program volunteers, thus partners in education.*

The process has three stages, including an application and background check review, an interview, and an agreement. Interested individuals complete an application and required background check (completed through Better Impact). All applications are reviewed; the review includes contacting personal references listed on the application and conducting the required background check.

Some individuals are uncomfortable with the screening process, not wanting to turn anyone away from Extension programs. It may help to remember that EMGs are not VCE clientele, but are partners in providing educational programs and are considered program volunteers. Screening processes, when prepared properly, are very helpful in finding appropriate volunteers who are well matched with the EMG mission. Screening helps applicants learn more about VCE, EMGs, and projects being conducted in the community. It also helps the R&T team to learn more about the applicants and their strengths, talents, and abilities so volunteers are properly placed. Remember also that a class' target completion rate is 85 percent -- that is, at least 85 percent of the individuals recruited and accepted into the program will successfully complete the entire training, including classes and volunteer internship. If the training completion rate is consistently less than 85 percent, the recruitment and screening processes should be evaluated to determine why volunteers are not completing their commitment.

Virginia Cooperative Extension requires additional screening beyond the application and interview. Background checks are required for new trainees and then every three years while the volunteer is active in the program.

A set of interview questions should be developed as part of the screening form and used for every person to allow for a fair comparison during the selection process. The questions should be designed to get the necessary answers, but must avoid discriminatory questions. A

valid interview includes only questions and topics that are EMG related to minimize personal biases and subjectivity, and eliminate unlawful, discriminatory questions. Carefully check interview questions to make sure that they all relate to the volunteer opportunities at hand and are not discriminatory in any way. The State EMG Office has created an interview guide for this purpose.

## **The Application Process**

Once the R&T team has developed the recruitment strategy, it must prepare for the application process.

### **Getting the Word Out**

EMG volunteer opportunities will need to be announced to the community. Decide how the opportunity will be publicized to make groups aware of the EMG opportunities. Plan how and when these opportunities will be advertised. Work with the PR team to develop appropriate promotional materials, such as fliers, press releases, posters, and radio announcements, to meet the planned recruitment strategy provides instruction for writing public service announcements and news releases as well as how to work with different types of media). Make sure that all publicity tells the recruits how to access the application.

### **Promote to Those Who Know**

Word-of-mouth advertising often generates a majority of volunteers, so start with those people already familiar with EMGs, such as current EMGs, office staff, and community connections. Ask these individuals to promote the available job opportunities to suitable friends, family members, neighbors, colleagues, and other contacts.

They may be willing to recommend personal contacts that would be good candidates. Make sure this approach does not lead to exclusion of underserved audiences or formation of a “club” attitude. Extension agents may have educational program participants who are also interested in becoming an EMG. Publicize the volunteer opportunities using local VCE mailing lists, making sure to include organizations that have provided donations of goods, services, and funding in support of unit programming in the past. Ask recipients of promotional materials to share them with a friend or individual that may be interested. Advertisement through email, websites, or social media may be an appropriate means of getting out the word, such as community web sites or companies within the community that agree to post EMG-related information to their staff or to the community. Be sure that announcements specify the location of the EMG volunteer opportunity.

Some Extension offices receive calls throughout the year from people interested in becoming an EMG. A list of these inquiries, including the name, address, and telephone number of the interested individuals, is a ready list of potential recruits who should receive application information.

Efforts should also be made to recruit from the agencies and organizations where the volunteers will be conducting projects. Establish contacts with arboreta, botanic gardens, schools, hospitals, community centers with gardens, etc. A contact person from each of these places should be on your local mailing list to receive EMG publicity each year. This information will be posted where employees, school teachers, volunteers, and possibly the

general public will be exposed to it, become interested, and apply. Find out if any of these places have newsletters in which they can post this information. Some employees may take the information to family, friends, and neighbors, generating more interest. Recruiting from these agencies will not only yield recruits, but will raise awareness of EMGs.

## Reach New Audiences

Expand the areas through which training is publicized to reach new people who may not be aware of such an opportunity. Social media, community centers, local churches, community newsletters or bulletin boards are all potential places to publicize training. Make sure that there are community leaders on the planning committees and that they are continuously made aware of the volunteer opportunities and community benefits of the EMGs. Reaching underrepresented individuals and communities should be approached with a long-range plan that is persistent yet sensitive, so the entire county or city is represented by EMGs. Building long term relationships with new groups and organizations can help build trust, open up new avenues for programming, and can lead to opportunities to bring in new volunteers.

## Suggestions to Reach New Groups When Seeking EMG Trainees

- Grass root organizations:** NAACP, Urban League, Asian American Congress, and the Governor's Advisory Commission on Latino Affairs are some examples to consider. Use press releases and, more specifically, paid advertisements in local and minority publications to announce programs. When publishing recruitment information/educational material, include diversity of peoples via pictures and examples cited. Highlight activities of value to their communities.
- Existing VCE channels:** Recruit through existing VCE channels, such as Program Assistants, 4-H leaders, horticulture businesses (industry), etc.
- Existing community services:** Other community services, such as schools, PTA, housing authorities, Boys & Girls Clubs and support groups, that already provide services to targeted audiences can be helpful recruitment sites.
- Horticulture/gardening industry:** Many horticulture service providers or garden centers have a base of clientele interested in horticulture. Work with these service providers to recruit those interested in volunteering to teach about horticulture through VCE. Industry members may also be interested in the training opportunity for employees.
- Community greening program:** Work with neighborhood/community groups in greening (e.g. community gardens, street trees, window boxes, parklets, etc.) The training could be expanded to involve other county staff in the areas of youth and community leadership development. Horticulture would then become a delivery method for leadership and youth development as well as for tangible, positive results.
- Environmental action groups:** Your local Native Plant Society, Audubon, Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay, and Sierra Club, may be likely groups from which to recruit prospective EMGs. These people are already interested in environmental issues.

## General Information Meetings

A general information meeting can be held for the public in person or online, before applications are sent out. This type of orientation is useful for those interested, so they can fully understand the focus of the EMG program and that it is a volunteer program and not just an opportunity to learn about gardening. This can save some effort when screening inappropriate volunteers if the expectations are presented early in the process. Because future trainees might not have attended the public information meeting about EMGs, it is

important to again include this information in an orientation session just prior to or at the very beginning of the training.

## **The Application Period**

Once advertisements about the EMG volunteer opportunities start, requests for applications will begin. It is helpful to remind office personnel and others involved of the application process and time frame so that calls and requests are not unexpected and so that interested individuals are referred to the correct people. It is important to be in touch with the applicant so they are aware of next steps in the process.

When the deadline for application has passed and the application period has closed, all applications should be reviewed. This initial review will select those applicants who will proceed to the next stage in screening, the interview. All applications screened out during this phase, all applications submitted past the deadline, and a list of all inquiries (names, addresses, and phone numbers) that were made past the deadline should be retained.

## **The Interview**

Once applications have been accepted and initially screened, individuals are screened again through personal interviews. Personal interviews are the best way to ask additional questions of prospective volunteers and allow them to ask additional questions about the local unit. The process continues to help select out those applicants who are not suitable or those who decide they are no longer interested once they learn more about it, while also helping the R&T team to learn more about the applicants. Interviews personalize the entire process and provide the final answers necessary to make the required selections. The interviews should be conducted by several people working as a group.

Prior to the interviews, a schedule should be set and interviewees notified of the time and location of the interview (interview times should be flexible as individuals may have personal commitments). Time between each interview should be scheduled for recording comments and notes after each session is complete. Again, the local coordinator and Extension office staff should be aware of the interview arrangements being made. Those EMGs conducting the interviews should read and familiarize themselves with understanding human motivation. This material will enable the interviewers to better understand the types of people applying for the available volunteer positions. Understanding personality types through language and motivation indicators is extremely helpful when placing volunteers in opportunities that are rewarding for the individuals, will meet their needs (why they were attracted to VCE in the first place), and will be suitable (ex: a person motivated by being around other people would probably not like a job working in the publications room by themselves and would most likely not complete the service).

When conducting the interview, interviewers should stay in control but try not to ask leading questions. A time limit for the interview should be set, and the schedule followed. During the interview, be sure to verbally state requirements. Though they were included in the application packet, they may have been glanced over. Use this time to ensure that the applicant has a clear understanding of what is expected if accepted. Include enough time to ask and receive responses to interviewers' questions, as well as leaving a few minutes for the individuals to ask any questions they might have. To help stay on schedule and keep control of

the interview during this time, let the applicants know how much time they have to ask questions. At the end of the interview, ask each individual if they wish to continue to be considered for an EMG position, thank each interviewee for his/ her interest, and indicate a date by which a decision will be made. Use the time between interviews to record all comments, including observances, impressions, and even specific comments or ratings on how they answered each question on the screening form attached to the application. These notes will also be very helpful during the final selection process.

## **Selecting EMG Trainees**

Once the initial review and interviewing phases are completed, the R&T team should meet to select the new volunteers. Use the screening forms and the notes that were taken during the interviews, in conjunction with the applications, to determine the final selection of applicants, who will then be referred to as trainees.

If you have more applicants who have successfully completed the application process than you can be placed in your training class, applications should be accepted into the training in order of when they submitted their application. Those applicants who cannot train during that cycle should be placed at the top of next year's training class list.

## **The Agreement**

The final phase of screening occurs when those individuals who were accepted into the training return their signed volunteer agreements indicating their commitment to the EMG program. EMG Volunteer Policies state that upon acceptance to the training, each volunteer must sign an agreement stating that he or she will fulfill the complete training (classroom instruction and internship) prior to beginning the classes. Agreements must include an attendance statement, an outline of the volunteer commitment, a pledge statement regarding distribution of VCE information and referral of appropriate questions, endorsement statement, nondiscriminatory statement, and acknowledgment of understanding liability (refer to sample agreement in EMG Volunteer Policies). Agreement copies will be kept by the Extension agent/Coordinator and the EMG Trainee. These agreements can be completed through Better Impact and stored in that online format.

## **Notification**

Once the R&T team has filled all of the available opportunities and received signed agreements from all volunteers, it is time to notify remaining applicants of their status. Letters of rejection should be created for those who were not selected to become members of this class of EMGs. Letters of rejection should be held until the signed agreements have been returned and the class is full so that there is still a pool of people to choose from should volunteer opportunities become available.

The rejection letters can be form letters with generic reasons for not interviewing or accepting into the training. Just keep in mind that some individuals may become upset and request the specifics in the decision made on their applications. In this case, the notes made on the standard screening forms are extremely helpful. Once suitable volunteers have been identified, all agreements have been signed and returned, all volunteer opportunities have

been filled, and everyone properly notified, the recruitment phase has been completed.

Records of all these transactions should be maintained in the VCE office for three years.

## **Planning Recruitment**

Review the demographics of your community, and then answer these questions:

- What are the proportions of different population segments?
- Who do EMGs serve?
- Who are current volunteers? Do the demographics of the local EMG group reflect community demographics (employed/retired, gender, race/ethnicity, etc.)?
- On which community groups should promotional materials focus?
- On which groups do the proposed educational programs and job descriptions focus?

## **Learn More About Populations Within the Community**

Once populations have been identified, learn more about them so the EMG opportunities can be effectively marketed to them. What do these people value? What are popular opportunities? How can recruitment messages reach these people? What environmental horticulture programs have significance to them? Seek input from members of the target group, staff members who manage volunteers from these groups, or colleagues from other organizations who effectively involve these groups. Look at recruitment, possible barriers, need for sensitivity training, job design, successful models, and retention and recognition of these groups. Get feedback on possible recruitment themes.

## **Look at Current Volunteer Opportunities**

What opportunities are available? What types of opportunities appeal to the people within the community? How do they match with the groups in the community? Can job opportunities be adjusted to draw in different people? For example, a retired individual who has the skills and time during the day could complete a daytime clerical volunteer job. Also, consider modifying the job description so that other target groups can do these jobs. For example, the same job could be done by a person with a disability, given modest modifications, or two high school students could get the job done from 3 to 5 p.m. after school, or ten “baby boomers” (professionals with daily work obligations) could do the task as a group project on Saturday. This step will identify specific populations to fill current needs.

## **Involve Leaders of Community Groups**

Seek community groups through their leaders. Ask leaders to introduce their groups to EMGs. Share with them details about the local EMG effort and its goals, community demographics, focus group and survey findings, and successful stories of educational programs to meet the needs of the community. Present the same information to potential volunteers brought together by that leader. As a result, increased target group support and, possibly, new volunteer projects for the local EMGs will be developed.

## **Begin Advertisement and Application Period**

Develop promotional materials that will appeal to the community. Make several different posters or ads, if necessary. Advertise in locations where many people will see the



announcements and through EMG educational programs. Be organized and ready to answer requests for information and applications. Make sure that potential trainees are aware of the nature of our program and see how it can fit into their lives. While the EMG program more often than not reaches those who are retired, those who work full or part time or who are full time parents should also be able to see themselves as part of our organization. What volunteer and training opportunities do you have for trainees with different scheduling needs?

## **Reference Checks**

Non-familial references can often provide relevant information about an applicant's background that will aid in the selection decision.

The applicant is asked in the application to provide references. The R&T team can decide how to contact those references. Options may be through phone calls, email, or an online submission form (Qualtrics, Google Forms, etc.).

Information obtained in a reference check is strictly confidential. It is the policy of the Commonwealth of Virginia to ensure compliance with the Privacy Protection Act of 1976, under which confidential reference information is not released to the employee or applicant. Guidelines governing the reference check are the same as for the interview.

Questions must be job related; discriminatory or illegal questions are prohibited. Questions designed to elicit information on performance or job behavior (i.e., dependability, personality, etc.) are permissible when they relate to the needs of the specific vacancy. Information not related to the position requirements must be disregarded.

For the sake of consistency, references for each applicant should be checked by the same person. Since a reference check can be used to clarify information and impressions obtained in the interview, the original interviewer should be the one to conduct the reference check.

## **Selection**

The selection decision should be based on an objective consideration of the job requirements and the applicants' qualifications. All of the information obtained about each applicant at each stage of the selection process should be evaluated. Follow-up interviews with top candidates are appropriate if additional information is needed. All selection decisions must be based on job-related reasons.

## **Developing Appropriate Interview Questions**

*Adapted from the VT Personnel Office's Employment Interview Handbook.*

The interview is an integral part of the screening process as it provides an opportunity for both the R&T team and the recruits to get to know each other and ask questions.

EMG policy recommends that a set of interview questions be developed and asked of all applicants interviewed. It is the responsibility of the local coordinator and the R&T team to ensure that interviews do not result in discriminatory practices. The interview is classified as

a “test” by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and other Federal agencies and, as such, must meet the validity requirements of any other type of selection procedure. A valid interview includes only questions and topics that are demonstrably job related. Interviews must be conducted in a consistent manner so the same job-related information is obtained from each applicant, thereby allowing for a fair comparison.

The State Office has created a standard interview guide that can be used by units: [Interview Guide for EMG Applicants](#). You can also find it on the [Coordinator section of the EMG website](#) under “Forms and Resources,” “Volunteer application and optional forms.”

## **How to Conduct an Interview**

The interview is a wonderful opportunity for the interviewing team and the applicant to get to know each other and ask clarifying questions about the volunteer opportunities available. It is important to give an adequate picture of the volunteering conditions and job duties. Regardless of whether or not the applicant is accepted as an EMG volunteer, the interview should leave the individual with a positive view of VCE and the EMG effort. As the interview concludes, the applicant should be informed as to when an acceptance decision will be made and how he/she will be notified.

This interview should make the applicant feel welcomed, give them space to ask questions, and help them better understand the EMG volunteer program. This allows for face to face time with other volunteers and the local coordinator or Extension Agent. This may be their first glimpse into VCE or the EMG Program and should be structured to not make them feel intimidated or that they would not be welcomed into the program.

## **Panel Interviews**

For many situations, panel interviews are appropriate for interviewing prospective volunteers. A panel may be used to provide recommendations, a ranking of applicants based on selection criteria, or the final selection decision. The individual responsible for making the selection decision and planning the interview process is responsible for ensuring that guidelines are followed by the panel, even if he/she is not participating in the panel interview.

### **Advantages of the Panel Interview**

There are many advantages for using a panel of interviewers. A panel interview may provide additional expertise necessary for a complete evaluation of applicants' backgrounds. If the position demands that the volunteer work with different organizational units, representatives of these units might be included on the panel to assist in the evaluation of the applicant's suitability for the position. Additionally, the applicant is exposed to several representatives of the EMG group and therefore may be provided with more complete information about the job and the organization.

Panel interviews, if properly conducted, tend to be more reliable and job related because panel members are accountable to each other. They are aware that they are being observed by other panel members; therefore, questions tend to be more to the point and personal biases are reduced. Interviewers are also able to base their decisions on the same sample of behavior.

## **Disadvantages of the Panel Interview**

There are a few disadvantages to conducting panel interviews. First, establishing rapport with the interviewee is more difficult. Given the potentially intimidating and overwhelming atmosphere of the panel interview, the panel should make every effort to establish rapport with the applicant and put him/her at ease. Both the interview setting and the seating of panel members should be arranged to maximize the applicant's comfort. There may also be a tendency for one panel member to dominate the interview and overly influence panel discussions. The impact of a domineering panel member can be reduced by defining in advance the roles of the members, assigning a chairperson, and structuring both the interview and the post-interview discussions.

## **Preparation for the Panel Interview**

- The R&T team should ensure that interviews are conducted lawfully and are effective in generating information about candidates that will assist in making successful selection decisions. The guidelines that apply to individual interviews also apply to panel interviews. There are, however, additional steps that should be incorporated into the preparation for panel interviews.
- Panel members need to be selected. The panel generally should not exceed five members.
- A panel chairperson needs to be selected. The role of the chairperson is one of leadership (not domination) and mediation. The same individual should be chairperson for all of the interviews to ensure consistency. Some consideration should be given to selecting a chairperson who is an experienced and effective interviewer and who is skilled in establishing rapport with the candidates. At the end of each interview, responses should be recorded and applicants evaluated to determine if the program is a good fit for each candidate.
- Panel members should be prepared in advance for their interviewer roles. Each member should be informed of their responsibility to conduct a lawful interview and the importance of maintaining a structured interview. Individual roles in the interview and the selection decision (i.e., advisory, decision making, etc.) should be defined. The interview schedule, copies of application materials, the job description and qualifications, the selection criteria, and the topics to be addressed in the interview should be provided several days in advance.
- Before the interviews, the panel should meet to structure the interview. Panel members should have prepared, or have been given, questions to ask about their specific topics. One panel member, possibly the chairperson, should be assigned the responsibility of greeting applicants, making introductions, etc. The rating and record-keeping procedures should be explained to each panel member.

## **Structuring the Interview**

The order/structure of the interview should be planned to include greetings and introductions, interview questions and topics, tours of the office, and the roles of other staff in the interview. The objectives of the interview are to assist the applicant in providing the best information possible and to leave the applicant with a favorable impression of VCE and the EMG effort.

## **Fostering a Good Interview Atmosphere**

It is important to remember that being accepted as an EMG is not a one-sided decision. The applicants will also be making observations, forming impressions, and making choices. The care taken in planning the interview may affect the applicant's perception of the program and the quality of the information obtained from the applicant. The following guidelines will assist in planning interview sessions.

- When scheduling appointments, the interviewer should introduce him/herself and identify the Extension office and the EMG group. The time and date of the interview should be confirmed. Directions to the office and information on parking facilities should also be provided.
- When talking to applicants, these sessions do not need to be called "interviews." Describing it as "open dialogue," "informational session," "application meeting," or other similar language can help the individual feel less intimidated and more comfortable with the process.
- The office should be prepared for the interviews. It is helpful to provide an interview schedule to the necessary people (receptionist, other interviewers, etc.).
- The interview schedule should be kept on time. If the schedule is delayed, someone else should greet the next applicant and explain the delay.
- The interview should not be interrupted. Necessary interruptions should be made as brief as possible, and an apology extended to the interviewee.
- Put the applicant at ease, and attempt to establish rapport. If possible, spend a few minutes on "small talk." They should leave this conversation feeling comfortable and excited about next steps.
- Each member of the interview panel should have a copy of the questions and a plan for asking them should be established.
- The interviewers should explain that they will be taking notes, but recordkeeping should not dominate the interview. Negative comments should not be recorded in the presence of the applicant, rather during the intermission between interviews.
- Good communication skills should be used during the interview, such as giving undivided attention to the applicant; maintaining eye contact; listening attentively; and being responsive to questions, key thoughts, or comments. The interviewers should also tell the applicant that it is acceptable to take some time to think about the questions before answering them.
- Interviewers should maintain control of the interview. If an applicant begins to wander from the question, he/she should be led tactfully back to the subject by rephrasing the question or asking a follow-up question.
- All interviews should be conducted in the same order and manner.

## **Preparation of the Physical Setting**

A pleasant physical setting should be developed for the interview. A quiet and private location should be selected, where visual and auditory distractions can be minimized. Interviewing from behind a desk should be avoided if possible. A desk may act as a barrier, and materials on the desk may distract the interviewers or the candidate. The physical setting should be the same for all applicants.

## Interview Topics

The following topics may be covered in the interview.

### *Volunteer Opportunities*

Sufficient information about the volunteer opportunities should be provided to ensure that the applicant is able to make a reasonable decision about whether being an EMG fits their needs.

*Conditions of Volunteering.* The conditions of volunteering as an EMG should be explained, and each applicant should be asked if he or she can meet any requirements. The applicant should be advised that, if accepted, they will be asked to sign a VCE EMG volunteer agreement, indicating that the applicant understands the statements describing EMG policies, benefits, and restrictions and that the individual agrees to fulfill the volunteer obligation.

*Volunteering Hours.* Information regarding training times, work hours for various volunteer opportunities, annual volunteer hours, record keeping, appropriate volunteer opportunities, etc., should be provided.

*Work Policies.* Information should be provided on EMG status, additional training opportunities, and peak volunteer times (i.e., answering horticulture calls in the Extension office during the spring and summer)

*Other Policies.* When relevant, information should be provided on the EMG Pesticide Policy, EMG Volunteer Policies, communication protocols, etc.

*Training Period.* Because the volunteer opportunity will involve 50 hours of horticulture training before the individual can perform primary job responsibilities, the training requirements should be explained.

*Benefits.* A brief description of benefits (status and prestige of being an EMG, working with plants and people, appreciation from community, liability insurance coverage, etc.) should be provided to the interviewee

## Chapter 4: EMG Training

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### Introduction

The EMG training has a national reputation and history of being comprehensive and of high quality. Virginia EMG volunteer policies require that EMG trainees complete a minimum of 50 hours basic horticulture training in order to be prepared for volunteering as an EMG. The training lays the groundwork for the volunteer's performance. Special care should be taken to organize the training so that volunteers are knowledgeable about what they do as an EMG.

Members of the Recruitment and Training (R&T) team are responsible for organizing the training schedule. Members should work closely with the local EMG coordinator to ensure that all topics and training needs are met..

Because recruitment and training are planned simultaneously by the R&T team, good communication among team members is essential.

## Organizing Your Training

Training consists of a minimum of 50 hours. Classes may be taught as lectures, workshops, tours, online modules, or as a combination of these techniques.

### Time of Training

As the training classes are put together, remember that the time of day chosen to hold class sessions significantly influences the makeup of the class. If training is offered during the daytime, individuals with flexible schedules will be able to take the training; but, this will possibly exclude those who work full-time or part-time. This may also affect the speakers available to teach classes. If training is offered at night to accommodate trainees that are not available during the day, then there must be volunteer internship opportunities that fall in the evening and weekend hours. Otherwise, offering training in the evening and having all volunteer opportunities during the day may substantially lower training completion (training and internship).

Deciding when during the year to conduct the class also requires careful consideration. EMG training courses are commonly offered in the spring or fall. Some prefer winter/spring training; just as the volunteers complete training, the spring rush for gardening information occurs, providing plenty of jobs and leaving no time gap between graduation and work. Others prefer fall training, which gives the volunteers time to reflect, absorb a bit more, and test their new knowledge and skills on their own landscapes for a few months before jumping into the internship experience.

### Training Topics

**Core:** Every EMG training in Virginia needs to cover a minimum of 30 hours of core topics. These include botany, soils, orientation (policy, VCE background, risk management), pest management (insects, diseases, and weeds) and pesticide safety, nutrient management and plant culture (pruning, propagation).

**Supplementary:** Additional topics (a minimum 20 hours) are selected from turf, vegetables, fruit, indoor plants, yard waste management, woody ornamentals, water management, herbaceous plants, organic gardening principles, and landscape design.

**Local needs:** Other pertinent subjects may be offered above the total 50-hour minimum to fit the needs of local VCE educational programming. If the total training hours in the local unit are greater than the state-wide 50-hour minimum, then the local training and volunteer hour requirements should be clearly stated in all materials.

These topics can be taught in any order preferred by the local unit. Basic botany and soils, however, should be taught in the first few class sessions. It is important to conduct these classes first, since instructors of all other classes will assume trainees already know the basic principles. Each of the other topics is covered as thoroughly as possible in individual class sessions. Other courses may be added when deemed appropriate.



During the training classes, trainees should be introduced to local VCE faculty and staff. Local Extension agents with whom EMGs will be working should be invited to present their work, the goals they are working to achieve with their educational programming, and the ways in which EMGs will assist them in implementing their programs. VCE 4-H and FCS agents as well as ANR agents should make these presentations, when applicable. Agents should present information about VCE's mission and local community needs the VCE office is addressing. Trainees should learn how EMGs fit into the overall picture. Program design and implementation should also be discussed during this class period, as well as the basic responsibilities of being an EMG.

## Pesticide Training

Because EMGs are answering hundreds of calls from consumers seeking solutions to insect and disease problems, all EMGs must be properly informed about EMG pesticide policy. Each EMG should also be trained to use the [VCE Home Grounds and Animals Pest Management Guide \(PMG\)](#).

EMGs should be trained to use the VCE web pages to answer questions and seek VCE-recommended information for presentations they may give as an EMG.

## Training Options

Special consideration for the learning atmosphere and teaching and testing styles should be given, since most EMG trainees are adults who may not have recently taken a class and may be nervous about attending lectures or test taking.

### In Person Training

Classroom space must be located and reserved well in advance of the training schedule. A room that will comfortably seat the number of trainees, based on the number of volunteer opportunities available, should be selected. Seating should allow for easy viewing of screens and whiteboards for taking notes. A training location should be determined at the time the schedule is prepared. Most often, groups use VCE office conference rooms or a local library with free meeting space. Be sure to confirm the availability of the location and reserve the room(s) for each and every training date.

### Hybrid or Online training with Canvas

If you are interested in offering a fully online OR hybrid training class, you have access to the Virginia Tech learning management system (LMS) called [Canvas](#). Canvas can be used to upload and organize class materials (presentations, zoom recordings, handouts), organize class schedule information and Zoom links via a calendar, and administer graded quizzes or other assignments. Canvas has many features (discussion forums for your students, graded/ungraded quizzes, etc) that allow you to set up a course however you'd like.

The State Office has also prepared a sample class template that comes pre-loaded with existing educational materials, but **which you need to customize to your class**. To get access to the canvas template, email Devon [dvj@vt.edu](mailto:dvj@vt.edu).

When collecting registration and payments via Destiny, Canvas can be integrated so that students are automatically added to the course when they pay via Destiny.

## Preparing the Training Schedule

When all of the details have been worked out, a training schedule should be prepared, matching a date with a class topic. Use this draft schedule to arrange speakers for the training classes. Speaker schedules, however, may require altering the order of the original syllabus.

## Finding Instructors

Once a class schedule has been drafted, speakers must be arranged. Since it is impossible to commit Extension specialists to all the individual training programs, local coordinators and the R&T team are encouraged to utilize local horticulture or related professionals as instructors. Some of the teaching of the course can be done by an agent, with the aid of resource materials from Virginia Tech. It is better, however, to include qualified people from the community, nearby colleges, Virginia Tech and Virginia State University extension specialists, and others rather than limit the teaching to one or two individuals.

The community is a great source for additional instructors with horticultural expertise. Soil and water conservationists, city horticulturists, town/county professionals, urban foresters, arborists, high school horticulture teachers, and others can be ideal lecturers. Veteran, knowledgeable EMGs may also teach courses. You may also want to consider bringing in specialists/experts through Zoom as a way to reduce travel for speakers and increase the number of possible speakers for the topic at hand.

Sometimes speakers will require a fee or travel expenses in order to teach the class. It is the role of the R&T team to decide whether or not payment for a speaker is possible and whether or not a suitable alternative speaker is available who can give the same presentation for free. If the for-fee speaker is chosen to give the lecture, the R&T team is responsible for finding the funds and making the payment arrangements.

The R&T team should work together to determine which people are candidates for teaching the EMG training classes. Brainstorm a list of area professionals, Extension specialists, and qualified EMGs from which to choose. First, schedule instructors for core topics, then fill in instructors for the other classes. Prepare a tentative schedule of lectures and presenters before speakers are asked to teach part of the EMG course. Then, contact each speaker to see if he/she is available to deliver the lecture on the particular topic and date. One individual should assume responsibility for contacting speakers to avoid duplication or misunderstanding when switching the class schedule to accommodate speaker's personal schedules.

Once the speakers have confirmed their willingness and availability, each speaker should receive an email thanking them for agreeing to do the lecture and restating the date(s), topic(s), and time(s) of presentation. Directions to the training facility and a copy of the relevant handbook chapter should also be included in this communication.

After the speaker has given their presentation, a thank you note should be sent. It can be a form letter for all speakers, or it can be personalized per speaker and include feedback from

the trainees' evaluation forms

## Training Textbook

The Virginia Master Gardener Handbook is the training text. It provides horticulture information specific to Virginia. This text meets the basic course topics required for EMG training.

These objectives are especially helpful in planning the course, teaching classes so that all material is covered, and providing a guideline for examination. Hard copy training handbooks can be purchased by trainees through the local VCE office in [StoreFront](#) (Search: "Program Fee EMG Handbook"). A free digital copy of the handbook is available through Better Impact in the document library. If trainees need a USB copy of the handbook due to lack of internet or other such accessibility issues, the State EMG Office can provide those. If your course is using Canvas for training materials and organization, the handbook can also be added here.

Handbook orders should be placed a minimum of three weeks before needed through VCE's [StoreFront](#). Please contact your Unit Administrative Assistant (UAA) or Unit Coordinator for details on how to process the invoice(s) received through StoreFront orders.

## Additional text

Often, the R&T team will decide that additional materials are necessary for training individuals as EMGs. Requiring additional text is entirely at the discretion of the local unit. Publications such as the VCE *Home Grounds and Animals Pest Management Guide* (PMG) are available for free online as a PDF. While it is not required that each individual EMG have a personal copy of the PMG, a current copy must be available for EMG use and each volunteer should be familiar with how to use it.

## Training Expenses

Training volunteers to become EMGs is not without its costs; expenses, however, can be minimized and managed. When setting your training fees for your local EMG Training, the following costs should be considered:

- State Office Program Fee, \$100
- Potential local fee(s) to consider
  - Background screening (required, approx. \$12.50 per person)
  - Speaker honoraria
  - Refreshments
  - Rental fees for space
  - Programming 'buffer'
  - Hard copy of handbook (optional, \$44 in StoreFront with binder, \$22 without)
  - Additional resources

However, there are several ways to reduce the cost per person for the training. Choose teaching space without a rental fee and speakers without honoraria or travel expenses (see discussion in the "Instructors" section for additional ideas). Graduation "intern" certificates can be ordered free of charge through the State EMG Coordinator's Office through the online [ordering form](#). To reduce costs, have trainees develop their own system to provide class refreshments. The cost of copying handouts can be minimized by providing PDF versions online.

If the training has been planned as prudent as possible and there are still expenses involved, a reasonable supply fee charged to the trainees as part of the class fee is suggested. It is important, however, to remember that training courses are not meant to be fund raisers for the program. Supply fees should be set at whatever amount per person will cover the remaining costs of training. Once the cost per person has been determined, it should be included in advertising materials.

The State Office incurs a number of costs each year that are necessary to the running of the Extension Master Gardener Program in Virginia. These include keeping the training and advanced training handbooks current, providing volunteer certificates and pins, modernizing training options, printing and mailing costs, travel, hosting Leadership Development Training, administrative and technical programmatic support, and much more. The implementation of a Program Fee allows our office a constant source of income that will help keep the program running smoothly into the future and will allow us to bring new materials, trainings, and staff to the Master Gardener Program. The implementation of a program fee will more accurately account for and cover more of the real expenses of managing EMG volunteers over the course of their tenure with our program.

The State Office offers scholarships to assist with the Program Fee cost for those who need it. This would help to lower the cost for a new trainee. Each unit is guaranteed one \$100 scholarship per training that can be used for one individual or split among multiple people. If more than one scholarship is needed, please reach out to the State Coordinator. We do not want the program fee to be a reason that someone does not become an EMG.

## **Additional Trainees**

Many municipalities, industry groups, or local organizations are often attracted to the EMG training and ask to participate in the training without completing the volunteer internship. Often, the details of training such individuals can be worked out as an exchange benefiting both parties. Municipal or industry trainees can be accepted as for-fee, non-EMG trainees in exchange for in-kind supplies, services, or other support to EMGs. The town horticulturist or city forester may teach several classes for EMG training in return for having their employees participate in the training sessions. A local non-profit may have an employee take the class in order to help with establishing educational programming; this would be a great potential partnership for new EMG programming.

VCE staff should make the decision whether or not to include non-EMG trainees in the EMG class. The number of additional non-volunteer trainees should not be excessive so as to dilute the EMG training class make-up. If non-EMG trainee numbers are too high to incorporate in EMG training, then a training session specifically for such groups outside of the EMG training should be considered. Extension agents and EMGs should work together to consider such a training as an educational programming focus. These individuals do not become EMGs and should not use the title.

# Conducting the Training

## Orientation

A proper orientation session to the EMG volunteering is essential to having focused, directed volunteers ready to accomplish their roles and responsibilities and is part of the core topics for EMG training. The orientation defines the EMG effort and describes the role of the EMG volunteer in its partnership role with VCE. The volunteer section of the Virginia EMG Handbook is an excellent introduction to and description of what is expected of EMG volunteers.

The orientation should be incorporated into the training as soon as possible, at or near the beginning of the training class. Much of the orientation information is also discussed in the initial applicant interview, but including it in class clarifies expectations and demands and lets the trainees have an opportunity to speak about their needs and expectations.

### Orienting New Trainees: Things Every Trainee Should Know About the EMGs

These topics are included in the EMG volunteer handbook. They are most helpful if covered in an orientation session prior to the beginning of training so that the trainee has a better understanding of the program basics and what is expected of him or her.

### Suggested Orientation Topics

- History of Cooperative Extension Goals and Mission of VCE
- VCE major program areas
- Roles of EMGs within VCE
- Organizational structure/state and local levels
- How VCE/EMGs relate to other organizations in the community
- Volunteer opportunities within your unit
- Basic organization, staff relations
- Computer, email, whom to call if sick, inclement weather policies, class schedule, attendance policy, etc.
- Parking, office space, restrooms, check-in procedures, mail boxes, etc.
- Emergency procedures and telephone numbers

## Conducting Classes

Once the schedule is in place and trainees have been oriented and know what they are expected to do, it is time to conduct the horticultural training that will enable volunteers to act as education partners with VCE.

Classes should be kept on schedule and started on time. Those EMGs who are acting as class facilitators should be early for the session to set up any A/V equipment necessary and to handle any emergency, such as finding a substitute instructor in the case of illness, etc. Attendance procedures should be established so that taking attendance does not interfere with the class presentation. Breaks should be taken at scheduled class times (be sure to alert the instructor to the break schedule). Any disruptions should be taken care of discretely, making every effort to conduct the classes smoothly.

## Communication with Trainees

If using the online application through Better Impact, all trainees will already be in the system

and established with a username and password. If Better Impact was not used for applications, all trainees will need to be entered into the system through the “add a volunteer” section. You will need to share the temporary username and password created with each trainee. Trainees are considered ‘Accepted’ under the volunteer status in Better Impact and will need to be designated as “Trainee” through the Qualification “EMG Status.”

Better Impact is an easy way to streamline communications with training classes and volunteers. All volunteers need to be set up in this system as soon as possible. You should also take time to go through the important parts of using Better Impact for volunteers. This will help in the long run as they log hours and sign up for activities in Better Impact.

## **Getting to Know Each Other**

It is important for trainees to get to know each other during the course of the training. Bonds formed during the training class will facilitate working together on volunteer opportunities. Establishing a bond among the EMGs offers another draw to volunteering and really assists with retaining these volunteers in future years. Some ways for trainees to get to know each other include in-class assignments, ice breakers, and team projects. Other activities include requiring each trainee to present a short talk to the class, which reinforces research skills for answering questions, but also gives an opportunity for each individual to introduce him or herself to the group. Additional assignments should be available for individuals who are unable to make public presentations to the class. Team assignments to answer questions and make presentations also encourage the trainees to work together and get to know each other. The relationships formed during training will affect the outcome of the individual’s experience as an EMG and can significantly influence retention.

During classroom training, temporary name tags should be provided that read “Name, EMG Trainee.”

## **Absenteeism and Tardiness**

The training course is essential to becoming an EMG, so trainees should make every effort to attend as many live classes as possible. However, we understand that this is not always a possibility for all. If classes are missed, trainees should make up the class session through online work or other such activities so that they have access to the same subject matter as those who attend in person.

Facilitators of the class sessions should use a dated sign-in sheet to determine class attendance. When trainees arrive for training, they should sign in to get credit for attending the classes.

Those running the training should be understanding of tardiness and give grace to individuals who may be running late. If tardiness happens during every training, be sure to check in with them to understand what is going on and talk through possible options and ensure they’re receiving all training class information from speakers. No one should be dismissed because they run a few minutes late.

A training attendance sheet is one possible way to monitor attendance and make-up of training sessions. The sign-in sheets for each individual class can be used to mark attendance on the main form, and make-ups by individuals who have missed class(es) can be indicated as well.



## Speaker Evaluation

It is important to evaluate guest speakers and the local training program to determine quality and effectiveness. Trainees should provide feedback after each speaker by means of a class evaluation form. The evaluation forms should be provided before class, completed at the end of class, and collected before the trainees leave. The feedback from these forms will be helpful in determining whether or not speakers were effective in teaching their topics and communicating with EMGs, and can be referred to in planning subsequent training programs.

## Course Exams

As part of the EMG training process, trainees must demonstrate that they have acquired knowledge in the specified areas of training. Open book exams will be given so that there is a comprehensive examination on all subject matter in the course. This also reinforces the use of the Virginia EMG Handbook as an information resource in finding answers to horticulture questions. The number and schedule of exams (i.e., a midterm and final, 16 weekly exams, four quarterly exams, etc.) is determined by the local coordinator and the R&T team. An exam schedule should be announced at the first class session that trainees know what to expect. Exams should be submitted to the local coordinator and designated EMG team for grading. Tests with corrected answers should be returned to the individuals and a period of class time scheduled to review the exam and the answers.

Trainees that achieve a 70 percent or higher cumulative average at the end of the classroom instruction will receive their EMG Intern certificates and will continue on to the internship portion of the program. If an individual does not receive this on a first try, the local coordinator should work with them to review trouble areas and help them achieve 70+%. This requirement should not exclude individuals from becoming EMGs.

Suitable questions for EMG examination are available to local coordinators through the [EMG program website](#). Updates will be made periodically. Contributions, with answers, are welcome and should be submitted to the State EMG Coordinator Office.

## Training Evaluation

At the conclusion of the classroom portion, the training should be evaluated. This will help the R&T team in making the entire recruitment and training process more effective and efficient for everyone. Questions regarding the recruitment and application process should also be included in the evaluation so that the following year's process can be improved.

## Mentorship Programs

Creating and implementing a mentoring program for trainees and interns can be incredibly beneficial for new EMGs. Mentors can assist with questions they might have as they move through the process, can help them integrate into the social aspects of being an EMG, and can also work with them to find volunteer opportunities. All of these pieces together can increase volunteer retention and help building strong relationships within your unit.

The Norfolk EMGs spoke during a State Office webinar in 2020 about their success with mentoring programs within their unit. To watch this recording, please visit the State EMG YouTube channel video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vw5lq52EzqM>. Articles have also

been published through the Journal of Extension focused on EMG groups around the country who have implemented mentor programs within their units. A few examples:

- Oregon State: <https://archives.joe.org/joe/1997october/tt1.php>
- Florida State: <https://archives.joe.org/joe/1999august/rb3.php>

We encourage all groups to think through how a mentoring model could be best implemented within annual training and through the internship. Each unit should also think through pairing transfer volunteers with mentors to help them more easily integrate into the EMG community.

As you work to establish a new program or evaluate a current mentoring program, be sure to think through how this program can best serve your new volunteers. Training for mentors should be put in place to make sure they know what information needs to be shared, how often they are expected to be in touch with their mentee. Share examples of ways they can reach out and provide support to their mentee, and make sure all mentors understand that new trainees and transfers will all have different needs when it comes to being paired with a mentor. Some may need a great deal of time, while others may only want to passingly interact with their assigned mentor. Group mentoring can also be a beneficial way to encourage relationship building: pair two mentors with 2 - 4 trainees and set up time for them to all meet as a group.

Another consideration on this topic is that team leaders often act as informal mentors for those who are starting to volunteer. Make sure that your current EMGs and project leaders are equipped to bring new volunteers in and help them feel comfortable and welcome.

Building fellowship and relationships within volunteer groups, with or without an Association, is an important piece of what EMG units can offer their volunteers. Our groups not only serve their community through their volunteering, they also serve the membership by giving an opportunity to share their interests with others and build meaningful relationships. Making sure that all EMGs, whether current volunteers, new trainees and interns, or transfer volunteers feel welcome within the VCE office and the EMG unit, is a crucial piece of ensuring long term success for your volunteer program.

## **After the Training**

### **Preparation for Internship**

All EMG Interns should leave graduation knowing what is expected of them in the following months, with whom they will work, and to whom they will report. Each intern should understand the “day-to-day” responsibilities of being an EMG intern, such as completing the volunteer internship, knowing how to record volunteer time in Better Impact, understanding the importance of reporting what he/she has achieved, staying involved and up to date on EMG business, when additional training opportunities are available, and other things. EMG interns should be given the opportunity to meet with others involved in similar jobs.

When trainees are selecting the teams they will be volunteering with, it is appropriate to review the responsibilities of being an EMG Intern, as found in the Virginia Master Gardener Handbook. Be sure to also make these individuals aware of the opportunity to maintain full EMG status. Reinforce that it is a continual recommitment, that once an EMG, not always an EMG!

Also during the final training sessions, members of the local EMG association should be invited to share with the trainees the opportunity to be a part of the local association. The function of the association and any activities that the group participates in can be shared with the trainees, and an invitation for membership extended. Participation and integration of the new volunteers into the local association can mean fewer management issues in the future for the local coordinator.

## Internship Details

During the minimum 50-hour internship, at least 40 hours must consist of public or community educational efforts (programs or activities) and up to 10 hours may be administrative activities for the business of EMG volunteer management (such as planning and conducting next year's EMG training class, being an officer of the local EMG association, or editing the local EMG newsletter). Annual volunteer hours (minimum of 20 per year) may consist of educational and/or volunteer management hours.

To properly track all efforts of EMG volunteer educators volunteers should track their hours through Better Impact. If an individual does not have a computer or lacks reliable internet, these records should be submitted to the local EMG coordinator for entry into the Better Impact. If an individual's records are not recorded on this system, that individual will not be recorded as having completed their internship. **If an individual does not volunteer, then they are not an EMG. If they do not report volunteer hours then they can not be recognized as an active EMG.**

## Graduation

At the completion of the training classes and passing of the exams, a graduation should be planned so that the achievements of these volunteers are celebrated and each trainee can be promoted to EMG Intern. Graduation intern certificates can be ordered free of charge through the [online ordering form](#). If preferred, local programs have the option of creating their own graduation certificates, as long as each individual who successfully completes the training receives a certificate indicating that he/ she is now a "EMG Intern." Many units decide to have a party or potluck luncheon for the graduation event. Town or county officials can be invited to the event in recognition of the achievement. This is often done when the class graduation is coupled with a recognition ceremony for those individuals who have completed their 50-hour volunteer internships and are now EMGs. Individuals who have completed their internships would receive certificates reading, "VCE Master Gardener", since they have completed the requirements. This is also a good time for other veteran EMGs to participate in the festivities and get to know the new interns.

## Name Tags and Using the EMG Title

During classroom training, temporary name tags can be used and placed in a plastic badge holder. Blank intern badges can be ordered through the State Office (a label maker can be used to print out names for these badges). After successful completion of training and internship, volunteers that will continue to volunteer) should receive a VCE engraved name tag with the title "Master Gardener Volunteer." Name tags must be [ordered online](#) through the local VCE Unit Office.

Be sure to remind individuals about the appropriate use of their titles. During the classroom-training portion, each individual is referred to as a trainee. After successful completion of the exam (70 percent or higher), the individual becomes an EMG Intern. It is only after these steps and completion of the 50-hour volunteer internship that individuals officially become Virginia Cooperative Extension Master Gardeners. Use of this title is a privilege, and this title is to be used only by individuals trained as an EMG while volunteering under the auspices of VCE. This relationship should be clearly stated in name tags, signs, etc.

EMGs work under the guidance of VCE to provide unbiased, research-based, environmentally-sound, horticulture information to the public; and any implied commercial endorsement resulting from use of the EMG title is improper. An example of inappropriate use is included below (see inset). The title may not be used for commercial publicity or private business. Participating in a commercial activity, association with commercial products, or giving implied VCE endorsements to any product or place of business is a violation of EMG policies. EMGs may only identify themselves as such while volunteering in conjunction with official/approved VCE programs or activities, such as a plant clinic conducted at a retail store, NOT for business or personal gain.

EMG training and experience may be listed in resumes and given as qualifications when seeking employment; however once employed, credentials may not be displayed by the EMG or the employer. Individuals who wish to use their horticulture training for distinction in the workplace should pursue Virginia Nursery and Landscape Association certification by exam, as the VNLA course work is very similar in nature to the EMG training.

This type of classified ad is considered a misuse of the EMG title in direct conflict with the volunteer agreement that the EMGs sign:

*CLASSIC DESIGNS LANDSCAPING  
Lawn maintenance, rototilling, pruning, yard work, spraying, planting.  
Free estimates, Virginia Master Gardener. 555-0069*

## **Encouraging Completion of the Internship**

Interns should be given 18 months to complete their 50 volunteer hours. In some cases, an Intern may need up to 24 months to complete depending on work and life challenges. After training is complete it may be necessary to prompt interns to fulfill the commitment made. Connecting them with a mentor or mentors and encouraging them to sign up for volunteer opportunities are important steps to take to ensure completion of the internship.

## **EMGs and Relocation**

EMGs who have completed their classroom training and internships in Virginia and received a positive recommendation from their local coordinator prior to moving to another part of the state are eligible to become volunteers in the locale of their new residency. EMGs may be required to take additional coursework required of all local EMGs in the new locality and will be subject to the guidelines of the new locale. Additional coursework to be required is up to the discretion of the local coordinator and Extension Agent.

EMGs who have not completed their internship prior to moving may be required to pass the

local exam and complete additional coursework prior to becoming volunteers in their new localities.

EMGs moving from out-of-state as well as returning EMGs (i.e., someone who trained in Virginia, moved away, and is returning to Virginia) may be required to complete the entire EMG training prior to volunteering in Virginia, depending on their demonstrated knowledge and skills in this geographic area. This is determined on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of the local VCE office.

When an EMG transfers from one Unit to another within the State, it is recommended that the Coordinator / Agent in the new Unit contacts the Coordinator / Agent in the Unit the EMG is transferring from. The status of the EMG should be verified, and the total number of volunteer hours should be documented. The EMG is then added to the roster in Better Impact for the new Unit. Contact the State Office for this roster transfer. Better Impact does not transfer hours between units, but the hours stay with the volunteer. The hours the volunteer is bringing in should be documented under the 'notes' section of their Better Impact profile. Enrollment or re-enrollment paperwork should also be complete for the new unit, allowing the records to be accessible at the new Unit office if needed. Re-enrollment 'qualifications' in Better Impact should be completed.

## **Volunteering Across County Lines**

Often, volunteers will cross county lines to train or volunteer with the EMGs closest to their homes. Questions arise as to where the time should be reported and who can take the credit. These details should be worked out and agreed upon by local coordinators and Extension agents in all units involved before the individual begins to volunteer. Generally, interns volunteer for and report back to the same individual. Local Extension staff should work out the details of area programming and volunteer exchanges in a way that suits the needs of each unit.

# **Chapter 5: Ensuring Continued Growth**

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## **Introduction**

An underlying goal of EMG volunteer management is to ensure continued growth of individual volunteers so that they will be motivated to remain with the local unit for many years and will contribute to and enhance their own quality of life and that of their communities. Some EMGs will volunteer for a lifetime, while others may complete the training and internship (minimum of 100 hours) and not pursue further opportunities. While it is not practical to expect all EMGs to stay forever, managing the volunteers appropriately is valuable to ensuring that EMGs remain interested, satisfied, and volunteer beyond the first year. The longer EMGs are involved, the greater return on the training investment and the greater the number of community educational programs (thus impact on the community) that can be implemented. Retaining experienced EMGs also gives the local coordinator a group of individuals to call upon to

manage the business of EMG programming.

In addition to understanding and implementing volunteer management techniques, local coordinators should understand the factors that motivate EMGs and encourage them to continue volunteering by implementing an annual renewal process that combines recognition, review, and appropriate placement of volunteers within jobs.

## **Practicing Good Volunteer Management**

Building EMG ownership through decision making and shared planning as well as setting an organized team structure to share responsibilities all contribute to a positive volunteer experience that will keep EMGs a part of the organization for many years. Proper planning of volunteer jobs and special attention to proper recruitment and quality training will also enhance the local unit and make it one that EMGs want to remain affiliated with. Every single action that local coordinators take in managing the volunteers has a cumulative effect in terms of the numbers of volunteers that remain with VCE from year to year. Good basic volunteer management will lay the groundwork for keeping trained EMGs actively volunteering.

### **Developing an Organized Structure**

Good leadership and structure within the EMG group will increase effectiveness, ability to accomplish goals, and credibility within the local community. Effectiveness as a group depends on the ability to build strong teams (or committees) that share in accomplishing the goals of the whole organization and the development of a system of transitional leadership. Without organization, EMG groups will struggle and may even fail. Without organization, communication is at best ineffective, but more likely nonexistent. Without organization and effective communication, volunteers are misinformed, feeling left out and angry. Coordinators do not know which way to turn to reach everyone since there are no existing communication channels that will effectively reach everyone. Volunteers, feeling left out and frustrated, fail to complete their volunteer time and VCE cannot fully meet the community's needs.

In order to be successful, a volunteer organization depends on teamwork for several reasons. First, most tasks require the expertise and energy of a group working together. No one person can do all the work alone. Second, effective teamwork helps build commitment and loyalty to the group. Third, being a part of a group or team fills a need for camaraderie and support, ensuring that members feel needed and important to the group. Fourth, decisions made by groups tend to be more effective, well thought out, and creative than those made by one person. Team development is important, then, to group success and depends on the effort and commitment of each leader and team member.

A well-functioning team should possess the following qualities:

- Strong sense of purpose, with clear goals understood by all members. Good group decision-making ability
- Mutual respect and acceptance of the contribution of each member
- Good communication skills, including the ability to listen to the input of others
- Clear roles: Members should understand how they fit into the group. Roles should be flexible so when the need arises, old roles can be modified to fit new situations. The roles should clearly demonstrate how they progressively lead to greater responsibility.



## **What Is an Effective Team?**

Teams are the backbone of a larger organization, serving as working groups to solve specific problems. Such groups implement the organization's programs; devise ways and means of carrying out business; in specific cases, establish policies and plans and execute the affairs of the body; and evaluate the organization's effectiveness. A team is a device for dividing into manageable components and distributing certain responsibilities and specific work of the larger group. A team is limited in the scope of the job it has to do and in its resources; that is, the finances, experiences of its membership, technical resources available, and time allotted for completion of the task.

### **Purposes of Teams**

Simply stated, the general purpose of teams is to assist the parent organization by taking on responsibility for and giving specific attention to certain details, problems, or concerns facing the parent body. Their purposes vary according to the specific needs for which they are created. Examples of specific needs include budgeting, publicity, membership, program implementation, and training of future leaders. Whenever teams are appointed, their specific tasks should be clearly defined in writing.

Effective teams should be the most important working force of the EMG effort, and they will be if team members are selected for the contributions they can make, not merely because it is their time to serve. Every member of the group should have an opportunity to serve on a team, but a member should be placed on a team in which he/she has interest or potential to make a contribution.

## **Creating EMG Management Teams**

In the normal routine of managing EMG volunteers, there will be tasks and responsibilities relating to educational programming; recruiting and training new EMGs; publicity or media involvement; soliciting contributions, both monetary and in-kind; and completing evaluations of and reports on management and horticultural education efforts. Teams in these areas will assist in delegating responsibilities related to managing EMGs and will help ensure completion of projects.

The teams suggested below will help perform basic functions. These teams can be appointed by the local coordinator or planning committee, staffed and rotated as part of the association's officer elections or they can be filled by a separate administrative structure. Provision should be made for rotation to avoid burnout and boredom or excessive personal "ownership."

Many units already have a team structure established. Using the below teams as a reference point, units should ensure that their various teams cover the teams/responsibilities listed below.

### **Educational Program Team**

Determining and planning educational efforts focused on meeting the needs of individual communities will ensure the achievement of EMG goals and objectives, in keeping with the mission of VCE. Ideas extracted from a well-rounded, community-oriented committee are of

vital importance in developing and directing programs toward the educational needs and wants of the local residents. This team, which works directly under the auspices of unit agents with relevant programs, will have sub-teams which carry out educational programming in specific subject areas (i.e., horticultural therapy, water quality, plant clinics, composting, etc.) and may or may not expand into advanced steward trainings. Initial members may be the original planning team members who initiated the local EMG training. Over time, team composition should change to include individuals who have the ability to offer insight into educational program planning and possess the determination to ensure the success of volunteer efforts.

As the local EMG organization expands, the team will expand to include the chairs of all major programming teams, such as plant clinics, hotlines, water quality, integrated plant management, 4-H/youth gardening, etc. This team works directly with VCE agents, as it is the agent's role to develop the educational programming that fulfills the VCE plan of work. Written job descriptions for volunteer opportunities will be the result of this team's work with agents in planning VCE educational programming. The Educational Program Team will also assist in identifying continuing education needs and opportunities consistent with the job descriptions developed.

## **Recruitment and Training Team**

Volunteers recruited from the community in which a program/project is implemented will be the single-most important resource for the EMGs. These community members are the source of renewed energy for projects and programs and also bring with them new ideas, contacts, and resources. It is important then that volunteers are continually brought into the program and, once recruited, given proper training to be an EMG. One person alone cannot handle all of these tasks, especially as the group grows. For this reason, a Recruitment and Training Team needs to be formed. This team can decide what is the best strategy for recruiting new people from the community, developing the training program, coordinating speakers, ordering books, facilitating training classes, and other tasks related to recruitment and training of new EMGs. This team may also be involved in planning continuing education events.

## **Public Relations Team**

Putting the group's accomplishments in the public eye will work wonders for the EMGs and VCE unit. Increased visibility will increase community involvement in the form of volunteerism, contributions, and participation in activities, plus increase awareness of issues. Media coverage is vital to success. For organizational purposes, a Public Relations Team is needed to focus specifically on increasing the visibility of the accomplishments and impact of the EMG programs in the community, as well as involving the community in EMG educational efforts. Working with the news media, creating an advertisement campaign, and making public presentations are all part of public relations. Again, these are large tasks better undertaken by a group rather than a single person, and a Public Relations Team is ideal to handle these matters. This team needs to work with the chairs of all teams to ensure that all activities and events are properly represented and promoted.

## **Resource Development Team**

A Resource Development Team must be created to meet material and monetary needs to carry out projects and programs. Soliciting in-kind contributions from local businesses is the most effective way of obtaining the things needed to carry out the functions of the group.

Even after the group has received contributions, such as plant material and other gardening supplies from local nurseries, free use of a public meeting room, and the like, there may still be a need for actual monetary funds for other services or materials that cannot be contributed. Fundraising activities may also need to take place and will be the responsibility of this team.

## **Evaluation and Reporting Team**

One of the most difficult tasks of an organization is to keep records of what activities were conducted, how effective they were, and their long-term impact. These records, which include facts and figures, surveys, and short anecdotes, are essential to keeping the group focused on its mission and ensure that goals are met. Records are essential to motivate the members as they demonstrate the progress being made toward a shared goal. The records are critical in getting continued support from the community and are of highest quality and are most complete when a team works together to develop them.

As the educational programs expand and the number of volunteers increases, the additional teams may need to be developed to meet special needs. New teams may be organized for the purpose of planning social or travel events, communication, re-enrollment, and other components of local volunteer management. These teams should also follow the local process for rotation of responsibility.

## **Developing Educational Program Sub-teams**

Most teams will require the development of subgroups, or sub-teams, as the number of EMGs involved grows. For example, in the area of educational program design and implementation, the need for sub-teams becomes evident early. EMGs should play an active, functional role in the planning and implementation of VCE projects, activities, and programs. When actively involved in the planning of their roles with VCE, they are more likely to become invested in the outcome, have higher enthusiasm for the work they do, and follow the project through to completion because they have developed ownership in the work. As EMGs see that they have a hand in their program direction, their enthusiasm and interest will increase. Local coordinators should encourage new responsibilities and opportunities to keep individuals challenged.

Sub-teams may also form to plan, implement and evaluate programs that result from Advanced EMGs, such as Advanced Tree Stewards, Water Stewards, and Land Care Stewards. The Advanced Specialization programs encourage short and long term planning and the development of a planning committee, which may be considered a sub-team of the Educational Program Team. Additional sub-team needs may arise for large or long-term programs.

## **Working with Teams and Their Leaders**

The local coordinator will work with the team leaders on an on-going basis. Here are a few suggestions for successfully working with individuals to get the job done.

- Develop a solid working relationship with the team leader or primary liaison person.

- Be sure to reach consensus on the goals of the projects or activities, as well as general operating procedures.
- Establish a regular means of two-way communication between the coordinator and the team; relying on informal, random sharing of information can lead to confusion, misunderstanding, and a waste of everyone's time.
- Be accessible to team leaders for questions and problem solving; even though a substantial amount of work has been delegated to this group, the local coordinator is ultimately responsible for the success or failure of the team.
- Plan some type of recognition for the team as a whole, as well as for individual members. Both have their value.
- Remember that every team member is another link between EMGs and the community – with the potential of mobilizing even more material and human resources.

## Running Efficient Meetings

*Adapted from and reprinted with permission: "How to Run an Effective Meeting," Citizen Forestry Support System TIPSHEET, American Forests and TreePeople*

### Why People Hate Meetings

Good meetings are characterized by clear roles, clear outcomes, clear decision-making power, real issues on an agreed-upon agenda, a comfortable environment, good follow-up with who/what/when action items, and a respect for diverse opinions and participants' time.

Ask why people hate meetings, and you'll get a laundry list of reasons that include the following: no clear reason to meet; unclear roles and expectations, with participants unsure of what they're supposed to be doing and what the result will look like; personal attacks on an individual's character instead of their ideas; information overload in the form of facts and figures; wheel spinning; a meeting space that is too hot, too cold, too big, or too small; unclear decision-making authority; and poor listening skills.

### Be Clear

One way to minimize the pain of meetings is to clarify roles and responsibilities. Who initiated the meeting? Who will set it up? Who will invite participants? Who will run it? How will minutes be recorded? Who will distribute them? How will problems be resolved? Who will manage logistics? Some people may have multiple roles when you answer these questions.

Even when conflict is unlikely, the following roles can help keep a meeting productive.

- The facilitator helps focus on the task. She/he ensures that everyone has the opportunity to participate and protects members from attack. A true facilitator does not evaluate or contribute ideas, but is the neutral servant of the group.
- The group participants make sure the facilitator keeps a neutral position and that their ideas are accurately captured by the recorder. The fear of appearing stupid or a reluctance to disagree can hinder participants from fully contributing. This issue is diminished when all believe they share equal responsibility for the success of the

meeting.

- The chair is an active participant in the group and fights for their ideas along with all the others. The chair may retain all the powers as final decision-maker if there is conflict about which the group can not come to consensus.
- The recorder captures ideas so they can be recalled and reviewed. In traditional meetings, a secretary takes notes and circulates the minutes later. However, using large sheets of paper that everyone can see helps focus a group. Sometimes a participant can let go of an idea if it can be seen in writing by everyone. The recorder method also ensures no important points are missed.

## Plan Everything

Good planning can help avoid common pitfalls.

- Prepare an agenda before the meeting (see below). Make sure all participants receive this ahead of time.
- Set up the room according to the type of meeting this will be, with chairs around a table, theater-style, or in a circle.
- Arrange for refreshments; necessary materials; and a comfortable, quiet environment.
- Establish ground rules when the meeting begins, including how agreements will be reached (consensus or majority?) and who will fill the roles of facilitator, chair, and recorder. Be sure to begin the meeting on time to honor those who are punctual.
- Get agreement on the agenda, and make any changes or additions.
- Use recorded notes during the meeting to reinforce and regain focus.
- Don't talk too much; have the group take responsibility for its actions
- Review agreements and assignments at the end of the meeting, including post-meeting logistics and the distribution of materials.
- Be sure to follow up, and participants will most likely be happy to work with you again.

## Set A Good Agenda

- List all items you think need to be covered to achieve the meeting's objectives. Don't worry initially about the order in which you list them.
- Determine who should introduce each item. Consider how the subject will be handled. Will the group be listening to a report, giving feedback, solving problems, or making decisions?
- Determine the time each item will take. Estimation might be difficult at first, but practice helps.
- Add up all times, and it may exceed the total meeting time allotted. It's better to discover this now than halfway through the meeting. Delete or table the least important items; everyone will feel better and think the meeting more of a success if all agenda items are covered.
- Finalize the agenda by listing items in an order that flows or based on the availability of those introducing items.

## Agenda Format

An agenda should contain the following information.

- Name of the group.
- Topic of the meeting: Distinguish it from other meetings held by this group.
- Date, with beginning and end times: It's a sign of respect to start on time and end on time.
- Location: Attach a map or parking instructions, if necessary.

- Attending: If the group is small enough, list those who have confirmed.
- Apologies: List those you know won't be there so participants aren't distracted by waiting for them to arrive.
- Attachments: Keep background materials succinct as most people will wait to read essentials at the last moment.
- Don't send material more than one week in advance.
- Reminders: List any items participants should bring, such as calendars to set the next meeting, refreshments for the group, or background materials.
- Special notes: These encourage individuals to attend, highlight action required in the meeting, or mention a special guest speaker.
- Agenda items: List topics, person responsible, and amount of time required.

## Motivation through Volunteer Job Placement

Integral to keeping EMGs interested in volunteering for their communities through VCE is the very nature of the work that they do. Identifying what motivates the volunteer and placing the individual in volunteer opportunities that meet individual needs are very critical for retaining the EMG volunteer.

### Understanding Motivation

David McClelland has identified three motives affecting people's work behavior. These motives are related to specific areas or types of needs: achievement, power, and affiliation. These motives display themselves in behavior and can be identified by the observant manager so that appropriate jobs are supplied to meet these needs.

The goal of an achievement-motivated person is success in a situation that requires excellent or improved performance. The achievement-motivated person needs to work alone and enjoys the freedom of guiding their own work and setting their own goals. They consistently produce work of high quality and accomplish what they set out to do. They challenge themselves but do not set out to do the impossible.

Power-motivated individuals want most to influence others. They are very concerned about their positions and reputations. These people are free with advice and want very much to see others follow their directions. Their personalities are usually aggressive, and they are often opinionated.

The affiliation-motivated person needs to be with other people who enjoy their company. These people are friendly and caring and want very much to be liked. They work best with other workers rather than alone, and they prefer management to be friendly rather than authoritative.

People volunteer for many reasons. They recognize needs in their communities that can be met using their knowledge and skills. They see volunteering as a way to develop and test new knowledge and skills that can lead to a change in careers. Many people who feel dissatisfaction with their professional jobs turn to volunteering for those perks of a good job, such as satisfaction, reward and praise, and actually seeing accomplishments and results. Many volunteers say that they turn to volunteering because there are not the same pressures



involved with volunteering that there are with working professionally. For these reasons, managers of EMGs cannot be lax about basic volunteer management. Volunteers will not be satisfied with the EMG effort if their roles are not structured, defined, and well organized, allowing them to develop ownership in the programs and have their needs and the VCE's needs met at the same time. However, the volunteer jobs cannot be so structured as to create the pressures of employment.

Using job descriptions makes it clear that the VCE educational programs are based on plans directed towards meeting community needs, rather than "random acts of education

The best tool for structuring the volunteer experience is a job description. A good job description defines exactly why these people are needed, what they will do, to whom they will report, and what is expected of them, but allows enough flexibility and creativity in how a job will be done. Job descriptions take the guesswork out of being an EMG volunteer by providing answers to basic questions. They help bring in an appropriate person for the volunteer job by specifying particular skills needed for accomplishing the job. Job descriptions help bring in an appropriate person for the volunteer job by specifying particular skills needed for accomplishing the job. They provide an evaluation tool to compare performance with expectations. This allows the coordinator to provide feedback and constructive advice to the volunteer to keep everyone on task. Most importantly, job descriptions reduce the number of headaches that coordinators experience. By developing job descriptions at the very beginning of the planning process, the Recruitment and Training team knows exactly what types of volunteers should be recruited, how many are needed, and exactly what the volunteers will do when their training is complete. The confusion and frustration of volunteers looking for something to do that keeps the coordinator or program planning team running and scrambling for additional volunteer jobs is greatly reduced.

Using job descriptions as recruitment tools attracts people who want to do those specific jobs. A great educational project opportunity may exist, but no volunteers are interested in completing it. The volunteer job must offer an experience that is fulfilling to the individual volunteering to do it; otherwise the volunteer will not be motivated to complete the job. Designing jobs with this in mind makes a great deal of sense. If the work creates action and is fun, the volunteer will continue volunteering.

Jobs that would satisfy the *achievement-motivated volunteer* are likely to:

- Allow a volunteer some freedom to set work methods and pace
- Allow the volunteer to enlist the aid of others
- Provide feedback and reward for performance
- Challenge the volunteer's skills

Job descriptions that identify the following features would appeal to the *power-motivated volunteer*:

- Allow the volunteer to direct coworkers
- Provide opportunities to influence others through persuasion
- Allow the volunteer control of policy and procedures

Characteristics of jobs that would meet the needs of an *affiliator* are ones that:

- Require interaction with coworkers
- Provide proximity to coworkers

- Depend on the cooperation of coworkers
- Allow for personal interaction with a stable group membership

What are some reasons to have written job descriptions from the perspective of staff and volunteers?

- Knowledge and understanding of what is to be expected from both parties
- Sense of satisfaction and accomplishment in knowing that the job has been accomplished well
- Planning assistance by knowing how many volunteers are needed according to the number of jobs available

How is the job description used as a tool in other areas of volunteer program development and management?

- Basis of reviewed and evaluations
- Identifies ways to meet individual needs and help motivate volunteers
- Tool for planning recruitment
- Basis for screening applicants
- Tool for planning volunteer recognition

To retain Master Gardener volunteers, a Coordinator needs to keep the volunteers stimulated and involved.

So, to avoid headaches and wasted volunteer potential, design meaningful jobs and detailed descriptions. Know the goals of the educational programs based on local needs. The planning committee, the local ELC, and the Extension staff have already identified needs within the local community that EMG volunteers can address. Use these local needs to develop definite roles for volunteers. Remember that there will be programmatic jobs that support some area of Extension programming, and there will also be administrative jobs that support the day-to-day business of managing EMGs.

## **Job Descriptions**

### **Who Should Write Job Descriptions?**

Job descriptions should be written as a joint effort between the local agent and/or coordinator, and the local Master Gardener Leadership team. The VCE agent is responsible for educational programs associated with the Plan of Work objective that the job fulfills, and the Educational Program Teams. These parties should work together on an annual basis to plan programming efforts for EMGs.

### **Components of Effective Job Descriptions**

An effective, rewarding job description will provide the key elements for the volunteer to acquire ownership of the job. Ownership develops when there is an event or task for which the individual volunteer is responsible, has authority to implement, and is accountable for the results. The individual develops ownership over and pride in the particular project and is more willing to invest time and energy in the project to see that it is completed and done well. Ownership is developed by allowing the volunteer to think and act on a project by being involved in the planning, organizing, and deciding about what is to be done. If volunteers are only allowed to do what others tell them to do and do not have the opportunity to make

decisions about their volunteer roles, they will burn out quickly and become disinterested in volunteering.

In addition, the volunteer must realize that they have accountability for their work and the outcome it produces. This creates more incentive to complete the job and do it well than if the volunteers were merely expected to perform a series of activities or job duties. Responsibilities and expected outcomes focus the volunteer on the end result and generate satisfaction in making progress toward that outcome.

The final element of a job description is to build in a means of evaluation and reporting. Each job needs a means of measuring the results to see if the volunteers have been effective at their jobs. Each job description needs a means of relating the quality of performance to the specified outcome. By taking these proactive steps, a system is set up by which the volunteer can monitor their progress and success and by which the coordinator can offer corrective advice or solutions when the results are not as expected.

Also, evaluation of the job's relevance and importance should be considered. Questions can be asked, such as "How will we know if this job is still necessary?" and "How will we know if this job is more or less effective at meeting our needs?" and "What will we see if this job is not meeting our needs?" These steps help avoid a situation where a volunteer gives an outstanding performance in a job that is not necessary or is ineffective at a job critical to meeting the local or situational needs.

As descriptions are prepared, keep in mind that job descriptions are used to:

- Help envision what volunteers will do and organize the work into reasonable and engaging jobs
- Define the work for volunteers -- set parameters and goals, identify supervisors, etc.
- Help volunteers know the extent of their responsibility, authority, and accountability
- Design training based on identified skills and knowledge.

## Job Specifics

The job description is designed to get down to specifics. What are the duties to be performed, the working conditions, the management expectations, and the benefits? What are the job requirements in terms of education, experience, and special skills? The job description can be the basis for a formal help-wanted advertisement among existing EMGs. Thinking through the various aspects of the job ahead of time can lend much more substance to bringing in and developing project leadership.

## Putting it on Paper

As a rule of thumb, there are ten components of a job description. When developing a new description, start with a clean sheet of paper and list the ten components, including title, place, goal, qualifications, duties, time required, benefits, support materials, impact and expected results, and supervisor/advisor.

- Title: The title names the job
- Volunteer Supervisor/Advisor: Who assigns work and/or provides guidance?
- Job Location: Where does the volunteer go to do the work?
- Goal: This connects the job to organizational goals and gives the EMG something to work toward; NOT activities, but outcomes. List both the overall goal of the program

and the goals of the volunteer position.

- **Qualifications:** These include life experience, skills, talents, “enjoyment,” and abilities from many areas of people’s lives, not just credentials.
- **Duties:** This describes the work. Use concise, clear language, active verbs, no jargon or “insider” technical terms.
- **Time Required:** Be sure to include frequency, duration, and length of commitment. Be as flexible as possible. Estimate time honestly, this includes meetings, preparation time, training, and reporting.
- **Benefits:** What are the tangible and intangible benefits of doing this job? This is the value of volunteering and of having a positive impact on the local community.
- **Support Materials:** What materials and resources are available for completing this job? Think of publications, references, supplies, contacts, etc.
- **Impact and Reporting Procedure:** How will the outcomes of this job be reported, and who will receive that information? Describe the expected impact of this job in the community, and indicate the procedure for reporting the impact through VCE.

## Always Evolving

A job description used correctly should be a working statement of what an individual does. Since VCE educational programs are dynamic, so too are the individual jobs within a program area. If necessary, change the job description as often as needed to keep it up to date and working effectively.

Remember that writing job descriptions does not add to the coordinator’s workload. While it may take extra effort initially to develop job descriptions, the amount of time will be reduced that was formerly spent placing volunteers who were recruited with no job plan. Job descriptions are management tools that help change the coordinator’s management style from reactive to proactive.

## Redesigning Jobs for Motivation

In designing and redesigning jobs or matching EMGs to jobs, the manager must assess the jobs to determine their motivational content. If repeatedly no one wants to do a certain job, there is probably something wrong with that job. It must be kept in mind that the job is the reward itself for the volunteer. There is no money payment, no vacation time; there may not even be a parking space.

Jobs can be changed by enlargement, enrichment, or simplification. A job is enlarged by increasing the number and variety of tasks done, however, it is important to remember that two or three meaningless activities do not add up to a meaningful one. Job enrichment refers to delegating functions that have been thought of as managerial. Including the volunteer in planning and evaluation procedures as well as the work itself helps enrich the job experience. Job enrichment can occur at any level of responsibility. Simplification involves combining tasks or even eliminating some tasks. In simplifying a job, look for any tasks that appear to be busy work and get rid of them first.

## Beware of Burnout

When communicating with volunteers about their jobs, local coordinators should listen and watch for symptoms of burnout in volunteers and themselves. “Burnout is a legitimate response to overwork or boredom, as well as an unfortunate by-product of mismanagement

(Energize Associates).” Many times, the stress of long hours, no pay, and unclear job expectations can wear down EMGs, especially those with increased levels of responsibility. Sources of burnout include lack of group direction (EMGs unclear about the group’s purpose and goals), tremendous workloads (especially true with individuals who cannot say “no”), unclear milestones for measuring success, and insecurity about the management structure.

“Burnout” can be noted by a change in behavior. It can be spotted when previously involved, active volunteers no longer function in the same productive way. It is often easier to recognize the symptoms after the “burnout” has happened.

For a volunteer, the greatest sign of burnout is simply quitting without word or warning.

## Strategies for Avoiding Burnout

Avoiding burnout is much easier than correcting the extreme result. Planning is the number one defense against burnout. By determining direction and priorities, responsibilities can be delegated so that workloads are reasonable. All of the other components of effective EMG management, such as communication, recognition, appreciation, well-written job descriptions, appropriate training and development, and evaluation, all contribute to a positive volunteer atmosphere that avoids the conditions that trigger burnout.

## Leadership Development

Leadership development is often an important part of keeping a volunteer group running smoothly. The Coordinator/Agent will need to work with volunteers to find leaders of teams, projects, and more. The local association (should there be one in place) also requires a regular influx of new leaders to help continue to effectively run the organization.

Finding new leaders within the ranks of volunteers is often quite difficult and continues to be a topic of discussion at the local, state, and national level when working with volunteers. The State Office regularly hosts Leadership Development Training. Past presentations and resources can be found here: <https://mastergardener.ext.vt.edu/current-resources/leadership/>

A few other resources:

[Developing Leadership Skills in Volunteers](#) article from Texas A&M Extension

[Enhancing Leadership Skills in Volunteers](#) article from the Journal of Leadership Education

## Motivating EMGs through Recognition

An integral and continuous part of managing EMG volunteers is the recognition process. Recognition gives the local coordinator the opportunity to say “thank you” to the volunteers who contribute so much to VCE. It also gives coordinators a chance to encourage and motivate EMGs by showing that efforts are recognized and appreciated as coordinators draw attention to individual or group accomplishments.

Remember, “A volunteer’s pay is recognition and assurance that he/she is an equal partner of the agency or organization. Recognition, therefore, should be an integral part of the

management process so that people feel valued and good about themselves and their organization” (Voluntary Action Center of the United Way in Dayton, Ohio, 1985, p. 31).

Since courtesy is a major form of recognition, it is extremely important to learn the names of EMGs and key aspects of their lives that are important to them. Getting to know EMGs adds to the sense of familiarity and establishes trust, both of which will contribute to retaining the volunteers in future years. For those coordinators who struggle with name recognition, the EMG name tag will help!

Keep volunteers involved and committed by having them make decisions about the future and direction of the educational programs through regular reviews and feedback sessions. Involve EMGs in planning the educational programs to be delivered to the community in the coming year.

Other types of local recognition include more personal expressions of appreciation. This can include simple recognition gestures, such as sending thank you notes after an event, or can be more involved, such as giving meaningful awards for outstanding or longtime service or having an annual awards dinner with certificates or gifts. Some EMGs may not want to be recognized with certificates or plaques, but instead enjoy representing the local group at conferences, meetings, or fairs.

## **Recognition Procedure**

It is important to plan a procedure for recognizing EMGs and their contributions as part of Virginia Cooperative Extension. A recognition plan should be established early and upheld throughout the year.

Basic volunteer recognition should include a VCE Intern certificate at the successful completion of training. When EMG interns complete the 50-hour internship, they should again be recognized by receiving the official EMG title, certificate, and name tag. These basic recognitions are intrinsic to being an EMG, and thus should not be overlooked!

Each individual, regardless of length of volunteer record, should receive an annual letter of appreciation. Components of this annual letter include the reason for appreciation of the individual (length of service, specific contributions, group achievements, etc.); mention of specific projects; a sincere closing, reaffirming the individual’s importance to the effort; and a signature by the local coordinator. This can be included with an invitation to indicate intent to re-enroll the next year, but should also include requirements to maintain EMG status.

The local coordinator may choose to administer recognition based on projects that EMGs complete. Special projects, events, or accomplishments can be recognized with an article in the local newsletter, a news release to local papers, radio spots, and spotlight stories for the media (this will also build credibility and publicity for the VCE programs). These are all appropriate ways of recognizing EMGs and motivating them to continue. Coordinators can submit EMGs for recognition at the State level through an [online submission form](#). By filling out this form for a volunteer who has gone above and beyond, the volunteer will be sent a letter of recognition/thanks and bumper sticker from the State Office.

Most EMG groups have an annual recognition event that is associated with training



graduation. At the same time that trainees are promoted to interns, other forms of recognition can occur, such as presenting service awards, pins, plaques, certificates, etc. Be careful not to decrease the meaning or importance of awards by administering them too frequently or with little thought or criteria. Be sure to match individual preferences with the awards given! Some individuals are more appropriately awarded or recognized through additional responsibility, promotion, or title rather than a certificate. Appropriate volunteer recognition is a process that requires considerable thought and planning and is not as simple as printing a few certificates!

## **Samples of Ways to Recognize Volunteers**

### **During Training Phase**

- Letter of welcome when accepted as an EMG trainee
- Official VCE name tags, including: trainee, intern, and EMG
- Provide adequate orientation
- Organize coffee and refreshments during training
- Provide good job descriptions, quality training, and support supervision during internship
- Publish list of new trainees in the local EMG newsletter

### **Daily or Weekly**

- Smile while working with volunteers
- Send informal thank you notes, whether from local coordinator, team coordinators, or local Extension staff
- On-the-job praise

### **Monthly**

- Volunteer of the month program
- Appropriate volunteer reviews and feedback
- Articles of introduction in local EMG newsletter or community newspaper

### **Annually**

- Special events where awards are given, such as luncheons, receptions, or dinners
- Certificates, plaques, pins, and other awards for time spent volunteering
- Volunteer Appreciation Day
- Special training opportunities or scholarships to conferences or meetings
- Holiday parties
- Gifts or tokens of appreciation for outstanding contributions
- Recognize those who went through Advanced EMG training
- Recognize new Emeritus volunteers
- Send a note of thanks
- Increase responsibility

### **At Meetings With Other VCE Staff or EMGs**

- Provide opportunity for EMGs to report about their achievements
- Report volunteer achievements
- Praise volunteers to others
- Photograph volunteers at work, and include photos in presentations

- Seek input from EMGs at planning meetings

#### **When EMGs Discontinue Volunteering**

- Send a letter of thanks acknowledging service

#### **During National Volunteer Week (April)**

- Be a part of community-wide efforts to recognize EMGs

## **State-level Recognition**

Additional recognition is provided at the state level for service to VCE. These service awards are administered annually by the State EMG Coordinator's Office as part of the EMG College in Blacksburg. Awards for individuals not in attendance are sent to the local coordinator for presentation. Volunteer milestones are recognized at 250, 500, 1000, and every subsequent 1000 hours (2000, 3000, etc.).

The call for individuals eligible for these awards is made in spring of each year and is based on the records in Better Impact, thus it is important to update volunteer hours periodically so that all deserving recognition can receive their awards and discounts for attending EMG College.

## **Continuing Education**

Because EMGs are representatives to the community as VCE educational partners, it is essential to keep volunteers up-to-date with current information and skills. It is for this reason that EMG volunteer policies require EMGs to obtain a minimum of eight hours annually of continuing education credit.

Continuing education provides opportunities for EMGs to continue growing their horticulture skills and knowledge and to sharpen their educational program delivery skills. This training obligation can be met through:

- continuing education programs offered through the Virginia Master Gardener Association or local Extension units,
- lecture-style presentations,
- workshops,
- webinars,
- selections from our [CE reading list](#) (book and audiobook lists both available),
- advanced training credits earned through participation in the annual Master Gardener College in June at Virginia Tech, or
- completion of advanced-level EMG programs, such as Land Care, Water, or Tree Steward programs.

All continuing education activities must be approved by the local coordinator. We encourage local coordinators to be open to new opportunities for volunteers to engage in continuing education activities. Coordinators should encourage volunteers to engage with education opportunities and find things that they are interested in and passionate about. VCE sponsored events should automatically be assumed to be approved for volunteers who look to engage

with those programs.

Continuing education offers many benefits for EMGs. It offers the opportunity to cover information to a greater depth than was presented in the initial training. Speakers and presentations expose EMGs to other agencies and information resources; resources which they may consult when teaching the public about environmental horticulture. As well, continuing education is the perfect opportunity to build both personal and professional skills that ultimately enhance the local educational programs.

The educational program teams should work with the local coordinator and VCE agents to identify subject matter and skill training necessary for EMGs to implement VCE educational programming. When planning job descriptions and the educational program plan for the coming year, determine what additional knowledge and/ or skills EMGs will need to perform in order to complete the volunteer jobs and outline avenues to provide this training for volunteers.

Ask these questions:

- Do EMGs need to know more about a particular subject area, such as heat-tolerant plants, disease-resistant vegetables, or compost and yard waste management techniques?
- Do they need actual skills, such as how to make a public presentation, how to answer horticulture phone line calls, how to conduct a plant clinic, 4-H leadership training, how to diagnose vegetable problems, how to use the Volunteer Management System (VMS), etc.?
- Do team coordinators or other volunteers need leadership training?

Regardless of the situation, determine what training is needed beyond the 50 hours of training each EMG receives initially. Continuing education should not duplicate the original basic training! Look for ways to provide this training for volunteers. A special committee may be assigned to assist the local coordinator with these responsibilities.

Keep in mind that not all speakers or arrangements can be made without fees being involved. EMGs may need to pay to attend certain events (although suitable free alternatives should also be identified), or the local group may consider paying speakers to conduct training.

Realize that the quality of training and the opportunities that are encouraged or made possible are tools for retaining EMGs. Volunteers come partly because they want to know more about gardening. Make that work to your advantage. Keep the EMGs well-informed and educated to keep their interest levels high, then give them responsibilities to use that knowledge through challenging volunteer opportunities.

Find out what EMGs want to learn about during volunteer reviews and feedback sessions. This will give the local coordinator an indication of areas of highest interest that can be utilized in planning.

## **Advanced EMG Training**

As EMGs get more deeply involved in various programming areas, they require increasingly

advanced levels of training. Local groups should determine whether or not it is appropriate to implement advanced EMG training programs, such as Tree Stewards, Water Stewards, and Land Care Stewards. These advanced programs are more specialized than the initial EMG training.

The Advanced EMG programs are designed to increase participants' knowledge of a specialized subject, as well as educate them in program design and implementation through an emphasis on the VCE Programming Model. Advanced programs require 30 hours of training. The hours of advanced training fulfill the annual CE requirement. After completion of training, Advanced EMGs should complete at least 5 hours of relevant continuing education and 10 hours of advanced training specific volunteer hours on an annual basis, in addition to the hours requirements to maintain their status as an Extension Master Gardener volunteer.

Advanced trainings are offered as part of Master Gardener College, but can also be organized by local units if there is a need and desire from EMGs. Considerable planning with local VCE agents and program planners is required to determine whether or not the advanced EMG training is appropriate for the given EMG group. Because these programs require an additional 30 hours of classroom training of individuals who have already completed the initial 100 hours of EMG training and internship, there are smaller numbers of people who wish to complete the advanced programs. Thus, the advanced programs may be conducted on an area-wide basis; drawing qualified and interested EMGs from several units into one training group. Class projects and future programming efforts are typically conducted locally, although area-programming efforts are encouraged. If advanced EMG training is a consideration for local EMG groups, the local coordinator and educational program teams should discuss the possibilities with local VCE agents and program planners.

A link to all EMG Steward training handbooks are available in the [Appendix](#) of this manual. Please reach out to the State Office with any additional questions or to see past agendas for these trainings.

## **Promoting Fellowship Among Volunteers**

Extension Master Gardener programs, and many other volunteer programs, do not just provide value by giving people opportunities to give back to their community. They also provide a place for people to come together, make friends, and meet others with similar interests. This is one of the reasons that individuals decide to join EMG programs and shouldn't be discounted or undervalued as part of the program. As Coordinators of a volunteer program, it is important to work to develop this aspect of your program. This could be through regular social activities, gatherings, etc. or through finding other ways of bringing volunteers together. Associations also provide opportunities for social interaction, and a social committee could be formed to help continue to provide these experiences for volunteers.

## **Relationships and Community in Your Program**

EMG programs offer the service of horticulture education to the community, but the programs also offer important opportunities for volunteers to build a network and relationships with one another. Through volunteer work, EMGs also facilitate relationship building within the larger community. This is also part of the public service we provide.

It's important to acknowledge this component of the program. A program that fosters a strong sense of community and caring will also have better volunteer retention than a program where volunteering feels transactional.

## Being a Trauma Informed Coordinator

As we work with volunteers and members of the community, it is important to understand that everyone brings with them their own unique story, successes, and trials. As you build relationships, keep in mind that not all struggles are visible and be sensitive to the individual needs of EMGs and those you work with in the community. There are a number of resources available on this topic and Virginia Tech also offers mental health first aid training that you can schedule for your unit.

Resources:

**Mental Health First Aid:** <https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/>

- Your unit can schedule Mental Health First Aid Training by contacting Hokie Wellness at [hokiewellness@vt.edu](mailto:hokiewellness@vt.edu). This training is available with both an adult and youth focus.

**Balancing Life Series from VCE:**

- Adult Mental Health: [https://video.vt.edu/media/Balancing+LifeA+Adult+Mental+Health+and+Well-Being/1\\_jxsbfdc7](https://video.vt.edu/media/Balancing+LifeA+Adult+Mental+Health+and+Well-Being/1_jxsbfdc7)
- Youth Mental Health: [https://video.vt.edu/media/Balancing+LifeA+Youth+Mental+Health+Awareness/1\\_22maxy99](https://video.vt.edu/media/Balancing+LifeA+Youth+Mental+Health+Awareness/1_22maxy99)
- Healthy Boundaries when Helping People in Distress: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tOGHHlaAZv8&list=PLsPrMF2hUwAaTaUe1V8RYnxfoiGLs9lYg&index=8>
- Fatigue, Brain Fog, and On-going Stress: [https://video.vt.edu/media/Balancing+LifeA+Fatigue%2C+Brain+Fog%2C+and+On-Going+Stress+-+5.14.21/1\\_sfxks1yb](https://video.vt.edu/media/Balancing+LifeA+Fatigue%2C+Brain+Fog%2C+and+On-Going+Stress+-+5.14.21/1_sfxks1yb)

## Chapter 6: Marketing your VCE Master Gardener Program

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### Introduction

The way in which the local EMG volunteers and programs are promoted all year long (and especially during recruitment) will affect the types of people that are attracted to the training classes. Promotion of the projects and accomplishments of EMGs is necessary so when it is time to recruit, interest has been created among people appropriate to be recruited -- those who want to teach as well as learn about horticulture.

If public relations materials improperly present EMGs as free garden maintenance staff, then people who only want to plant flowers and pull weeds will be attracted. Volunteers with these expectations will be less willing to volunteer in appropriate capacities (such as answering

horticulture questions, staffing plant clinics, or conducting water quality protection programs). In addition, questions will be raised as to the appropriateness of free garden maintenance activities conducted by representatives of VCE, an agency committed to education. If, however, press releases and reports capitalize on the EMG implemented homeowner lawn-care program that has reduced nitrogen inputs into the local watershed or the 4-H youth gardening program for at-risk youth that has reduced recidivism by 75 percent, then this will present EMGs as volunteer educators who teach people about the importance of environmentally-sound horticulture practices or improve life quality for individuals.

Individuals who are interested in a great opportunity to make a contribution to the community will then be attracted to VCE and the EMG training.

Promotion will also assist in developing resources. With increased public awareness, other groups become interested and willing to work with EMGs toward common goals. Community businesses and organizations are more willing to assist with supplies and services if they have an understanding of EMG activities as obtained through accurate promotional efforts. Promotion and marketing of EMG activities also offers the perfect opportunity to publicly recognize community supporters, which strengthens relationships with community groups.

Promoting the accomplishments and activities of EMGs will be a major factor in determining the success of the EMG programs. Promotion generates:

- Free publicity
- Prospective EMGs
- Increased community involvement and support
- A better public understanding of VCE and EMGs

If no one knows what EMGs are doing, programming is bound to have less impact. Likewise, if media portrays educational programming as conducted by EMGs or EMG associations, then the connection to VCE, Virginia Tech, and Virginia State University will be lost, reducing the value and impact of the relationship. A successful publicity campaign, however, will undoubtedly increase community participation and awareness.

General promotional materials should emphasize the value of EMGs to the community and the need for the EMGs to provide information and educational services to the community. Community links and impacts that are made through schools, businesses, community groups, etc. are especially helpful in generating positive public relations within the local communities. For these reasons, the PR team should use quality annual reports as the basis of promotional materials.

## Marketing Materials

When promoting events, EMGs should use [VCE EMG marketing materials](#) found on the EMG coordinator/agent section of the website. These VCE marketing items provide sight recognition and lend credibility to the information or event. EMGs should wear VCE name tags to represent themselves.

**Business cards:** Business cards with information about your local help desk are available and can be ordered through the regular VCE business card ordering system (the agent or UAA can



order here). These cards are useful for providing contact information for help desks.

**Brochures or other print materials:** Templates for brochures and other print materials are available through the EMG state office. To have these materials printed, you will need to download and fill out [the brochure request form here](#) and email it to Devon [dvj@vt.edu](mailto:dvj@vt.edu). When you receive your customized brochure template, you can print it locally.

Additional information and templates can be found on the [EMG website](#).

**Banners:** The State Office can also help you customize an existing banner template, or (in some cases) work with you to develop a custom banner or sign to suit your needs. Local units are responsible for printing the banners locally.

**Table cloths:** Many units have table cloths with the VCE and EMG logos. The State Office does not have a supply of table cloths to distribute, but we can coordinate among multiple units to place a bulk order if there is enough interest/demand for table cloths to make ordering in bulk cheaper. If there is not enough demand to make a bulk order feasible, you can order a table cloth independently.

## Logos

All Master Gardener logos are available here:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1v2pdYFtGkkusBrK8Yjam8ziK1-cPrqbT?usp=sharing>

VCE logos are available here:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/14IDlqGBGjqv2B6BKCSYE5IVWrvl61x6RIgu4JaGNvSU/edit>

Many local units also have their own logos. We consider existing logos “grandfathered in” but request that units not create **new** logos. If you’d like a version of the standard EMG logo with your unit’s name inserted, email Devon [dvj@vt.edu](mailto:dvj@vt.edu).

Please do **not** make changes to the VCE or EMG logo such as:

- X Stretching it or distorting it
- X Changing colors
- X Adding other elements

## Indicia Statements

Whenever you create a flyer, brochure, or other document for public distribution, you must include the indicia statement:

Virginia Cooperative Extension is a partnership of Virginia Tech, Virginia State University, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and local governments. Its programs and employment are open to all, regardless of age, color, disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, military status, or any other basis protected by law.

More information on VCE’s indicia statement can be found here:

<https://sites.google.com/view/extintranet/marketing>

# Digital Media

## Websites

Every VCE Office has a website via <https://ext.vt.edu/offices.html>. Please check this page for your office and make sure the Master Gardener program is featured on your unit website.

We are aware that many units maintain third-party websites in addition to the official websites offered through <https://ext.vt.edu>. **These websites must belong to the association.** There are risks associated with using a third party website as your official Extension Master Gardener website that include: there are no Virginia Tech-approved vendors for domain registration and only one approved hosting provider, all images must be sourced appropriately, you must have an appropriate privacy statement, and all content must be ADA compliant.

The State Office is unable to provide technical assistance for association websites. For assistance with a <https://ext.vt.edu> page, or to request edit access to your unit's page, please contact the web manager for CALS Communications and Marketing: <https://www.communications.cals.vt.edu/people.html>

## Newsletters

Virginia Tech currently has no approved email software. MailChimp and Constant Contact are not approved for use by Virginia Tech Departmental Software. That means that you cannot pay for these services using Virginia Tech funds. We are aware of the difficulty this causes and have advocated (and will continue to advocate, along with many other departments) that Virginia Tech approve an email software for use.

## Design Software

There are a few options for designing attractive flyers, social media graphics, or other items. For large or expensive items like banners or signs, the state office can also provide design assistance to make sure you have the correct files for printing.

**Adobe Spark:** As a Virginia Tech employee, you can use Adobe Spark. To get access to Spark for free, contact departmental software. Once you are logged in to Spark, you can create graphics and other items and use a pre-loaded VCE brand template (contact Devon [dvj@vt.edu](mailto:dvj@vt.edu) for access to this).

**Canva:** Like Spark, Canva is an online design tool you can use to make flyers, graphics, and other items. The free version of Canva is sufficient for many needs--if you want to save a palette of brand colors or share document among different users, you can pay for a premium version (which is approved by VT software).

**PowerPoint:** PowerPoint is also good for designing graphics and presentations. The advantage of PowerPoint is that you are able to share files with others and ask them to make changes. With online design tools like Canva or Spark, you can only export an image version of your product to share.

# Social Media

## Social media policy

Please review the Virginia Tech social media policy available here:

<https://policies.vt.edu/social-media-policy2.pdf> (Please note that some of the content of this policy is designed with Virginia Tech university departments (e.g. the College of Engineering or Office of Advancement) in mind.)

Please review and use Virginia Cooperative Extension's social media policy for basic information like naming conventions, the number of accounts to create, and which settings to choose when creating a page, [click here for the VCE social media policy](#).

Please follow Virginia Tech's guidelines as outlined in the social media policy regarding appropriate content, using professional discretion when liking/following other accounts, and setting "house rules" that govern your local unit.

We do not have specific guidelines about which social media platforms you should/should not use--this is up to your discretion. At a state level we focus mostly on Facebook, and also use Instagram and Twitter. You also do not NEED to have social media if you don't want it.

We do not have specific guidelines about managing social media pages. Some units choose to have volunteers manage pages, some have a coordinator or agent manage pages. As long as you are following Virginia Tech's guidelines about content appropriateness, you can choose the arrangement that works best for you and your unit.

## Video

### Zoom recordings

When using your Virginia Tech Zoom account, meetings can be "recorded to the cloud" and will become available here: <https://video.vt.edu/home> (you must log in using your Virginia Tech PID). **Note that this website is often called Kaltura.**

Recordings can also be edited using <https://video.vt.edu/my-media>. To trim out the beginning or end of a zoom recording, locate the video in your library then click the small pencil-shaped edit button that appears to the right of the video thumbnail. Then click "launch editor" (button to the right of the video).

NOTE: If you are using Zoom with a sponsored PID (are not a Virginia Tech employee) you do not have access to video.vt.edu!

### Video editing

From time to time agents or volunteers may wish to create educational videos. If you want professional video editing software, CALS Communications recommends Camtasia.

Camtasia 2020 is an easy to use video editor with built-in features for screen recording. Add a voiceover to a PowerPoint presentation. Edit videos recorded with your smartphone.

Download a free trial from [Techsmith](#). View [online tutorials](#) for getting started. Purchase form [Departmental Software](#) for \$170.

Additional Camtasia resources:

- [A Friendly Guide to Video Production](#)
- [How to Create Videos for Extension Education: An Innovative Five-Step Procedure](#)
- [The Ultimate Guide to Easily Make Instructional Videos](#)

There are many more training videos/presentations for creating videos on the CALS Communications resources website: <https://www.communications.cals.vt.edu/resources.html>

You can also record a presentation in PowerPoint! Instructions here: [PowerPoint: Record a Slide Show with Narration and Slide Timings](#)

## Video storage and distribution

For “storing” videos online, you have two options: [Kaltura](#) or YouTube. You cannot just upload a video file directly to Canvas or to a website--you have to put it on YouTube or Kaltura first, then embed the video player or paste a link for people to access the video.

**If you don't want the video to be available to the public and visible only to those with the link:** In YouTube, set the publishing options to “unlisted” and the video will not appear in your public account but you can send the link to whoever you want to access it. In Kaltura, on the edit page for the video, go to “publishing” tab, then select “unlisted”--now the URL visible in your navigation bar can be copy/pasted and sent to those you want to see the video.

## Image Attribution and Copyright

When you source digital images for presentations or otherwise, you must be sure you are choosing images licensed for reuse. These training materials, provided by Virginia Tech libraries, are designed to provide guidance for you and your volunteers. We recommend that you at least review the “Introduction to copyright” module:

- [Introduction to Copyright for Extension Master Gardeners](#): Provides an overview of copyright, what is copyrighted, and how you can/can't use copyrighted material.
- [Introduction to Creative Commons for Extension Master Gardeners](#): Creative Commons is a licensing system that defines how certain material can be reused.
- [Introduction to Fair Use for Extension Master Gardeners](#): “Fair use” allows for reuse of copyrighted material in certain circumstances.
- [Introduction to Publicly Available Resources for Extension Master Gardeners](#): Provides descriptions of resources you can use without copyright issues.

## Zoom Access via Sponsored PIDs

Sponsored PIDs are used to provide a short term PID to someone not affiliated with Virginia Tech. You can use a sponsored PID to give a volunteer access to a Virginia Tech Zoom account. These are short term (up to 1 year, renewable). They can be requested here: [https://4help.vt.edu/sp?id=sc\\_cat\\_item&sys\\_id=36abf15ddb41a308cd2c56594b9619a9](https://4help.vt.edu/sp?id=sc_cat_item&sys_id=36abf15ddb41a308cd2c56594b9619a9)

Anyone can submit a request, but it must be approved by a Department Head or Department Head Alternate.

Limitations:

- The person CANNOT already have a PID such as previous employees or students. A person with a previous PID must use the Non-Paid Affiliation Form (P-86) to "re-activate" their current PID.
- Only the sponsor of the account can request a password reset.
- When the account is created initially, the person has 24 hours to set their password or a password reset needs to be requested.
- Renewals for the PID must be done by the Sponsor.

A Sponsored PID has one affiliation: VT-AFFILIATE-TEMPORARY

VCE has requested some volunteers get sponsored PIDs to be able to schedule and host Zoom meetings.

Note: A sponsored PID must manually provision a Google Account BEFORE logging into Zoom for the first time. Zoom provisions an account at first log in, and uses the person's VT email address to do so. If the person hasn't created an email address yet, Zoom randomizes the email address it uses. This makes it impossible for the person to be set as an alternate host. If this occurs, open a ticket with TLOS – they will need to delete the account from Zoom so the person can provision a Google Account first.

Access limitations:

- Google Account – They must self provision the account (<https://accounts.it.vt.edu/myaccounts>). Once done, they get access to a full VT Google Account.
- Zoom – They get access to a VT Zoom Account
- Canvas – Access to canvas must be requested by the sponsor. Submit a 4Help Ticket with the request.
- Kaltura (video.vt.edu) – they do NOT get access
- eduroam – Access must be requested by their department.
- VPN – Access must be requested by their department.
- Microsoft – They do not get access to a Hokies account or Office 365.
- Code42 – They do not get access to the CALS backup system.

## Working with the Media

Public relations planning is just as important as planning educational programming or any other part of volunteer management. The PR team should work with all other teams to plan a calendar of events for the year and build/maintain a media contacts list. Determine what happens each week or month. Remember that good media efforts start two to three months before the event actually happens!

Media coverage is good for:

- Announcing news to niche or mass audiences
- Driving traffic to your website
- Increasing program attendance

- Sharing on social media to significantly increase views
- Increasing your visibility in search engines
- Increasing your credibility with colleagues and the public

## Develop an Effective News Release

A news (or press) release is a summary of an important event or update that you send out to local media in the hopes of them running it in the newspaper (or online newspaper) or calling you to ask for a TV/radio interview. Write a news release when:

- **You have an interesting story to tell.** For example, if your volunteer or project just won an award
- **You have important information to relay.** For example, if you have an upcoming training class, event, or spring plant sale. Alternatively, if you want to provide timely horticultural information via the media, such as “it’s time to plant your spring garden.”
- **You want to get “ahead” of a brewing issue.** For example, you know that the spotted lanternfly was just confirmed in your county and you want to tell people what that means.

Start by planning:

- What do you want to communicate?
- What is the one takeaway you want the audience to remember?
- How will you do this?

If you don’t know exactly what your key message is, your audience won’t either. It can take some time to develop a strong message, and you will need to spend time honing it down--you can’t tell people everything.

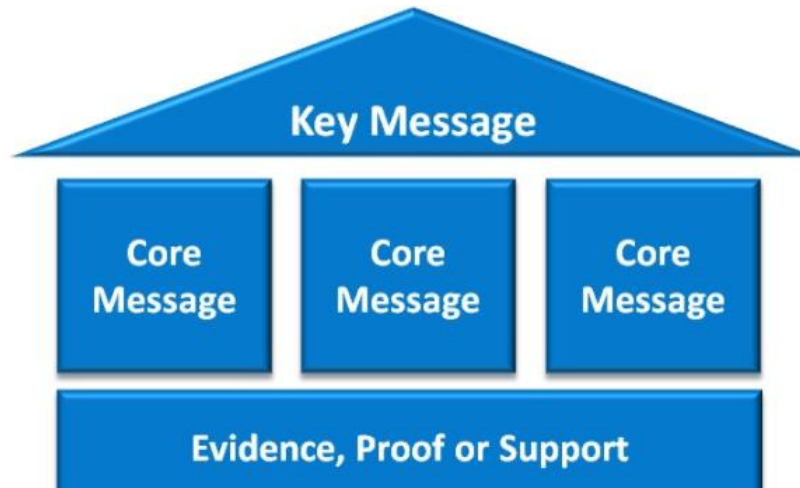
The “Message house” is a useful tool for developing your message. The components of the “message house” are:

**Key Message (or Main Message).** 1 sentence, 1 thought. If the audience remembered just one thing about your conversation, this single statement should capture it explicitly. It’s the 30-second trailer Hollywood would make of your idea.

1. **The Core Messages.** 3 messages that support the Key Message. Each is 1 sentence, 1 thought. Each adds depth to/elaborates on the Key Message
2. **Evidence, Proof and Support.** You justify your proof in two ways:
  - Rational evidence is facts, statistics, qualified research, thorough analysis, best practices, case studies and considered reasoning.
  - Emotional evidence is stories, testimonials, personal experience and situational anecdotes.

The best mixture is both rational and emotional. As the saying goes, rational persuades, but emotion motivates.





**Start with a strong key message:** There are five points to remember when writing a news release: WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN, and WHY. The answers should appear in the first sentence or two, called a lead. A strong lead captures the attention of the readers or listeners and makes them want to know more. After the lead, each succeeding paragraph should be of declining importance. It helps a reader to learn the important facts of a story in the first few lines. If it is necessary to cut parts of the news release, the editor can cut from the bottom, where the least important information details should be found.

### **Press release best practices:**

- Have someone proof your release.
- Set up Google Alerts for your unit
- Always include your website in your release.
- Make sure you leverage all resulting media coverage on your website, through social media and in framed copies in your office.
- Be brief when writing a news release. One double-spaced typed page has a better chance of being used than two double-spaced typed pages. A two-page item takes up more space or time than most editors (print or broadcast) will usually give one item.
- Check the story for accuracy. Never guess on names, dates, times, or places.

### **Things to remember when writing press releases**

- You can put together a team of volunteers to work on media; appoint one group member to be in charge.
- Be sure the name of your local unit and the name, address, email, and phone numbers of the Extension office or contact person are at the top left of each page of information.
- If preparing a news release, make sure the sheet tells when the information is to be released (e.g. “for immediate release” or “hold until December 1”).
- If the PSA or calendar of events information is to run for a specified time, mark it with both the numerical date and the day of the week (e.g., “For use Sunday, December 20, through Sunday, December 27.”)
- Always give the exact day and date of an event.
- Keep a record of all media contacts made by EMGs. This may save time and trouble in the future.

## Developing messages for soundbites or elevator pitches

If you are putting together a short soundbite or elevator pitch, remember the 27-9-3 RULE:

27 words said in less than  
9 seconds with no more than  
3 points discussed

For example: VSU Small Ruminant Program: *Demand for sheep and goat products provides opportunities for farmers, but many lack the knowledge needed for success. VSU helps by providing valuable information on production.*

## Develop a Press List

In order to know what to do with your press release (where to send it!) you need to have a press list. This is a list of media outlets in your area; you may already have relationships with a few local news stations or papers and you should prioritize those.

If you don't have a press list, you can look up local media outlets and start building one here: [www.abyznewslinks.com](http://www.abyznewslinks.com)

## Consider Audience

When preparing media materials, it is essential to select the target audience, and then use the media that best reach that audience.

Different groups of people respond to different languages and techniques. For that reason, the writer of public information must be conscious of the receiver's language and communicate information in those terms. Any time you prepare media for the public, ask yourself:

For the public audience I am trying to reach:

- To whom am I speaking?
- What are their needs?
- How will the information I have affect those needs?
- What kind of information does the audience need to take action, make a decision, or participate in a program?
- What level of existing knowledge or understanding does this audience have?
- What will the audience get from this?
- What phrases, metaphors, pictures, and media formats will relate best to my audience?

# Chapter 7: Planning and Evaluating EMG Programming

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## The Program Planning Process

Not all volunteers need to be or will want to be involved in the more complex program development process. At the very least, the Educational Program Team should be involved, since this team is responsible for identifying educational programming roles for EMGs and developing job descriptions to be used for placement and recruitment. Specific EMG program teams should be invited to participate in planning applicable programs. Others should be kept informed of the planning events, such as through the local newsletter, and have the opportunity to contribute at future planning sessions.

VCE faculty and staff must avoid individually planning all programming that involves EMG implementation on the assumption that EMGs are not trained as educators or planners. Many EMGs are present/former teachers or are currently/previously involved in similar planning functions with their employment and can offer tremendous input and assistance with program development. If there are not EMGs with such experiences or who are comfortable being involved in these decisions, it may be possible to involve them in the process by restating the tasks in non-jargon terms and seeking their input (i.e., explain the proposed job and its goals, rather than the outcome indicators and objectives that it satisfies).

## Planning New Educational Programs

Local coordinators should be in constant communication with local VCE agents to see that EMGs are involved in the planning of programs that will involve EMG implementation. The local coordinator has a responsibility to work with local VCE staff to determine the educational programming plan for the coming year so that the need for volunteers can be met through re-enrollment or additional recruitment.

This inspires and motivates the staff to plan ahead, be organized, and be receptive to the ideas of others. The result is usually a much happier, more cooperative corps of EMG volunteers who are willing and interested in implementing the programming that has been planned.

VCE agents planning new programs should get together informally with the appropriate program teams to explore the idea of starting such a program. The need analysis should be planned with EMGs. It may be appropriate to have the program team members who are EMGs help conduct the first meeting with the larger group of EMGs to seek additional volunteer support for implementing the program. The longer EMGs see an agent or other leader in complete control, the harder it will be for EMGs to be involved. If EMGs see that the agent and one or two other people have worked together from the very first thinking through of an idea, they will be more likely to feel that the program is really group-owned. It is more difficult to get EMGs to buy in after part of the work has been done. Program planners should keep in mind that the more EMGs are involved in the planning of programs, the more likely they will volunteer to implement them.

## EMG Planned Projects/Activities

Very often, EMG projects and activities “spontaneously generate,” whether from a community request or from a volunteer who has an idea that meets a local need. Because the projects may or may not integrate with the planned educational programming to be implemented by EMGs, the opportunities that arise should be evaluated to see if they are appropriate Extension activities, whether or not they are feasible, and if there is sufficient commitment to ensure completion. It is perfectly legitimate to say “no” to an opportunity that presents itself. New projects should be evaluated to determine how they fit into Extension program areas, such as sustainable landscape management and the unit’s Situation Analysis.

The local coordinator is responsible for ensuring the direction that projects and activities take and for ensuring that they are completed in a fashion appropriate to VCE. If EMG projects and activities are planned outside of the educational program plan worked out with local VCE agents and staff, then a Project Proposal and Authorization Form should be completed. Completion of the form requires a signature of a VCE personnel, who, by signing the form, is authorizing the event as a VCE activity. Projects and activities that are implemented without completion of a Project Proposal and Authorization Form are not considered EMG activities and do not count as EMG volunteered time, as VCE was unaware of the event and could not approve it as appropriate.

**Unapproved events do not carry the liability shield of VCE/VT.**

## Plan of Work and Better Impact

As each program implementation job description is created, it should be linked to the corresponding VCE Plan of Work Program Plan objective. This will ensure that the activities are in keeping with the mission and goals of VCE. It also offers the opportunity for EMG volunteers to work with Extension agents in planning the educational programming work for the coming year. In order for EMG volunteer activities to be properly reported on a state-wide basis, the list of projects will be entered into the Better Impact. See the [‘Guidelines for Creating Activities in Better Impact’](#) document for more information on how to set up new activities in Better Impact.

## Volunteer Activity Report Groups

Activity Report Groups are established by and added to Better Impact by the State Coordinator’s Office of the EMG program. Any suggestions or changes must be managed through the appropriate channels in the state EMG office.

Within Better Impact (BI), the local unit coordinator (or local BI administrator) can add “Activity Categories.” These are specific to your unit and are the VMS equivalent of “Projects.” When you build a volunteer activity in BI, you will pre-assign the Category and the Project Report Group. You can also add specific Feedback Fields to capture specific data for that Activity or Category.

**EMG Environmental Stewardship:** This activity group would include projects such as urban nutrient management or other efforts to improve or protect water quality, work with pollinator

gardens/gardening for wildlife, cover crops, turf alternatives, gardening for climate change, emphasis on native plants, and how to safely use organic and synthetic pesticides etc. **EMG Youth & Horticulture:** This activity group would include any projects where the target audience is pre-k through high school. Projects would be partnerships with 4H Youth Development, scout groups or similar, local boys' and girls' clubs, in-school or after-school clubs where gardening or horticulture is central to the activity.

**EMG Economic Value of Horticulture:** This activity group would include projects where the economic value or impact of horticulture can be captured in ecosystem services, mitigating heat-island effects, impacts on property values, increase in local tax revenues directly tied to the greening of communities or business districts, money saved due to specific conservation practices which directly impact heating and cooling costs at a residential level.

**EMG Food Security (nutrition, production, preservation):** This activity group would include any projects involving local food production on private or public property through individual gardens or community gardens. The educational aspect of the activity group would center on teaching others how to plant, cultivate, and harvest their own fruits and vegetables to increase personal food sovereignty. Additionally, this could involve local EMG volunteers growing surplus fruits and vegetables specifically to donate to local food banks. Finally, it would involve joint projects with the Master Food Volunteer program so clients can learn how to handle fruits and vegetables safely post-harvest and preserve them.

This is a shared Report Group with the Master Food Volunteers. This allows for statewide impacts to be written across volunteer programs.

**EMG Human Health (quality of life):** This activity group would include any projects involving horticultural therapy, working with differently abled clients, and working with clients in assisted living and nursing home facilities. Likewise, any projects dealing with working safely in the garden, staying healthy through garden activities, and taking measures to avoid trauma or harmful exposures while gardening (e.g. using sunscreen or other means to block harmful UV rays or using insect repellents to avoid harmful diseases vectored by insects).

## Coordination and Management

Part of sharing ownership of a program is sharing directions and finding those particular volunteers who are skillful in coordinating and managing programs. Neither local coordinators nor VCE agents can do everything for everyone else. Once a program has been planned, responsibility and authority for implementing the program should be delegated. Therefore, EMGs must be able to give out assignments, set up time schedules, gather supplies, and locate resources in order to fulfill their roles. Program planners can seek the assistance of the local coordinator in appropriately delegating educational program planning responsibility to EMGs in the different program teams.

Use written job descriptions to specify activities and responsibilities of each individual, to recruit individuals with special knowledge, skills, or physical ability needed to do a job, and to review volunteer performance against given expectations and responsibilities.

## Evaluation of the EMG Program

Evaluating the EMG effort is an often overlooked, but essential part of managing local EMG

volunteers. Providing each volunteer with an opportunity to give feedback regarding the training classes, management and educational programming conducted by EMGs will assist in planning and implementing future activities as well as motivating and retaining trained volunteers. The intent of the evaluation process is to confirm to EMGs that their views are valued and listened to, so they feel they are integral parts of the unit, while also gathering information that will help improve the local educational programs.

## **Conducting the Evaluation**

Willingness of EMGs to participate in the evaluation process reinforces their commitment to VCE. Including them in the evaluation process also recognizes and reinforces their value to VCE educational programs.

Volunteer reviews can be conducted in several ways, including one-on-one interviews, phone conversations, printed or online surveys. The method decided upon largely depends on the time available to conduct the reviews and the level of trust and comfort between local coordinators and volunteers. One-on-one contacts during reviews, such as interviews or telephone conversations, may reduce the degree of honesty with which volunteers discuss their volunteer experiences with the local coordinator. In contrast, it may be useful to have personal interviews with any EMGs that do not regularly come into the Extension office, to reinforce their connection with VCE. EMGs may feel freer to discuss their experiences in a written survey form, however, written surveys allow for little interaction during the review. The local coordinator may choose to combine review methods to get different types of information from volunteers.

It is important to keep the evaluation tools (i.e., written surveys, interview questions, etc.) as short as possible to make them useful. Too many questions or requesting too much information will result in a poor response and evaluators who fail to fully read or use the responses given. Evaluation tools must, however, allow for EMGs to fully express concerns and brag on accomplishments.

Timing of the evaluation process is critical for implementing necessary changes. It is recommended that the annual review process be combined with the annual renewal process to facilitate all of these decisions as well as assist in identifying recognition that is due.

## **Types of Evaluation Criteria**

Evaluation should seek assessment and input on the EMG effort, including training, management, and skill of the coordinator; the EMG educational programs in the community, including appropriateness, value, and impact; and individual EMG activity, including value and impact, personal satisfaction, and recommendations for the future.

## **Overall Organizational and Management Evaluation**

It is important to periodically evaluate the overall EMG organization. There are two basic questions that comprise a good evaluation:

- **What did EMGs do to enhance the quality of life in their community?** This involves looking at external measures to answer the question, “Are EMGs accomplishing their purpose?” It is tied to program goals and objectives and helps demonstrate what needs were met and how the activities of volunteers made a difference.



- How well did EMGs do it?** This involves looking at internal measures associated with the methods used to accomplish goals. It answers the question, “How are EMGs managing the resources allocated to the group: financial, physical, and human?”

Questions to ask on a survey may include:

- What is the EMG purpose?
- Do EMGs know what they are supposed to accomplish?
- Do they have the skills to accomplish it?
- Do they have sufficient authority to accomplish it?
- Do EMGs know if they are succeeding or not?
- Do they have the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed?
- Are things organized so their responsibilities are clear?
- Do EMGs receive appropriate and sufficient recognition?
- Do EMGs receive sufficient and effective communication (between other EMGs, EMGs and coordinator, EMGs and VCE staff, etc.)?

## VCE Educational Program Evaluation

During evaluation, it is equally important to seek input on the jobs that EMGs are doing, namely the EMG-implemented VCE educational programs. Ask questions about the planning and preparation of programs, EMG skills for implementing programs, and how these programs are impacting the local community.

Information gained during these sessions should be used for future planning of projects and programs to be implemented by EMGs.

## Using the Evaluation

Evaluations should be anonymous and summaries should be supplied to all VCE and EMG personnel. The information should be reviewed and discussed so that changes in the local EMG volunteer management can be implemented. **To ignore or discount issues and concerns brought up during evaluations is worse than never asking for input in the first place.**

Information gained through evaluation is most valuable if it is used to continue the process of planning and program development. In addition, it can be shared with all interested parties (i.e., District Directors, local funders) in order to maintain support for the EMG volunteers.

## Evaluating EMG Projects/programs

Evaluation of EMG projects is an important part of ensuring they are meeting the needs of the community and your local VCE plan of work. As EMGs and VCE continuously adapt to the changing needs of their communities, projects and programs will change in their focus and format. Regularly evaluating these projects will help keep your program relevant into the future.

# Chapter 8: Recordkeeping and Reporting

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## Introduction

Recordkeeping, or documentation, is extremely important today for several reasons.

- It provides continuity through staff changes.
- It is critical to risk management practices.
- It proves the scope and quantity of EMG volunteer contributions
- It justifies the expenditure of staff (volunteer or paid) time and organizational resources
- It enables recognition of individual volunteers and their accomplishments in many different ways

EMG recordkeeping and reporting responsibilities may differ by individual unit. Recordkeeping may be accomplished utilizing an Evaluation and Reporting (E&R) Team, VCE staff or individual EMG volunteers. In any of these instances, the information to be collected will be entered and maintained using Better Impact, our volunteer management site. Information maintained in Better Impact may be shared with the PR team so they can highlight EMG accomplishments in public relations materials, such as pamphlets, posters, fliers, and public TV spots that promote the work, impact, and value of these efforts and accomplishments to the local community.

Some of the most basic types of records related to volunteers include the initial application forms, enrollment and re-enrollment forms, volunteer time records, job descriptions, recruitment activities, evaluation results (training, speakers, volunteer, and overall EMG organization), and logs of project and team coordinators' activities and problems encountered and how they were resolved. Records to be kept for local EMG groups fall into two main categories, local archival information and educational program records. The following sections will explain how to manage and maintain appropriate records at the local level.

## Local Archival Information

Local archival information is any information pertaining to the local EMG effort. This type of information is maintained to monitor the status of individual volunteers and to document activities in the event of a liability claim.

Individual records are maintained for the protection of the volunteer and VCE and to meet state reporting requirements. Records can be maintained online on a secure (password protected) computer. Many of these records are housed in Better Impact and should be able to be accessed easily in case of audit.

Much of the information maintained on an individual EMG is not of a sensitive nature and will be entered into Better Impact (i.e., total service hours as an EMG; list of current, active EMGs; service awards due; etc.). Local archival information includes application, references,

volunteer commitment agreements (Qualifications section in Better Impact), volunteer hours, milestone records, and continuing education hours..

## **Applications and References**

Prospective EMGs are able to apply to training online through Better Impact. The State Office has created a document that details this process. It can be found on the EMG webpage in the Coordinators/Agents section or by [clicking here](#). If you have applicants with limited computer proficiency or internet access, a hard copy of the application can be found on the same EMG page mentioned above or by [clicking here](#).

References are requested as part of the application process. You can call, email, or have references fill out an online survey (Qualtrics or Google Drive are good options) and answer questions about the candidate as their schedule allows.

## **Signed Volunteer Commitment Agreements**

Each trainee must complete a volunteer agreement once they have received orientation and have been accepted. This is available in the Qualifications section of Better Impact or as a hard copy [here](#). The initial agreement will be supplemented annually by a new agreement form that constitutes intent to remain an active EMG.

## **Volunteer Time Records**

Volunteers should keep track of their hours in Better Impact. As new volunteers, the MGC or Agent will need to go over how to enter hours in this system and the expectations for doing so. It is important that volunteers log all their hours and in as timely a manner as possible. This will help with end of the year reporting and showcasing one portion of the impact that EMGs have in their communities. If your unit has a designated timekeeper who enters hours for members, please make sure an efficient system is created by which volunteers submit their hours to the timekeeper. Volunteers should also be able to check the hours entered by the timekeeper for accuracy.

## **Recognition Records**

Records should be kept locally to document when EMG volunteers have received their “EMG Intern” certificate, title of “VCE Master Gardener” certificate, and any service awards at the state level. This information must be entered into Better Impact for access and tracking purposes. Additional recognitions received, such as local volunteer service awards, are kept at the discretion of the local group. Milestone awards achieved can be kept in Better Impact under each volunteer’s profile, section titled “Custom Fields.”

## **Continuing Education Records**

EMGs are required to fulfill a minimum of eight hours of re-enrollment training (continuing education) annually to maintain active status. EMGs are encouraged to choose re-enrollment opportunities that build skills utilized when assisting the community in their volunteer jobs for VCE as well as being of personal interest. The information should be new and stimulating to the recipient, rather than repetitive information (hence, sitting in on initial EMG training as a “refresher” is not appropriate continuing education unless significantly different than the

original training). Individual EMGs should always report these hours under the category of “Continuing Education” in Better Impact.

## **Other Archival Information**

Other archival information beyond individual records that is important to maintain includes any journals or minutes of project and management teams as well as scrapbook-type information that documents EMG events. This information provides invaluable guidance for future planning, outlining what has been tried before and what has worked most successfully. This type of information is extremely important in documenting EMG events and for presenting accomplishments to the community and the state. This information may be stored with Better Impact (contact their support team for more storage if needed) or in a VCE Google Drive created for EMG materials, resources, and documentation. Other appropriate archival information to maintain includes:

- Management Team Minutes
- Association/EMG Business Minutes: A copy of the minutes from meetings of the local EMG association or from any EMG-related planning or business meetings should be maintained in a file at the local VCE office.
- EMG Historical Pieces: EMG groups many times have photographs of events, newspaper clippings about their projects, program fliers, group recognition and awards, and other such materials.

## **Educational Program Records**

Part of the responsibility of volunteering as an EMG is data collection from educational programming. VCE personnel, such as agents and program technicians, should work with project team coordinators before the project or program is conducted to determine what types of data are necessary and feasible to collect and the manner or form in which the data should be collected. This data collection assists in preparing annual reports to justify and present the impact of VCE and EMG activities within the community.

This information is best gathered and most easily maintained by project, event, or ongoing program. Hence, the chairperson for each project, event, or ongoing program should oversee record completion and submission to the Evaluation and Reporting Team, as specified in the job description. The E&R Team should tally, summarize, and make this information available to agents and/ or technicians who are preparing annual VCE reports or other local reports as needed. Educational program records to be maintained include project proposal and authorization forms, project team journals, clientele participant records per event, even summaries VCE educational program plan, and pertinent release forms.

## **Project Proposal And Authorization Forms**

Project proposals and authorization forms should be created for all new projects and activities to insure compliance with VCE goals and credit for volunteer hours. Annual renewal forms may be helpful for continuing projects and activities. Completion of the form requires the signature of a VCE agent or other designated paid personnel, who, by signing the form, authorizes the event as a VCE activity. Before the proposal is authorized, the event must receive a project designation that corresponds to the appropriate VCE plan of work objective

that it satisfies. This designation is then used to incorporate the project in the VMS.

Projects and activities that are implemented without approval or completion of a Project Proposal and Authorization Form are not considered EMG activities and do not count as EMG volunteered time, as VCE was unaware of the event and could not approve it as appropriate. Unapproved events do not carry the liability shield of VCE/VT.

## **Clientele Participant Records Per Event**

Clientele data is necessary in order to determine the audience that different educational programs are serving. For example, an EMG conducting a plant clinic will collect certain pieces of data that document the impact of the EMG's actions and of the event itself, such as the number, ethnicity and age of participants during the event, the number and types of questions asked, the responses and recommendations made, and the problems encountered. This type of information is required by the USDA and should be specified by the agent supervising the work.

Volunteers are not required to report demographic information on program participants. However, In Better Impact, volunteers are required to report on the number of contacts they had during their programs/projects (direct or indirect). This information can be collected by the Agent or Coordinator at the end of the year for reporting. If Agents would like to record more detailed demographic information for their own reporting purposes, they should work with the EMG volunteers to determine the best way to collect and report that information. This information may not be needed for all programs that EMG work with, but rather ones that the Agent would like to highlight and share demographic information.

## **Reporting**

All of the records that EMGs are asked to keep will either support/document activities (an essential step in risk management) will be integrated into reports that are required of VCE staff and/or will enhance effectiveness/ efficiency of future programming. It is important to remember that EMGs are working with VCE faculty and staff to implement educational programs in the community. Part of the programming responsibility is reporting the outcome. While formal report writing is primarily a responsibility of VCE staff with programming responsibility, EMG volunteers should assist in the process by collecting the data specified under recordkeeping and punctually entering this information into the VMS. EMGs should also provide assistance and cooperation with local faculty and staff in completing final reports, such as through clarifying details and information about events, participants, or outcomes.

There are two types of reports that will be necessary for the local EMG volunteers. The first report is an individual volunteer report that covers individual hours, both service and training, that must be reported regularly to maintain status as an EMG and to receive state service awards when due. The second type of report is an impact and accomplishment report that tells the story of what EMGs collectively accomplished against the VCE plan of work. These reports are separate, but both reports utilize Better Impact to manage the information necessary for report preparation. These are both handled through reporting under the HOURS tab in Better Impact. To capture additional information from volunteers reporting hours, you can add Feedback Fields to the activity.

## **Volunteer Reports**

Each EMG has a responsibility to maintain and submit accurate volunteer time records. This information is entered into Better Impact. Individual information is then synthesized to meet the reporting needs of the local and state-level management office for the VCE Master Gardeners. The State EMG Coordinator must have a current, accurate list of EMGs and their status (including training, re-enrollment, and annual volunteer service) for sending the InSeason newsletter, for VT/ VCE liability insurance purposes, records of state-level recognition and awards for each individual, and for end- of-year tallies of the accomplishments of EMG groups throughout the state. This information is used to seek additional grant funding for resource development and to market the EMG volunteer effort. Hence, all of the local archival information that is gathered at the local level and input into Better Impact keeps all of the necessary information at the State Master Gardener Coordinator's fingertips and reduces the pressure and stress of data collection and report preparation for EMGs, local coordinators, VCE agents, and other personnel.

## **Better Impact Resources**

Better Impact has a great database of resources. You can access that by searching the top bar of your Better Impact administrator page. Questions that can't be answered there can be directed to the Better Impact support team. You can reach them through the green text bubble at the bottom right corner of your administrator screen. Their team replies quickly and answers will be sent both in Better Impact and to the email address associated with your account.

## **Volunteer Record Retention**

Volunteer records should be retained for 5 years beyond termination of involvement. All unit offices should maintain up to date records in their civil rights files as needed (see Appendix for required annual reporting forms). If online copies are kept instead of paper copies, they should be easily accessible and maintained in a secure filing system. These records may be requested during Civil Rights audits of local offices.

# **Chapter 9: Managing Resources**

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## **Introduction**

EMGs do not need a large amount of money to be effective or to accomplish their goals. However, certain projects or activities require money handling, for instance to purchase materials or resources for classes. These activities will require channeling money through a checking account.

## **Checking Accounts**

Each Extension Office has a checking account that can be used for limited transactions. For



instance, fees collected for training EMGs (supply fees) can be deposited and invoices paid out of the Extension account. However, this account is restricted and can not be used for transactions related to associations for example, money collected from association fundraisers, association dues, etc. To handle these other funds, an EMG association should set up an account at a local financial institution for managing transactions. The association account must be managed responsibly, but will provide more flexible transactions. No VCE employee may sign checks, reconcile bank statements, or have anything to do with those volunteer accounts, even if they are EMG volunteers themselves on the side. Funds placed in the volunteer account or drawn out must be the volunteer-held funds and not confused with funds/payments intended for the VCE unit Extension office. In fact, to distinguish the two accounts there must be an address other than the VCE office as the address of record.

## **Planning the Local Budget**

EMG volunteers will need basic supplies and facilities to operate. The following categories suggest where most expenses are incurred.

### **Printing**

Some assistance may be available from the local Extension office or local government. It includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Recruitment brochures, flyers, posters, etc.
- Program forms, volunteer applications, and materials
- Recognition certificates
- Informational publications, such as brochures, presentation handouts, etc.

### **Supplies and materials**

Supplies are generally consumable goods that are needed not only for the volunteer office, but also for the volunteer activities in the community. All supply costs rise as volunteers come on board and begin increasing the amount of work produced.

#### **General Office**

Pens, pencils, note pads, film for project documentation, computer paper, printer cartridges, name tags, message pads, etc. These are likely available through the Extension office.

#### **Field**

Fertilizers, plants, potting soil, gloves, plant tags, stakes, wires, etc.

Hand tools, such as pruners, loppers, shovels, mulch forks; watering equipment; tractors; tree spade; dump trucks; pick-up trucks; etc.

### **Training**

Training expenses may include those for speakers to present to local EMGs (new training classes or continuing education classes) or the cost of registration for EMGs to attend training in other locations (such as EMG College).

*Further training and education to keep abreast of the latest horticulture and volunteer management information*

- Journal subscriptions
- Related books
- Registration fees for workshops and conferences on volunteer management and horticulture for volunteers
- Travel costs

#### *Honoraria and recognition*

- Speaker requiring an honorarium for making a presentation
- Costs of recognition “gifts” (optional) and events
- Cost of annual thank you letter/certificate for volunteers

## **Travel**

Some costs for travel may be necessary for training, presentations, or other reasons. The resource list may need to include airfare, ground travel, food, and/ or lodging.

## **Maintenance Costs**

Equipment repairs and rentals and other maintenance costs will need to be built into the budget.

## **Contractual and direct services:**

- Advertisements
- Sites (for meetings, demonstrations, field days, etc.)

## **A Budget Planning Sheet**

In order to plan a budget, the local group must decide on its spending priorities. The Resource Development team should work with the local EMGs to develop this information. Start with a list of activities planned for the year, and outline the materials the group will need. If the group has decided to purchase or improve local resources, these items should be included in this list. A miscellaneous category should also be planned, since the group will likely encounter unplanned expenses and/or cost overruns. Ultimately, this list will give the baseline amount of money that the EMG group needs to meet its goals for the year.

Now that the Resource Development team understands what will be needed for the year, a plan can be made to meet those needs. First, balance the expenses with resources currently available. This includes resources/materials provided by the VCE office, tools currently available and anything provided at present. When the bottom line of cost coverings meets the cost expenditures, the “budget” is planned. Most likely, the resources available will not meet the planned expenses, and a plan for covering the difference must be made.

Resource development and fundraising are two common means of obtaining the resources necessary for conducting EMG activities. It is the job of the Resource Development team to determine the methods (resource development or fundraising) used to meet costs. The following sections on resource development and fundraising will assist in completing the balanced budget.

## Developing Resources

The EMGs will need materials to carry out various projects and operational duties that would ordinarily be purchased outright, but can be supplied through in-kind contributions. These contributions reduce the amount of actual program funding (dollars) needed and provide opportunity for community involvement in the programming. Office supplies, advertising, plant materials, tools, or other “stuff” necessary to achieve program goals can be solicited by the Resource Development Team from groups or businesses within the community.

Networking lessens the difficulty of locating materials that will be needed and sets up a system for supply. Remember that to develop resources, it is not necessarily what someone knows, but who someone knows, and EMGs are a primary resource. Involve all EMGs in the resource development process by viewing them as a springboard into the community and encourage networking. Remember to also look within the EMG group. The association newsletter could run a “wish list” for each issue so that members are always abreast of resource needs and can determine if they have anything to offer.

## Supplies and Services

The EMGs will need other supplies or program support services in addition to equipment and visibility. Consider as sources of supplies and services all businesses and agencies within the local community, not just those that are horticulture related. Businesses are often willing to support parts of a project by providing supplies or services, especially if they can receive public attention from the visibility of EMG group activities. It is important to be thorough in developing support services and supplies through in-kind contributions and be careful to not offend potential or present contributors because EMG needs will grow as the organization and program does.

## Raising Funds for EMG Programs

In-kind contributions may not satisfy all of the needs of the EMG volunteers, so actual dollars may need to be raised through sales, fees, monetary gifts, and grant awards. Funds should be raised to cover specific expenses or projects. The Resource Development team should determine whether or not sales and fees are appropriate. They should decide if an event should have an entrance fee or if a service or product of the group is being sold to raise money for a reason.

Monetary gifts may be solicited much like in-kind contributions would be. Grant awards specifically for non-profit organizations like EMG associations, are available from many external sources, such as foundations, corporations, associations, and other organizations, whose applications involve the completion of proposal packages carefully written to the source's specifications that satisfy their goals as well as those of the local EMGs. *Never solicit money or in-kind contributions without your Agent's knowledge.* Locate a funding source whose goals nearly match the goals and ideas of the local EMG group. Be sure to find out whether the recipient of funds must have recognized nonprofit status. Be sure to research the funder and know what proposals they typically fund. Obtain the funder's proposal form (if applicable) or guidelines, determine if the EMG can accept money from the foundation or if a partner is needed to handle the money, prepare the proposal, have objective individuals review it, and submit it within the deadline. Regardless of the source, be sure to thank the

funder appropriately and punctually and fulfill all obligations.

## **Soliciting Contributions**

Almost 80 percent of money given to nonprofits comes from private individuals who make contributions, while foundations give only seven percent. Consider contributions, monetary and in-kind, as a substantial source of support for EMG activities. When asking for contributions, remember these tips:

- Ask for contributions for a specific EMG activity or project. People will respond more generously when they know they are giving to other people who have a specific plan they are requesting funds for, rather than requesting for an institution or “general support.”
- Consider supplying a list of needs with costs for donors to choose from.
- Do some research about the organization, business, or person who is being solicited.
- Be sure to contact the right person.
- Ask for a specific amount, within reason for the contributing party. If appropriate, specifically list what a person’s contribution will be used to purchase.
- Make a personal visit (face to face contact) to make the request. They are more often funded.
- Keep donors informed of EMG and community progress, and be sure to uphold any conditions of funding (such as final reports, etc.).
- Be sure to thank contributors, regardless of the contribution size.

## **Locating Grant Sources**

Grant sources are cataloged, listed, and organized in hundreds of databases according to interest areas, types of funders, and other classifications. Most grants should be submitted through VCE under the direction of Extension Agents with collaboration by EMGs; however, some grants can only be obtained by local community nonprofit organizations and thus it is appropriate for EMG associations to apply for these grants.

## **Delegate Responsibility**

Once a budget has been outlined, a plan must be made for meeting these resource needs and delegating responsibility. If participant fees have been decided upon for events, then set payment schedules so that supplies can be ordered. If plant materials are needed for a 4-H garden project with the local elementary school, then find a volunteer willing to solicit plant material donations.

The image of the local EMG volunteers as educators and contributors to the well-being of the community will greatly influence the success of resource development endeavors. Large public interest will make the process easier; likewise, if the public is not informed of the EMG educational programming and community interest, then community groups will be less likely to support EMG efforts.

# Chapter 10: EMG Associations

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## Introduction

EMG associations provide an opportunity to promote the fellowship that EMGs need and enjoy, while also providing a volunteer organizational structure that develops leadership skills and facilitates EMG volunteer management.

EMG associations provide organization and strength to an otherwise amorphous group of people with commonalities. They provide a structure for distributing responsibility, authority, and distinction with a means of rotation through elections and terms. Titles of association offices are also recognized and more official than loose descriptions or individual identities. Local associations provide continuity for the group of EMGs who have completed their initial training and internships, bringing individuals together to advance personal roles and take responsibilities. EMG associations provide a more official way to delegate responsibility and to recognize authority. It is easier to move forward with structured relationships.

Not all EMG groups form associations. They are able to do so if the group is well organized and each individual is well informed of their responsibilities. Information flows through a routine channel, and volunteers and VCE staff need to be kept informed of events and obligations.

*Appropriate activities for an association are recreational and social exchange among members; professional development by conducting educational programs for members; and activities to make it possible for members to better reach their goals (for example grants/fundraising for attending educational events or for establishing EMG educational programs). EMG associations do not sponsor public horticulture education events, but rather they educate the public about VCE and EMGs and provide management structure to facilitate VCE educational programming. Additionally, new EMGs are trained through VCE. Members of Associations often coordinate and participate in training of new EMGs but in doing so, they are serving in their role as an EMG not as a member of an association.*

## Association Structure

### Types of Associations

There are several types of associations that EMGs can form, with each type having specific rules and methods to organizing and functioning legally. The group's goals and purposes determine the necessary degree of organization. EMG groups generally choose informal associations with elected officers, bylaws, and standing rules, and no corporate status or tax-exempt recognition. This structure enables delegation and rotation of responsibility for EMG management. A few groups, however, conduct extensive community programs and handle many types of funds in large amounts (in excess of \$5,000 annually). These types of groups need to consider the structure and function of an incorporated association and should seek tax-exempt status. Generally, the more advanced the activities of the

association, the more formal the structure necessary.

Regardless of degree of structure, EMG associations are generally nonprofit, a status that has certain distinctions. Be aware that being a nonprofit group does not preclude the group from raising money or making a “profit.” It means that the group uses money made or raised to support the charitable activities that are the purpose of the group’s existence, rather than benefiting the members or officers of the group personally. This does not mean funds cannot be spent on members. For example, funds can be used to provide training for members such as paying members’ expenses to attend continuing education or EMG College, which will in turn add to the delivery of educational programs to the public.

## **Establishing a Board of Directors**

The local association will need a board of directors to provide leadership and make decisions. Appropriate individuals, such as those with professional experience or strong leadership skills, should be identified and initially asked to serve as part of the board. The association’s bylaws should specify establishment, length of service, composition, powers, and special rules pertaining to the board of directors. The board of directors may also serve as officers (the term “officers” generally includes directors).

Effective boardsmanship is an art as well as a science. It requires that members be skilled in interpersonal relationships and have a clear understanding of the organization’s mission. It also requires that members possess a realistic appreciation for what is desirable, possible, and fair for all.

Primarily, a board is concerned with formulating “board-level” decisions (i.e., decisions pertaining to broad developmental-level courses of action, rather than decisions concerning the means for carrying out a specific course of action). Its individual members cannot speak for it, but the collective decisions of its members determine the organization’s overall course of action. The board governs the activities or management of an organization. The board is legally responsible for the operation, business, and management of the body it represents. Final authority on all matters affecting an EMG association rests with this board.

## **Articles and Bylaws**

Articles of incorporation are basically a declaration or promise to society covering the organization’s aims and intent in incorporating. To receive tax-exemption from the IRS, the organization’s goals must fit into one of the IRS categories of public benefit and its setup and management must be appropriately accountable. These are not to be changed.

Bylaws are designed to regulate how the organization will be run internally. They may include some of the same provisions as the articles (name, purpose, members, officers and directors, disposal of assets in case of dissolution), but will also give details on how officers are elected, terms of office, meetings, dues or other criteria for membership, criteria for making changes to the bylaws and other procedural rules

The relationship to VCE, local coordinators, and agents should be included in association by laws.



## **Liability As Impacted by Association Status**

It is important to remember that the status of local associations can affect liability coverage for EMG events. VCE/VT extends liability coverage to representatives of the university in conducting business related to/ on behalf of the university. This includes coverage of EMGs volunteering on behalf of VCE, under the Commonwealth of Virginia self-insurance program, as authorized by [Section 2.1-526.8](#) of the Code of Virginia. This insurance program covers employees and volunteers while participating in EMG activities approved by Extension personnel for cases of negligence or liability only (does not cover criminal charges). Any medical problem, however, arising from volunteer work for VCE/ VT is the individual EMG's responsibility through their own personal health care coverage. The VCE/VT liability policy does not provide coverage for activities conducted on behalf of an incorporated EMG association (or an association that has become so organized that it is legally viewed as an organization that is separate from the university) for those activities that do not support the mission and goals of VCE/VT, such as a picnic or pleasure trip. Questions regarding VCE/VT liability coverage should be directed to the Office of Risk Management at Virginia Tech (540-231-7439).

## **Financial Flexibility**

A strong reason for local EMG associations is financial flexibility, however incorporation is not required for banking or fundraising on a limited level. An EMG group does not need a large amount of money to be effective or to accomplish its goals.

However, certain projects require money handling such as to purchase materials or resources. These activities require channeling money through a checking account. Extension budgets often cannot provide even small amounts of money necessary for limited projects and EMGs should work closely with their Volunteer Coordinator or Agent to ensure proper funds handling and tracking.

Formation of a local EMG association allows for convenient management of funds for conducting EMG and EMG Association educational programs. An association, regardless of corporation and tax-exempt status, is eligible to apply for an Employer Identification Number (EIN) and set up an account at a local financial institute. Proper account establishment, accurate record keeping, and careful management of funds can allow an EMG group to do many things with relatively small amounts of money. An association would be free to raise the money needed by whatever appropriate means association members selected, such as plant sales, and accepting donations to the association for speaking engagements and plant clinics (EMGs can not charge speaking fees for VCE programs but can take donations). Monies raised could then be deposited to the local association account for conducting appropriate and authorized activities.

## **Memorandum of Understanding**

Newly established associations need to have a memorandum of understanding (MOU) on file with Virginia Cooperative Extension. Please contact the State Office for more information.

## **Organization within the Association**

If the association is developed as a partnership with the local coordinator and all or most

EMGs belong, then the association leadership may also serve in the leadership roles of the local programming teams. They may share the basic responsibilities or condense additional responsibilities. For example, the association secretary may be in charge of the minutes for the association, but might use their writing and organizational skills to also serve as the head of the public relations team. Although the sharing of roles may be confusing, keep in mind the associations' duties include activities that support education of members and educate the public about EMGs while EMG activities include all activities that contribute to educational programs for the public.

The association also determines, through bylaws, the length of term and the means of rotating team members and chairs.

## Membership

No matter how great and wonderful the association, there will be a few EMGs who will decline membership if given the option. **Association membership cannot be a requirement for volunteer involvement with EMGs.** The local coordinator should make sure to inform the entire EMG group, regardless of association membership, of volunteer and training opportunities. It is also each individual EMG's responsibility to stay informed and meet the requirements for their roles as an EMG volunteer.

## Membership Fees and Benefits

Associations usually have membership fees associated with them. Many volunteers will ask, "What will the association do for me?" The correct question is "What can I contribute to the association to gain the greatest benefits for myself, the causes of the association, and the other members?" EMGs should think of the association membership fee as an investment to accomplish such goals as to receive timely information, to bring a particular speaker to the next monthly meeting, or to underwrite trips to EMG College. Being involved in the responsibilities of the association keeps individuals interested and gives them the opportunity to change or enhance current projects and plans. The structure of the association automatically distributes responsibilities to different people over time through elections, offices, and teams.

When the association membership fees are asked of members, the fee should be explained in terms of the items that the fee supports. Tangible items, such as newsletters, t-shirts, etc., should be listed along with the intangibles, such as credibility, recognition, a voice, etc.

## Developing and Practicing Effective Communication

MG associations greatly facilitate communication among EMGs by establishing channels for certain types of information and providing a structure for information dissemination.

### Newsletters

Generally, associations publish a monthly or quarterly newsletter for members. The purpose of the newsletter is to keep EMGs informed of events going on in conjunction with the local group. The newsletter should include updates on teamwork, projects, re-enrollment opportunities, a calendar of events, notes recognizing individual contributions, and other details. Horticulture information is sometimes included in this newsletter for the general

interest of members, although there are better forums for this information. Newsletters are most easily sent by email through online newsletter services or PDF.

### **Association Meetings**

An association will have many types of meetings, such as for business, education, or socializing, or may make meetings a little of each. A schedule of meetings for the association should be determined, explained (whether social, educational, business, etc.), and advertised through the local newsletter and/or email. Some groups prefer to set the association meetings on a regular basis that can be specified in the bylaws. Members should be well informed of meeting dates. Meetings should be well organized and not waste the time of participants.

The executive board should meet regularly with the local coordinator to discuss planning, scheduling, and project progress.

## **Handling Funds as an Association**

Funds should be handled in an appropriate and systematic manner. The association should establish written guidelines and procedures based on local needs and circumstances.

### **Types of Accounts**

Most EMG associations have a simple checking account with whatever bank is offering the best deal. Features such as no minimum balance are a plus, especially if the group has a small budget. For larger accounts, EMG associations should consider interest-bearing checking accounts and other sorts of low-risk investments.

### **Who Should Sign Checks?**

It is recommended that two or three individuals be approved signers for the account to avoid the frustration of not being able to get reimbursed or purchase materials because only one person can sign the checks. The names and signatures of chosen individuals should appear on the account's signature card at the bank. The local group should decide whether or not the local volunteer coordinator, association president, and/or association treasurer should be approved signers on the account. Authorized individuals should be rotated with the election of new officers to avoid placing undue financial responsibility on any one person. The account's signature card can easily be changed at the bank following association elections. Checks written for over a specified large amount should require two signatures on the check. For extra security, groups may want all checks to require two signatures.

No VCE employee may sign checks, reconcile bank statements, or have anything to do with those volunteer accounts, even if they are EMG volunteers themselves on the side. Funds placed in the volunteer account or drawn out must be the volunteer-held funds and not confused with funds/payments intended for the VCE unit Extension office. In fact, to distinguish the two accounts there must be an address other than the VCE office as the address of record.

The association's officers or executive board should decide how they want to oversee these

accounts (i.e., periodic reviews or audits to ensure proper use of the funds or establish any written procedures). Not having any oversight does not appear to be a problem until something goes wrong. The EMG organization could be implicated or somehow blamed if there was ever any unorthodox use of the accounts and the board had no provisions for checks and balances. It is critical that everything be DOCUMENTED. The public is very intolerant of undocumented funds handling by volunteer groups. An annual review by a trained and objective individual (someone that is not a member of the association) is recommended.

## **Establishing an EIN**

In order for the EMG association to set up a checking account, the group must first have an Employer Identification Number (EIN) from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). Clubs or other nonprofit organizations that generate funds and wish to keep them in a checking account for security and accounting purposes need to establish an EIN with the IRS. The application is done with the completed Form SS-4 (includes instruction) obtainable from the IRS. Neither incorporation nor a fee is required to obtain an EIN. The EIN number should be returned within a month of application. ESTABLISHMENT OF AN EIN DOES NOT CONFER TAX- EXEMPT STATUS.

MG Associations cannot use the VT/VSU federal tax identification number or tax-exempt status, and they cannot use 4-H accounts or status. The Virginia Master Gardener Association does not serve as an affiliated, “umbrella” organization to local associations, so it cannot confer its tax-exempt status to other EMG associations. EMG groups must apply for their own EIN numbers and establish their own accounts.

## **Obtaining Tax Exempt Status**

Nonprofit organizations, such as EMG associations, are exempt automatically and do not have to file Form 1023 with the IRS if they do not exceed \$5,000 in gross receipts each taxable year . This, however, is not a formal recognition of nonprofit status. In order to assure contributors that their contributions will be tax-deductible, the organization will have to file for tax-exempt status recognition with the IRS. Incorporation of the organization is considered a first step for proceeding with tax- exempt status (this status is often referred to as a 501 (c)(3)).

**Horticultural programs are conducted by EMGs for the public under the auspices of VCE, not EMG associations. If you wear the association “hat” rather than the VCE then you may jeopardize your liability.**

If official IRS recognition of the group’s tax-exempt status is desired, begin by reading IRS Publication 557, [Tax-Exempt Status for Your Organization](#). It is necessary to file [Form 1023](#) “Application for Recognition of Exemption” and [Form 8718](#), “User Fee.” This is necessary to obtain certain benefits, such as public recognition of tax-exempt status, exemption from certain state taxes, advance assurance to donors of deductibility of contributions, exemption from certain federal excise taxes, nonprofit mailing privilege, etc.

In order to complete the application for tax-exempt status, a listing must be provided of the group’s income and expenditures for the past four years. If the group has just been established, a proposed budget for two years should be provided in place of the income and expenditures. The group must be able to demonstrate public financial support in some form, via donations, grants, in-kind support, and the dues paid by members. The group must also

demonstrate that group funds are not spent only on benefits for members, but are applied to activities that benefit the public and are part of the group's goals and purposes of existence. The IRS must be provided with a copy of the articles of incorporation, the bylaws, and a copy of the certificate of incorporation. All of this material is mailed with a check for \$150 to the IRS. A response should come within six to nine months, or the group will be alerted to any problems or omissions from the application. Be sure to keep a copy of all submissions.

## **Follow up to a Successful Application**

If the EMG association is a newly formed group, the IRS sometimes issues an interim approval for 501 (c)(3) applications and requires submission of income tax forms for several years in a row (this does not require the organization to pay taxes, however). If all is in order, a final approval will be issued after the IRS is satisfied that the group is performing as advertised. No annual fees are required by the IRS to maintain status. The letter of approval may be copied and distributed to foundations, groups or individuals from whom support is sought so that they will know their gifts are tax deductible.

## **Fundraising**

An association is free to raise the money needed by whatever appropriate means association members select, such as plant sales, and accepting donations to the association for speaking engagements and plant clinics. Monies raised could then be deposited in the local association account for conducting appropriate and authorized activities. Common fundraisers include:

### **Silent Auctions**

Silent auctions of donated plant and gardening related merchandise are fun events that draw lots of participation and can make large amounts of money. They take a bit of time to organize since they involve soliciting items; stocking, organizing, and pricing items prior to the sale; and then follow up to thank the contributors.

### **Plant Sales**

Plant sales where plants have been grown by EMGs, divided from their personal stock, or acquired through donations, have raised nice amounts of money. If plants are to be grown or solicited, considerable advanced planning must occur, and a rain date should be scheduled for the actual event. Plant sales offer an excellent opportunity to combine teaching with fundraising as community groups can be involved in the growing of plants (they usually also receive a small portion of the proceeds) and/or plant clinics can be held in conjunction with the plant sale as an extra incentive for the public to come out and participate.

While it is not appropriate for EMGs to charge for their services or to receive personal monetary compensation for work done as an EMG, it is certainly permissible to accept contributions made to the local association, such as for a speaking engagement or staffing a large event. For example, EMG groups in the past have successfully arranged donations to their associations in return for conducting plant clinics at retail locations. Such contributions should be made payable to the EMG association and deposited into the association checking account.

## Virginia Master Gardener Association, Inc.

In addition to local associations throughout the state, a state-level association also exists to serve EMGs in Virginia. As the number of EMGs grew, many volunteers felt the need for an organization that could provide continuing education, communication, and social interaction with other volunteers on a statewide basis. In the winter of 1988, an advisory board consisting of EMGs and Extension agents, was appointed to investigate the formation of such an organization. After a year of study, the advisory board recommended that a state EMG association be formed.

In 1990, the Virginia EMG Association was incorporated. By 1993, it had achieved status as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, tax-exempt, non-stock corporation, with a mission “to foster communication, education and fellowship among those involved in the Virginia Cooperative Extension EMG Program and to support and promote the Program.”

The VMGA is not a parent or umbrella organization that governs or directs the local associations. Rather it is a separate entity developed to support local associations and to provide statewide leadership and networking opportunities.

Membership is open to all EMGs, whether trainees, interns, or active or emeritus volunteers, and to Extension employees. Annual dues are required, and a lifetime membership is available.

The Association is governed by a board, consisting of a President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, immediate past President, and Chairs of all standing committees. A list of current officers and contacts can be found [here](#).

Members of VMGA within local units or groups of units that train together select a representative who attends state meetings and serves as the link to local EMGs by reporting activities of their units and keeping their units advised of activities around the state.

The Virginia MG Association sponsors continuing education programs for EMGs during the year at various locations throughout the state. It staffs a horticulture booth at the State Fair. It offers programming suggestions for the EMG College and, in general, serves as an informal advisory group for the state EMG effort. Through its bimonthly newsletter, information about programming and activities is shared among the many local groups. A communications network has been set up to provide time-urgent information sharing and to publicize activities. The Association expands and strengthens the EMG groups by offering assistance to units when they need support in setting up local associations and fundraising.



# Appendix

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*If any of the links provided below are broken, incorrect, or out of date or if you do not have the password for the Coordinator section of the website, please contact the State Coordinator.*

## Forms

**Accident/Incident Report Form:** [Click here](#)

**Background Screening (Sterling) Request Form:**

- [Request for Background Screening - Sterling Volunteers.pdf](#) or <https://mastergardener.ext.vt.edu/forms/> “Background Checks”
- To be used for those who do not want to enter their information online. Sterling prefers they work directly with the representative handling VCE checks by calling her. Number is located on the form.

**Certificate of Insurance:** <https://risk.controller.vt.edu/vi/generalliability.html>

**Civil Rights Compliance of VCE Volunteer Organizations and Clubs:**

- [VCE form #490-156](#)
- Completed annually

**Contacts Reporting:** [VCE Contacts Reporting.pdf](#)

**EMG Enrollment:**

- Initial enrollment (trainee/intern): [EMG Trainee.Intern Volunteer Agreement.docx](#)
- Annual Re-enrollment (active EMG, calendar year): preferably completed through Better Impact, paper copy: [EMG Active Volunteer Agreement.docx](#)
- Enrollment includes:
  - Volunteer Agreement
  - Standards of Conduct
  - Contact information confirmation
  - Voluntary disclosure of criminal convictions

**Emergency Procedures Card:**

- <https://intra.ext.vt.edu/support/volunteer/documents/EmergencyProceduresCard490-10110up.pdf> or <https://mastergardener.ext.vt.edu/forms/> “Risk Management Documents”

**Equal Access Assurance:**

- Completed when establishing new partnerships

- [Equal Access Assurance Administrative Guideline Oct 2018.pdf](#)

#### **Evaluation Forms:**

- Training Evaluation: [EMG Training Evaluation template.docx](#)
- Training Speaker Evaluation: [Training Speaker Evaluation Form.docx](#)

#### **Learning Groups Log:**

- [VCE form #490-153](#)
- Completed annually

#### **Mailing List Log:**

- [VCE form #490-155](#)
- Completed annually

#### **Media Release Form:**

- Volunteers complete through Better Impact (Additional Information section)
- Non-volunteers if pictures are being taken, filed in office
- <https://www.communications.cals.vt.edu/resources/media-release.html>

**Project Proposal and Authorization Form:** [Click here](#)

## **Other Links & Resources**

#### **Background Screening with Sterling:**

- Paper form and information for contacting our Sterling representative: [Request for Background Screening – Sterling Volunteers- updated 2-18-22.pdf](#)
- Frequently Asked Questions about Sterling process: [Sterling Volunteer Screenings FAQ](#)
- Sterling explanation from EMG State Office: [Sterling explanation – updated 2-18-22.pdf](#)

#### **Better Impact:**

- Better Impact Administrator Training: [https://video.vt.edu/media/Better+Impact+Training+-+Admin/1\\_2w1vw8pa](https://video.vt.edu/media/Better+Impact+Training+-+Admin/1_2w1vw8pa)
- BI Volunteer Training: <https://bit.ly/382ni2h>
- BI Reporting Training for Admins: [https://video.vt.edu/media/Kathleen+Reed%27s+Zoom+Meeting/1\\_im61qagb](https://video.vt.edu/media/Kathleen+Reed%27s+Zoom+Meeting/1_im61qagb)

- Better Impact Frequently Asked Questions: [Better Impact FAQs.docx](#)
- Better Impact Guide for Applications: <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1Zn-0XdXznPpi0AZPILeqmuan5hPfrH5b>

### **Biweekly Update Submission:**

- <https://mastergardener.ext.vt.edu/biweekly-submission/>

### **Contract Information**

- VCE has moved to an online submission process to get contracts signed by the Director
- To submit: <https://vce.submittable.com/submit>
- Contract information on the Intranet: <https://sites.google.com/view/extintranet/policies>

### **EMG Handbooks:**

- Tree Steward Handbook: <https://pressbooks.lib.vt.edu/treesteward/>
- Land Care Steward Handbook: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1f6209DDnXijvNuuWrJ9mB7Aee2N0pDzm/view?usp=sharing>
- Water Steward Handbook: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1www-0V1XKWctzfUk43MrYwDUO5RrY-js/view?usp=sharing>
- Virginia Master Gardener Training Handbook: current PDF version available for download in the Better Impact document library. To purchase hard copies: [storefront.ext.vt.edu](https://storefront.ext.vt.edu) "Program Fee EMG Handbook" or "Program Fee EMG Handbook (no binder)." If you choose the no binder option, binders will need to be provided by your office through another supplier.
- 2022 Home Grounds and Animals Pest Management Guide: <https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/456/456-018/456-018.html>

### **EMG Webpage:**

- Volunteer/main page: <https://mastergardener.ext.vt.edu/>
- Coordinator/Agent side: <https://mastergardener.ext.vt.edu/coordinator-resources/>
  - Password: contact State Coordinator

### **Ordering:**

- Blank name tags for trainees/interns: <https://mastergardener.ext.vt.edu/name-tags/>
- Certificates and Emeritus pins: <https://mastergardener.ext.vt.edu/order/order-certificates/>
- Name tags for active EMGs (post-internship): <https://sites.google.com/view/extintranet/marketing>

**Pesticide Policy:**

- [VCE Pesticide Policy Statement #93-001\\_revised2020.pdf](#) or <https://mastergardener.ext.vt.edu/forms/> “Volunteer Policies”

**Program Fee Guide:**

- <https://mastergardener.ext.vt.edu/forms/> “Program Fee” or [EMG Program Fee Guide \(updated 3.2022\).pdf](#)

**Trainings for Volunteers:**

- Required every three years
- Risk Management: [Risk Management for VCE MG Volunteers.ppt](#) or <https://mastergardener.ext.vt.edu/forms/> under “Risk Management”
- Civil Rights: [https://video.vt.edu/media/Civil+Rights+Responsibilities+of+Virginia+Cooperative+Extension+Volunteers/1\\_60c1v7ky](https://video.vt.edu/media/Civil+Rights+Responsibilities+of+Virginia+Cooperative+Extension+Volunteers/1_60c1v7ky)

**VCE Intranet:** <https://sites.google.com/view/extintranet/home>

- Policies: <https://sites.google.com/view/extintranet/policies>
- Volunteer screening: <https://sites.google.com/view/extintranet/reports-and-plans/planning>