

Texas Master Gardener Management Guide



Revised December 2023

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Glossary

Charter - a document incorporating an institution and specifying its rights; includes the certificate and articles of incorporation.

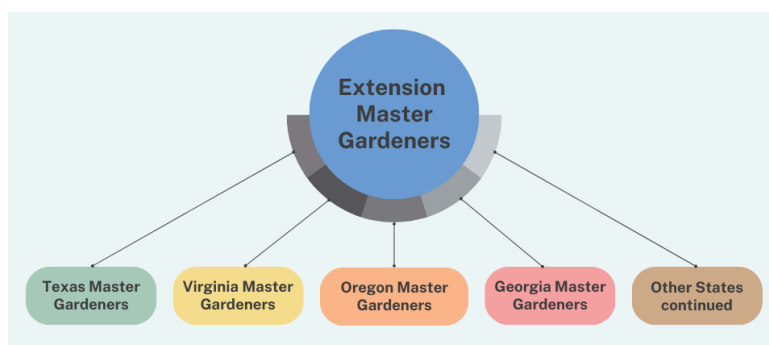
County Extension Agent (CEA) - employed by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service

County Master Gardener Associations - There is a distinction between being a volunteer with the Texas Master Gardener program, being a member of a county Master Gardener Association, and the Texas Master Gardener Association. Each is explained in this document in the appropriate section. County Master Gardener Associations' primary focus is the internal education of its members, providing social connections, and fundraising in support of the Extension Master Gardener program.

County Master Gardener Coordinator - The EMG program is administered through Texas A&M AgriLife County Extension Agents or a staff member, who is the responsible party for the local Master Gardener program.

Earth-Kind® Landscaping (EK) - uses research-proven techniques to provide maximum garden and landscape enjoyment while preserving and protecting the environment. The objective of Earth-Kind® Landscaping is to combine the best of organic and traditional gardening and landscaping principles to create a horticultural system based on real world effectiveness and environmental responsibility.

Extension Master Gardener (EMG) - volunteers who have been trained and provide horticulture education and service on behalf of the Extension service in their state. The difference in terms of Extension Master Gardener and Texas Master Gardener is in who we serve vs. where we serve. Often these terms are interchangeable.



Junior Master Gardener (JMG) - The JMG program is the international youth gardening program of the university cooperative Extension network. It is the primary source of youth gardening education for Texas Master Gardeners.

Master Gardener Coordinator - an employee of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension whose role is to oversee the Extension Master Gardener program within a county with direct oversight by the CEA. May also be called Master Gardener Volunteer Coordinator.

State Master Gardener Coordinator - the person at Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service with oversight to all county programs; provides resources to CEA's and Master Gardener Coordinators.

Status - refers to the current standing of an Extension Master Gardener as recognized by the Texas Master Gardener Program. Following this standardized list will ensure consistency and accuracy in reporting across the state. Deviations may be considered acceptable at the county level but cannot be reflected in the VMS system. It is essential to maintain uniformity in reporting to ensure the integrity and comparability of the data collected.

- *Intern* - one who is currently completing the instruction and examination phases and those serving volunteer hours towards certification.
- *Certified* - one who is in good standing, active and continues to work toward annual recertification.
- *Honorary* - bestowed to philanthropists, politicians, celebrities, and spouses of certified Extension Master Gardeners. They have not taken the training or been certified and may not use the title Texas Master Gardener. They do not record hours.
- *Emeritus(a)* - an honorary title for distinguished service of a retired Extension Master Gardener. Must be nominated, approved, and submitted to the State program office. Distinguished service means that a volunteer is acknowledged and admired for excellence in the county. They may no longer serve as volunteers or record hours. For additional clarification, please see the [Emeritus](#) portion below.
- *Retired* - an individual who has served a minimum of five years and chooses not to retain certification through the requirements established by State and County guidelines. They may attend Association meetings and events but may not volunteer.
- *Released* - Extension Master Gardeners and Interns who have left the program permanently but have recorded hours. This is an archive status. This could refer to someone that has been asked to leave the program, but generally it would refer to someone who has passed away or indicated they are leaving with no intention of returning to the program e.g.) moving to another county or state, or no longer interested in continuing to serve. They should be removed from the roster.
- *Leave of Absence* - a specified length of time approved by the Agent. Request and approval must occur prior to the absence. There may be requirements to return to active service. If a volunteer does not return to service on the agreed date and has not asked for an extension (and

- received approval) for the LOA, then they should be marked Inactive. After 1 year they should be moved to Released or Retired.
- ***Realigning*** - a volunteer is returning from an approved Leave of Absence and must complete additional requirements set by the agent to regain certification. During this period, the volunteer should be marked as Realigning, which allows them to record the hours needed to return to good standing. Once those requirements are fulfilled, their status can be updated to Certified. (added March 30, 2026)
 - ***Inactive*** - a volunteer who has discontinued the program and/or has stopped serving and recording hours. This is an interim status for someone that is not showing up anymore and you are not sure of their intent. If a volunteer does not meet recertification requirements in a given year, they should be moved to Inactive. After 1 year they should be moved to Released or if they have 5 years served, to Retired.

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service - a unique education agency that provides programs, tools and resources on a local and statewide level which teach people improved agriculture and food production, advanced health practices, environmental protection, economic and youth programs.

Texas Master Gardener - volunteers who have been trained and provide horticulture education and service on behalf of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension.

Texas Master Gardener Association - The Texas Master Gardener Association is a corporation that is made up of county Master Gardener Associations to assist local associations by pooling resources and sharing educational opportunities internally. There is a distinction between being a volunteer with the Texas Master Gardener program, being a member of a county Master Gardener Association, and the Texas Master Gardener Association. Each is explained in this document in the appropriate section.

Texas Master Gardener Program - The Texas Master Gardener Program is the outward education that volunteers provide to local communities on behalf of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension. There is a distinction between being a volunteer with the Texas Master Gardener program, being a member of a county Master Gardener Association, and the Texas Master Gardener Association. Each is explained in this document in the appropriate section.

Volunteer Coordinator - a volunteer who oversees a project or activity. May also be called project manager, or committee chair.

Volunteer Management System (VMS) - The mandatory Volunteer Management System where service and continuing education hours are recorded. The VMS may also house calendars, documents, and association information and resources.

Introduction

The Extension Master Gardener (EMG) Program is a volunteer development program offered by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service (Extension) and is designed to increase the availability of unbiased, research-based horticultural information to the residential public and to assist with the mission of Extension. This Management Guide will be valuable for the volunteer to understand the expectations and their volunteer role and for the coordinator to manage the program appropriately.

See [Appendix A](#) to understand the history between the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service and the Texas Master Gardener Program.

MISSION: The mission of the Extension Master Gardener Program is to provide quality and relevant horticulture education to the people of Texas.

Program Objectives

Training and empowering local volunteers to implement the objectives of the Extension Master Gardener Program to disseminate horticultural information to individuals, groups, adults, and youth within the community. Examples are:

- conducting Junior Master Gardener (JMG) projects
- answering requests for horticultural information
- establishing and maintaining demonstration gardens
- providing presentations on horticulture topics
- conducting plant clinics

The Value of Volunteers to Extension

Extension Master Gardeners are trained to help with the work of the Extension office, yet they are not employees. When Extension Master Gardeners are recruited, they form a network of highly qualified people who have career and life experiences that add to their service within the program. For example, teaching, public speaking, writing, publishing, managing, designing, analyzing, human relations, mass communication, information technology, etc. Volunteers bring so much more that helps us elevate our reach and impact.

“We cannot do what we do without you!”

EMGs are an important part of Extension and their communities. They selflessly serve others and desire to see people succeed in their gardening endeavors. The reach of Extension is much greater because of the time and commitment of volunteers.

“Thank you for your service.”

Responsibilities of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service

The EMG program is administered through Texas A&M AgriLife County Extension Agents or a staff member, who serves as the County Master Gardener Coordinator. Further, Extension provides a statewide office to provide oversight of these guidelines and continuity of the program.

Responsibilities of Extension include:

- overseeing all internal (volunteers) and external (public) educational components of the program.
- recruiting and selecting people for the positions that are needed to fulfill the mission of the program.
- ensuring that each volunteer has been background checked and has signed a volunteer agreement to be filed in the county office.
- coordinating, conducting, and funding training for Extension Master Gardener volunteers.
- certifying and recertifying Extension Master Gardeners using State Master Gardener Guidelines.
- facilitating communications between Extension personnel and EMGs.
- approving **all** volunteer activities and projects to ensure they **support Extension's educational mission**.
- evaluating and reporting volunteer efforts. These efforts will be gained using the mandatory statewide volunteer management system (VMS).

And where applicable (See [Associations](#))

- chartering Extension Master Gardener Associations following the state guidelines.
- working closely with leadership and members of the Association

The County Master Gardener Coordinator may recruit individual EMGs to serve as volunteer coordinators to assist in managing projects and activities. For example, EMGs may serve as coordinators for speaker's bureaus, school garden programs, demonstration gardens, and more. Volunteers must meet regularly with the Master Gardener Coordinator to maintain unity and communication regarding the County

Extension Master Gardener Program projects and activities. However, the ultimate accountability for these actions lies with the staff member who serves as the local Master Gardener Coordinator.

Texas Master Gardener Title

The Texas Master Gardener title can only be used by individuals trained in the Texas Master Gardener program to assist Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. To use the title, volunteers must be actively participating in a volunteer role and meet recertification requirements annually.

EMGs should only display credentials or give the appearance of being a Texas Master Gardener when the activity is designated by the agent or coordinator as an approved educational project. Texas Master Gardeners must not use the title in any form of advertisement outside of the intended educational purpose. For example, applying Texas Master Gardener insignia or logos (see [Logo/Brand Guide](#)) to business cards for personal business ventures. Further, using the title for personal gain or implying Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service endorsement of any product or place of business is improper.

The credentials for Extension Master Gardeners should be displayed properly while conducting official volunteer service. The proper display includes wearing Master Gardener name badges, shirts, and aprons with the current up-to-date logo. Any items with the former logo must be retired.

Extension Master Gardeners who are not currently certified cannot use this title. The title of Texas Master Gardener is valid only when the volunteer is actively participating in an Extension Master Gardener program being conducted by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. When an individual ceases active participation in the Extension Master Gardener program and/or does not meet recertification requirements, the individual's certification as a Texas Master Gardener becomes void. The County Extension Agents or staff serving as Master Gardener Coordinators, are charged to maintain this guideline.

Agents or coordinators may consider approving a [Leave of Absence](#) or bestowing the [Emeritus](#)(a) title when warranted.

Requirements for Texas Master Gardeners

It is important to note that the intern and recertification requirements are minimums. County Extension Agents have the authority to increase these requirements. Training content and volunteer service hours are under the purview of the County Extension Agent and must be entered in the VMS to earn and maintain the title.

Intern

To earn the title of "Texas Master Gardener" an intern must:

- apply through the agency's online application system
- complete initial Extension Volunteer training modules
- pass background screening
- sign [Volunteer Agreement](#)
- receive a minimum of 50 hours of instruction within one year
- pass an examination administered by Extension
- volunteer a minimum of 50 hours of service in one year

Recertification

To retain the Texas Master Gardener title, individuals are to:

- participate in a minimum of 10 hours of recertification educational training (CEU's), to begin 1/1/25
- provide an additional 20 hours of volunteer service, to begin 1/1/25

Every three years

- pass background screening
- sign [Volunteer Agreement](#) (some associations do this annually)

Note: Refer to the status definitions in the [Glossary](#).

Importance of Reporting

Reporting in VMS is imperative to the continuance of the EMG program which relies upon State and Federal funding. Reporting shows the community and our stakeholders the impact of our volunteer service provided.

Volunteer Agreement

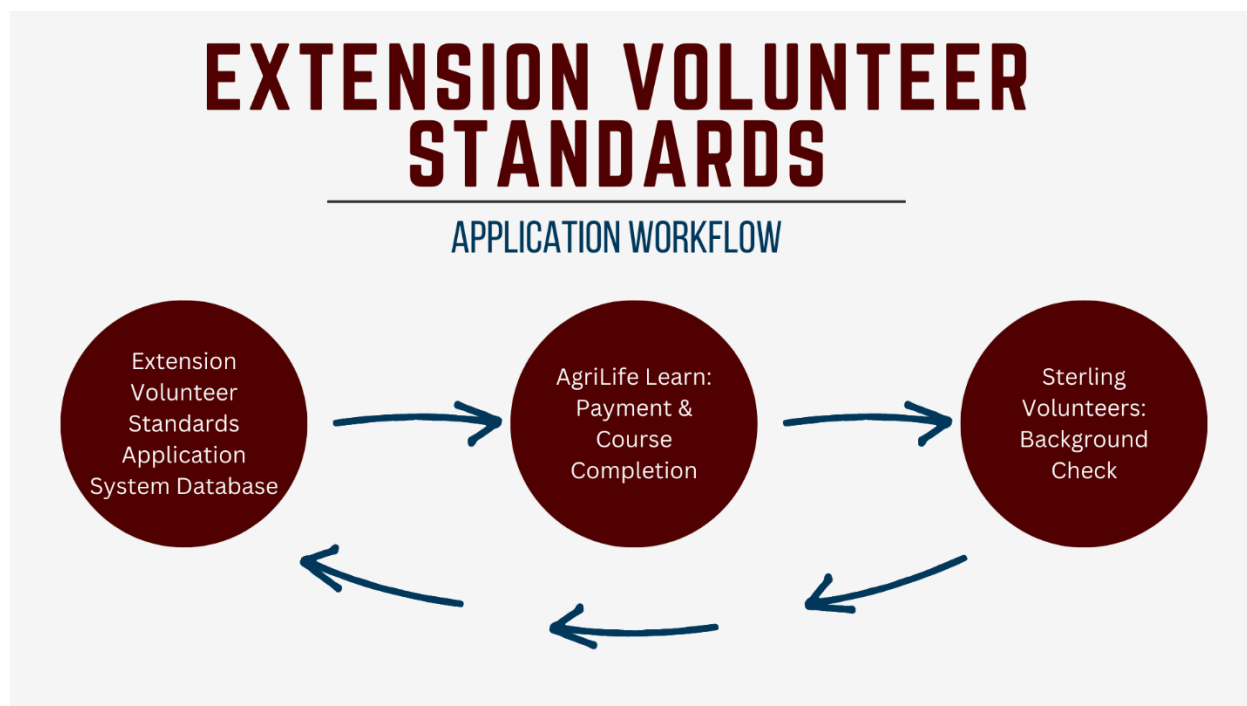
The EMG Volunteer Agreement outlines the expectations of the volunteer, the role of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension employees and code of conduct required by both. This [form](#) must be signed and filed at the county Extension office every three years. The most recent version of the form must be used.

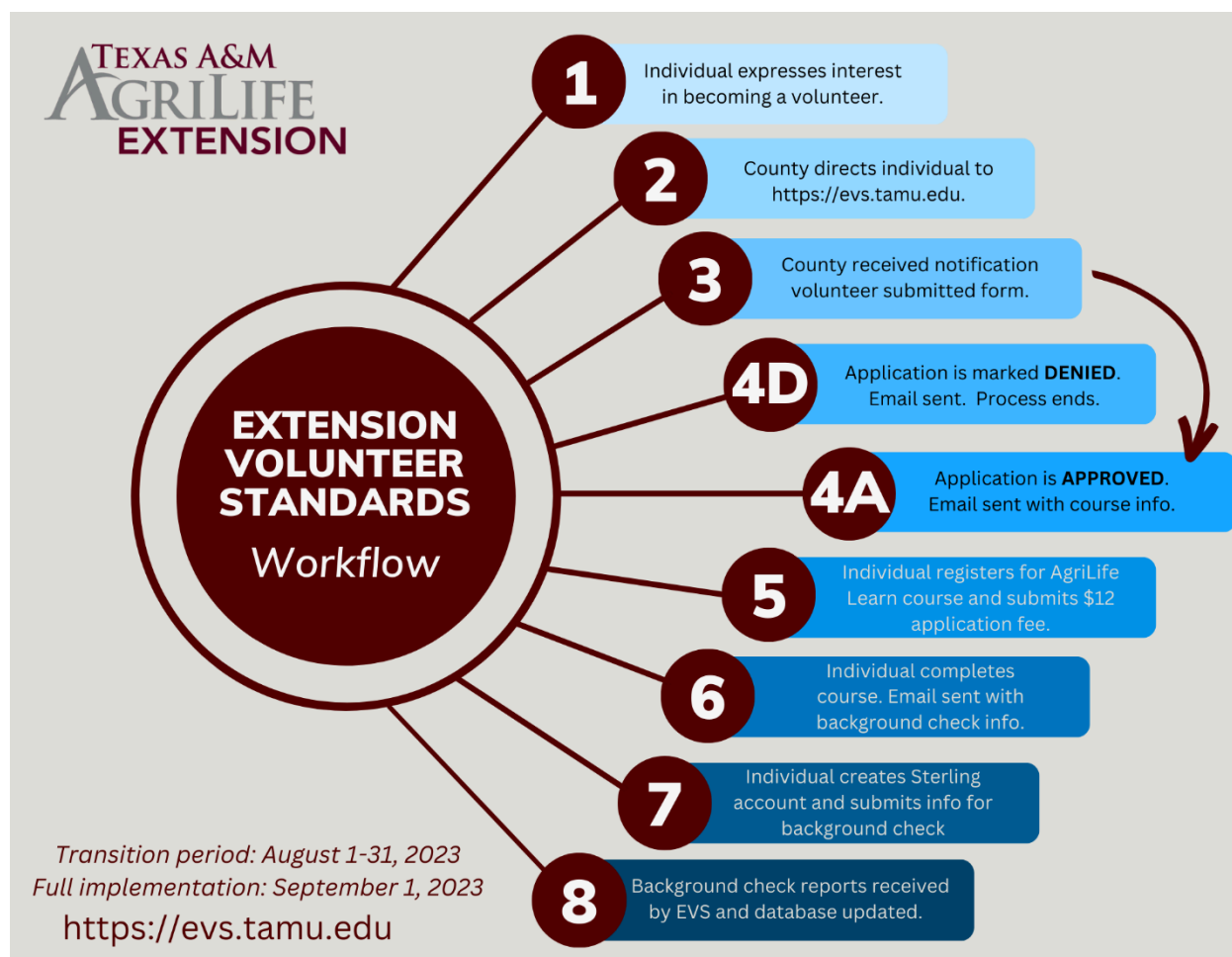
Volunteers not adhering to all items in this agreement may forfeit their certification as an Extension Master Gardener volunteer.

Background Screening Process

It is of utmost importance that all who encounter the Texas Master Gardener program and Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service are treated in a manner that is not only respectful but also safe. Therefore, all Extension Master Gardener volunteers must adhere to the agency's background screening process. The screening process is administered through the agency's Extension Volunteer Standards (EVS) office.

Initial assessment of a volunteer is conducted when they apply for a volunteer role with AgriLife Extension. The applicant will submit their application online. If the volunteer's application is accepted by the county, the volunteer will then need to complete training and a background check. The training is an online course through the AgriLife Learn platform where the application fee (see note below) will be collected. After the training modules are complete, the applicant will receive instructions regarding the background check. Once their background check is completed, if approved, they may begin fulfilling any volunteer roles or requirements, including intern training.





Continuing volunteers must reapply every three years from the volunteer's most recent screening. All renewing volunteers will pay the application fee (see note below), complete the volunteer training, and submit information for the background check. The Extension Volunteer Standards Application system will alert volunteers 60 days prior to the expiration of their last background check to complete the process if a valid email address is stored within the system. If the process is left uncompleted, the individual may not participate in volunteer activities and may forfeit the fee.

NOTE: The application fee may be paid by either individuals or an association. The cost per person is \$12. Information about group/bulk payments can be found at <https://evs.tamu.edu> on the FAQ page found on the top menu.

The entity that conducts the background check is Sterling Volunteers. Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service has contracted with them to provide only criminal background history including a search of the Government Watch List Search (OFAC), DOJ Sex Offender Search, and a National Criminal History Search. Sterling Volunteers

conducts other types of screening services, but the AgriLife Extension contract is limited to criminal history only.

When submitting information for the background check, the volunteer will be asked to provide the following information:

- First, Middle, Last Names
- Suffix
- Date of Birth
- Social Security Number
- Gender
- Phone Number
- Email Address
- Address and length of time at that address

The information provided for the background check is shared with only Sterling Volunteers and AgriLife Extension does not store this information.

Again, Texas A&M AgriLife and the Texas Master Gardener Program desire that all volunteers' experiences are pleasant and not harmful in any way. Screening for criminal history helps the agency ensure that each volunteer is secure.

Additional questions about the screening process should be directed to the AgriLife Extension Volunteer Standards office at <https://evs.tamu.edu/>.

Recommendations by Extension Master Gardeners

All recommendations by Extension Master Gardeners must be research-based and must follow the current recommendations found in the various publications available from Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. Only after research with Texas A&M AgriLife Extension, Research or the University has been exhausted, may secondary sources such as other state Extension or .gov sites be used. The program stands behind Texas A&M AgriLife Research and Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service as proven information.

- When making product recommendations, if more than one option is listed as a satisfactory solution, the client should be made aware that there are multiple options available.
- Cultural problems and soil additives which are not specifically covered by Extension recommendations and publications should be recommended only after consultation with County Extension Agents or Program Specialists.
- Questions concerning commercial production of crops and pest management on such crops are to be referred to the local county Extension personnel.

- Volunteers must stay neutral in their recommendations. If a volunteer's personal belief regarding products or practices contrasts with a client's request, the volunteer should not impose their personal beliefs on the client. If needed, have another volunteer or the agent provide the requested information. For example, if the volunteer is uncomfortable making herbicide recommendations and is requested to do so, the volunteer should refer the client to someone else.
- Unscientific solutions or household remedies must not be recommended.

Volunteer Service Hours Defined

County Extension Agents/Master Gardener Coordinators make the final determination on what volunteer service hours are acceptable to meet requirements for Extension Master Gardener certification and recertification. Projects determined appropriate by the agent must be pre-approved and added to the VMS prior to service or reporting.

To assist in this determination, the following guidelines are provided. Volunteer service hours should be performed during activities that are:

1. Education focused, as opposed to service or maintenance-type work, understanding that some service or maintenance work is required to support educational endeavors.

Direct contact is defined by actual, physical time spent before an audience or individual.

Examples of educational service:

- actual time answering questions.
- face-to-face time educating about a horticulture topic at a booth (may only be 3-5 minutes per person)
- presenting a lecture on horticultural topics
- conducting a tour in the demonstration garden

Examples of service and maintenance work:

- preparation of PowerPoint presentation
- setting up tables and chairs for a presentation
- researching and authoring an article
- weeding and maintaining a demonstration garden
- planning meetings

2. Supportive of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service's overall mission and objectives

Examples of AgriLife support:

- promoting other AgriLife educational opportunities whenever possible such as handing out Better Living for Texans material at a booth
 - coaching a 4-H team with a horticulture focus
3. Sponsored (or co-sponsored) by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service
- Collaborations with other organizations are important, but Extension does not supply other organizations with volunteers to do their work.
 - Extension Master Gardener volunteer hours may be claimed for credit with the Extension Master Gardener program or another organization, but not both.

Transfers

At times people will move to a different county or state and wish to transfer their service to different county Master Gardener Programs. This is permitted if both agents agree and complete the form linked [here](#). EMGs must be in good standing in their current county or state. Agents do not have to accept a transfer or may require additional screening, training, service, or payment by the incoming volunteer. Some volunteers may have dual membership in more than one county. This must also be approved by both agents and may have additional requirements. To maintain membership in more than one county, a volunteer must fulfill recertification requirements in both counties.

It is best to provide the initial service requirement in the county in which the volunteer trained because of that county's investment in that volunteer. In rare circumstances transfers may be allowed but it is discouraged.

The transfer within the VMS system must be done by the state VMS Coordinator upon receipt of this form. Creating new profiles will create issues in the database.

Leave of Absence

On occasion, an Extension Master Gardener Intern or Texas Master Gardener is unable to fulfill the requirements to obtain or maintain certification due to illness, illness in the family, or other personal situations assessed on a case-by-case basis. In cases such as these, a "Leave of Absence" may be requested using this [form](#) and granted by the County Master Gardener Coordinator. The Leave of Absence is to be for a specified period and may have specific training and/or service requirements for the individual to regain full status as an Extension Master Gardener Intern or Texas Master Gardener. A Leave of Absence is not intended to be used simply because a volunteer does not fulfill certification or recertification requirements. The volunteer will continue to pay county and state association dues.

Emeritus(a) Status

"Texas Master Gardener Emeritus(a)" is an honorary title awarded to a retired Extension Master Gardener volunteer who has served the Extension Master Gardener Program with distinction.

The decision to bestow this privileged title is serious and should be made by consensus of the County Extension Agent, and members of the local program.

Examples of distinguished service are:

- Created a database for plant selection in the county
- Served on numerous committees and/or held office
- Held integral leadership roles in development of demonstration gardens
- Instrumental in getting JMG curriculum into schools
- Vital in the recruitment of new members and mentoring interns and new Extension Master Gardeners
- Coordinating classes for training new volunteers
- Frequent speaking engagements in the community
- Exceptional number of service hours donated to Extension

The emeritus(a) status is not to be confused with the title of "honorary" or a "retired" EMG (refer to the [Glossary](#)).

Eligibility: Nominees for emeritus(a) status should be retired Texas Master Gardeners who were in good standing upon retirement, preferably with five or more years of service. Recognizing that Extension Master Gardeners may make a significant contribution to the program in a shorter period prior to retirement, discretion regarding time of service is given to the County Extension Master Gardener Coordinator.

A Texas Master Gardener may be nominated for emeritus(a) status while still an active volunteer, but the status will not be conferred until the individual retires as an Extension Master Gardener.

Nomination Process

A nomination may be brought forth by an agent or EMG. A committee may be formed to determine if the nominees fulfill the distinguished designation. The committee may seek additional testament from others to determine the eligibility of the nominee to receive the designation.

If the committee determines the volunteer is deserving of the designation, then the nominee should be presented before the membership for a vote.

Upon final decision on emeritus(a) status, the County Extension Master Gardener Coordinator shall notify the nominee in writing of the final decision.

Once approved, a letter with a description of their distinguished service should be sent to the state office with a high-quality photo of the recipient.

Recognition and Privileges. A Texas Master Gardener emeritus(a) is considered an important and integral part of the program. Emeritus(a) Extension Master Gardeners shall be recognized by:

- Presentation of a certificate or plaque indicating emeritus(a) status at an appropriate event/ceremony.
- Other recognition items may include a name badge or gifts recognizing status as an emeritus(a) Extension Master Gardener as deemed appropriate by the Master Gardener Coordinator and committee.
- Listing of name, county, and title in a permanent Texas Master Gardener emeritus(a) roster located on the Texas Master Gardener website. A photograph is required with this listing.
- Permanent listing on county roster.

Emeritus(a) Extension Master Gardeners shall not volunteer but will be accorded the following privileges:

- Continued access to Extension facilities and educational resources.
- Invitation to maintain membership in the local county and state Extension Master Gardener association (note: annual dues to the county association would be paid by the Extension Master Gardener emeritus(a) unless waived by the association governing board). They are not required to pay TMGA dues.
- Invitation to participate in Extension Master Gardener educational and social events.
- May serve as an invited advisor for programs or projects but will not record hours.

Dismissal of an Extension Master Gardener Volunteer

A volunteer may be reassigned or dismissed at the sole discretion of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. Disregard for the policies and guidelines established by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service and the County Master Gardener program are grounds for dismissal of an Extension Master Gardener Volunteer. Other examples of conduct which could lead to disciplinary action include, but are not limited to:

- illegal activity
- behavior which compromises the health and safety of volunteers, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service employees, or clientele
- being habitually disruptive to the overall program

- unwilling or unable to work amicably with agents and/or other volunteers
- conduct which is harmful to the Extension Master Gardener program's reputation
- failure to relinquish/rotate leadership roles

The nature and seriousness of the infraction or violation will determine whether the option of reassignment or dismissal should be considered.

Before any official action is taken, unless the action is illegal or causes harm to another person, the County Extension Agent and/or immediate Extension supervisor should counsel with a volunteer(s) when reassignment or dismissal is being considered. If dismissal is decided by Extension, communication with the volunteer(s) will be done in confidentiality, to the extent permitted by law.

In the event of a disturbance in the program or between individual volunteers, it is expected that the volunteer(s) will visit with the Extension agent to communicate the facts of the events. The agent will consider all positions and determine what is best for the program. If a volunteer has a conflict with the agent, it is expected that the volunteer will first visit with the agent about their perspective and try to resolve the situation with them. If a resolution is not found, the State Master Gardener Coordinator will be contacted. The State Coordinator will determine the best course of action. The volunteer will be contacted within two weeks of the initial communication, but it may take longer to reach a resolution.

Training Resources

Value of Texas Master Gardener Training

Through Extension Master Gardener training, volunteers can advance their gardening expertise with up-to-date research-based horticultural information, as well as gain considerable confidence in delivering this information to the public. The volunteer aspect of the Extension Master Gardener program allows individuals to dedicate their time and talents to educate and enhance their local community utilizing the science and art of horticulture.

Training Volunteers

Extension Master Gardener training is known for being comprehensive and of high quality. Training may occur as individual counties, multiple counties coming together, or statewide via virtual training. Texas A&M AgriLife Specialists, Program Specialists and agents are the most reliable source of expertise; however, certified Extension Master Gardeners and horticulture professionals may be used. It is critical that any individual used to train Extension Master Gardeners deliver research-based information in an unbiased manner.

IMPORTANT! Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service is responsible for training, therefore, the funds obtained for training belong to Extension even when the Association collects the funds.

Examples of Extension's funds are programs or events that provide education to the public. Association funds would include fundraising events such as plant sales or the sale of an Association cookbook or calendar. However, there may be time in which an Association may receive Extension funds. In this case, those funds should be earmarked as Extension's and are at the agent's discretion to use.

The following subjects are usually covered while meeting the minimum of 50 hours of training:

1. General Concepts

- Earth-Kind® landscaping principles
- Plant growth and development
- Soils and fertilizers
- Diagnosing and managing plant health
- Concepts of insect management
- Concepts of disease management
- Plant propagation
- Pruning

2. Specific Areas of Horticulture

- Vegetable gardening
- Fruits and nut production
- Landscape plant materials
- Landscape design and maintenance
- Turfgrasses and care

3. The Extension Master Gardener Program

- Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service
- Volunteerism and working with people
- Utilizing the Volunteer Management System (VMS)

Other courses may be added when deemed appropriate by agents. Classes may be taught as lectures, workshops, tours, or a combination of these techniques.

An examination will be administered at the end of training. Testing resources are available to agents on the txmg.org website under the Agents Only tab.

Texas Master Gardener Handbook

The *Texas Master Gardener Handbook* is the training curriculum for certification for the Texas Master Gardener program. Handbooks are typically included in the EMG Intern Training class but may also be purchased at this [link](#). To receive a discount on Handbooks, an Extension employee must complete the order. The public may also purchase the handbook for personal use at full price.

The *Texas Master Gardener Handbook* is **copyrighted** and may not be reproduced in any form.

Texas Master Gardener Website

The official Texas Master Gardener website is found at txmg.org. This site contains information on the Texas Master Gardener Association, resources, conference information, Extension Master Gardener Events, Advanced Training opportunities, required submission forms and links to many more materials and information. Agents and volunteers are encouraged to visit the website on a regular basis.

Social Media

We encourage Extension Master Gardeners to follow other counties and the state on a variety of platforms including Facebook, YouTube, Pinterest, etc. For example, [Aggie Horticulture Facebook](#), or [Skip Richter's YouTube](#) (CEA – Horticulture) and Instagram. There is a wealth of information at your fingertips available for learning opportunities and networking. Please ensure that the information on whichever page you follow, or share is rooted in research.

Advanced Training

Advanced Training is offered to certified Extension Master Gardeners whereby they may obtain greater knowledge that supports or expands specific county educational programs. Agents must approve a volunteer to attend an Advanced Training Class. Attendees of Advanced Training Classes should prioritize public education for the purpose of attending.

Advanced Training classes provide a minimum of 16 hours of education. Following completion of the training, an individual must complete a minimum of 20 hours of volunteer service in the subject matter. These hours are in addition to annual recertification requirements. It is recommended that a designated program or project be outlined prior to attending the training class for the volunteer to be able to obtain certification.

Advanced Training Offerings:

- Budding & Grafting (on hold)
- Compost
- Earth-Kind®Landscaping
- Entomology
- First Detector
- Greenhouse Management
- Herbs
- Home Fruit (South Texas)
- Junior Master Gardener (JMG™)
- Plant Pathology
- Plant Propagation
- Rainwater Harvesting
- Texas Superstars®
- Tree Care
- Turf Grass
- Vegetables

All Advanced Training classes must be approved through Program Manager Nicky Maddams in the State Master Gardener program office. Advanced Training classes are offered on a rotating basis to distribute resources most appropriately. Prior to forming a new Advanced Training, educational material, and format, volunteer service opportunities, and the public need for information are considered.

Junior Master Gardeners (JMG™)

The Junior Master Gardener program and curriculum are to be used for any youth gardening project. Any existing youth projects not currently using the curricula will be permitted to continue, however JMG elements should be inserted where possible. When using the International JMG curricula you can be sure it is research-based, and you should get the results intended when using as directed in the curricula piece. Components of the JMG curricula may also be used. For example:

- working a fair booth, utilizing a JMG activity such as know-and-grow sombreros.
- reading *Tops and Bottoms* from the Literature in the Garden curricula to a classroom of children.
- hosting a youth camp and including several components of the *Learn, Grow, Eat, and Go!* curricula.

Further, JMG components may overlap areas of Extension. For instance, there may be times where a 4-H or FCH agent has a community gardening program and Extension Master Gardeners could implement the full JMG program or components into these projects. This is a way to provide full support for all Extension activities.

Program Evaluation

Program evaluation is critical to be able to explain our value to the community, stakeholders, and the agency. It is important to evaluate the programs EMGs perform to clearly ensure that the work is meeting the needs of the intended audience. Program evaluation also helps direct the changes and improvements needed to fully support the mission of the program. One of the tools available to EMGs is using [reports from VMS](#) to see how resources are being distributed. Another way to evaluate program outcome is via survey instruments given to the participants to gather data.

Sample Positions

These are typical example positions in county Extension Master Gardener programs. This may be completed by an individual or a group of volunteers. Each county will have their own nuances on how to conduct these duties.

Help Desk - The objective of a help desk is to assist clients with their gardening questions and concerns. This includes answering phone calls, email, or client walk-ins.

Presenters/Speakers Bureau - an individual or group of volunteers presents information on a topic to an audience.

Demo Garden Workers - volunteers who serve to build, maintain, or educate utilizing a county-based demonstration garden.

Youth Worker - volunteers who provide gardening education to children.

Program Resources and Tools

State Website

The txmg.org website continues to be the primary resource for an extensive amount of information about the EMG program. Some of the many things you can access include:

- Upcoming training opportunities, including Advanced Training
- TMGA Board of Directors meeting dates and minutes from previous meetings
- Annual Conference details and registration

- Upcoming events hosted by Texas Master Gardener Associations across the state, i.e., plant sales, educational programs, etc. when submitted by counties
- Archived TMGA newsletters
- Newsletters from other Texas Master Gardener Associations
- TMGA financial documents
- Executive Committee and standing committees
- Officer and Director rosters for county associations
- 501(c) (3) Group exemption information and forms
- TMGA administrative documents
- Bylaws
- Chartering information
- Management Guide
- Annual Reports

County Websites

Counties can leverage a dedicated subsite on the txmg.org state website at no cost. This can yield numerous benefits. By utilizing a subsite, counties can ensure consistency in design, functionality and security while tailoring content to local news and events. This provides the users with a sense of cohesion among the counties. Website support and monitoring by AgriLife IT provides technical assistance, timely updates, and troubleshooting, ensuring the site is functional, secure, and user-friendly. The site uses the trusted WordPress platform.

County Social Media

Social media is a powerful and dynamic tool for connecting people, disseminating information, and promoting events.

The primary social media platform used by Extension Master Gardeners is Facebook. It offers analytics and targeting capabilities so that content may be tailored to reach specific demographics to ensure that our message resonates with the intended audience.

While Facebook is the prominent platform, there are additional platforms that may be included in the social media strategy. Exploring other platforms ensures that we reach different demographics and engage our audience on multiple levels, enhancing our overall presence.

The Texas Master Gardener Program has [Social Media Guidelines](#) that must be followed.

Volunteer Management System

The Volunteer Management System (VMS) was designed specifically for Extension Master Gardeners throughout the USA. It is a mandatory system across Texas. It is a very robust program that provides a user-friendly interface to ensure easy navigation and accessibility for all users.

VMS Guides for volunteers and administrators are available on the website. Each county has at least one local administrator who is responsible for maintaining and updating the system, answering support requests and training new users.

Recording volunteer hours in a timely manner is particularly important for several reasons:

- Maintaining accurate documentation demonstrating the organization's impact to stakeholders, donors, and funding agencies (state and federal) to secure ongoing support and resources.
- Facilitating proper allocation of resources, making informed decisions, and analyzing projects.
- Honors the commitment of our volunteers and recognizes their contributions.
- Promotes the overall success of the program.

The county agent is the "owner" of their respective counties system. Each county should have at least one local VMS Administrator who serves as the manager of the system for that county. The local administrator(s) are responsible for local training, resolving simple issues and maintaining current statuses and data.

Monthly reporting by volunteers is paramount as it serves as the fundamental tool for collection of volunteer service. Agents report monthly to the state and quarterly to the federal government. Hours that go unreported in the timeline they were served hold significant implications, particularly in the context of funding. Accurate reporting of hours served is essential for the program to demonstrate its activities and contributions, which directly correlate to the allocation of funds. Any hours that are not properly accounted for in the correct period may lead to the loss of financial support, as they cannot be included in reports.

Accurate and timely reporting ensures a comprehensive overview of the efforts of volunteers, safeguarding its ability to continue serving the people of Texas.

Online Intern Training

The State Master Gardener Program office offers an online intern training for any county program that chooses to participate. The training provides 35 of the required 50 hours. Local programs are responsible for the remaining 15 hours. The advantages are continuity of message across the state, fewer hours spent lining up individual speakers,

less travel and time away for speakers, and evaluations have shown similar learning outcomes as a traditional in-person class.

Training is offered in the spring and fall. Individuals may log in to the meeting platform separately but some of the best outcomes are when local groups meet together. This allows for the agent and certified Extension Master Gardeners to answer questions and help the interns feel a part of the existing group.

There is no charge to the county to participate in the Online Intern Training. Any regular county training fee still applies.

Logo/Brand Guide

The Texas Master Gardener logo is a crucial aspect of maintaining brand consistency and ensuring a strong visual identity across all platforms. When utilizing the logo, it is essential to adhere to the guidelines outlined in the [Brand Guide](#). This ensures that the logo's proportions, colors, and clear spaces are maintained, preserving its integrity and impact. No modifications are permitted.

All vendors should be given the Brand Guide prior to performing a job, whether it is a brochure, banner, or a t-shirt. Any items with the former logo must be retired.

Required Statements

Equal Opportunity and Disability Statements*

It is important that all understand and incorporate equal opportunity and disability statements into their volunteer service. This full statement must be included in all print and electronic marketing materials, including brochures, websites, and major marketing materials generally included in the footer of the document:

Full Statement: *Texas A&M AgriLife Extension provides equal opportunities in its programs and employment to all persons, regardless of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, disability, age, genetic information, veteran status, sexual orientation, or gender identity. The Texas A&M University system, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners Courts Cooperating.*

The shortened statement must be included on newsletters and flyers, generally in the footer of the document:

Shortened Statement: *Texas A&M AgriLife Extension is an equal opportunity employer and program provider. The Texas A&M University system, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the County Commissioners Courts Cooperating.*

The Disability Statement must be included in materials for any in-person public events:

Required Disability Statement: *Persons with disabilities needing accommodations for effective participation in the program should contact the County Extension Office at least one week prior to the program or event to request mobility, hearing, visual or other assistance.*

Required Commercial Products or Trade Names Disclaimer Statement

Master Gardeners should not recommend or endorse any commercial products, trade names, or businesses. Occasionally, examples of brand-name products may be included as a reference to describe options available to the community. For example, brand-name herbicide products that contain a specific active ingredient, or a list of books preferred by Master Gardeners. In these instances, the following disclaimer statement must be included:

The information given herein is for educational purposes only. Reference to commercial products or trade names is made with the understanding that no discrimination is intended and no endorsement by the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service is implied.

**Ensure that this language is in a readable format. This includes proper typeface, appropriate size, center-aligned, in a color that provides suitable contrast (ex. black text on a light background). Typeface should be Times New Roman or Arial.*

Name Badges

Name tags must align with the Texas Master Gardener [Brand Guide](#). Examples may be found on the [website](#).

Application Process

There is an agency application process where anyone who wants to become an EMG will follow.

- Agents or other employees will forward the application link to the individual to fill out.
- Once the county office receives the application, determinations regarding the application will be made.
- If someone is accepted into the program, the process will then send the applicant to an AgriLife Learn volunteer training module which at completion will be followed by the background screening process.
- An application fee will apply.

Annual Reports

Each year the State Master Gardener Coordinator will consolidate the data

provided by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension staff members and provide a summary that is posted on the TMGA website txmg.org.

Each [Annual Report](#) will include such details as the number of Texas Master Gardener volunteers trained during the reporting year, the total number of certified volunteers, the total number of Master Gardener volunteer service hours and the economic value of those service hours. In addition, the summary information will include other details and statistics as have been reported regarding Master Gardener activities, projects, etc.

Most Extension Master Gardener volunteers appreciate learning about the impact of their volunteer service, and sharing this information with local Association members is encouraged. This information may help others understand the value and importance of Extension Master Gardeners, especially when soliciting for donations, sponsorships and/or partnerships with other organizations in the community.

Collaborations

Collaborations are often a natural way to foster support for the Texas Master Gardener program or a specific EMG event. Collaborations may provide financial support from foundations, for-profits, or non-profit corporations. In a collaboration relationship, the expectation of Extension personnel and Texas Master Gardeners is to:

- Maintain public trust.
- Establish and ensure internal and external accountability practices.
- Ensure resources are used for their intended purposes.
- Clearly identify the role of Extension and the role of EMGs.
- Ensure risk management and mitigation.
- Minimize risk to support groups and volunteers through education/training (see [financial responsibility training](#))

Due to the Texas Master Gardener program's tie to Texas A&M AgriLife Extension, there are parameters surrounding collaborations. The following must be maintained:

- Provide unbiased information, and the Texas Master Gardener title is to be used only when doing unpaid volunteer service.
- As a member of the Texas A&M University System, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension is a non-political, non-commercial entity and maintains full editorial control of its content.
- Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, the Texas Master Gardener program, and volunteers must remain objective and not be identified as endorsing or promoting products, services, or businesses.

When the above parameters are met, other considerations must be made prior to and during the establishment of a collaboration. Ask the following questions:

- Has the guidance and approval of the County Extension Agents regarding the collaboration been acquired?
- Will the collaboration support the missions of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, the Texas Master Gardener program, and/or the County Association?
- Will the collaboration lead to an educational activity?
- How will the role of the County Extension Agent, the EMG program, and the third-party partner be defined?
- How are AgriLife Extension and the EMG program referenced in the collaboration activity, publication, and/or website?
- Has the collaboration activity been approved by the MG Association?
- Is there a written agreement or Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) regarding the role of each party?

This type of statement should be used at the end of a fact sheet, on the sponsor page of a website, or on program fliers when a product or company name appears in the content:

“No endorsement is intended for companies and/or products mentioned, nor is criticism meant for those not mentioned.”

Acknowledgement of sponsor and/or donors is appropriate. Consider the following ways to recognize those collaborations.

- Include company logos on printed and digital content.
- Link to their website.
- Sponsors may be categorized based on funding level.
- For online purposes it is recommended that a sponsor’s web page is created and it is linked to the main page navigation.

Agent Resources

Starting a County Extension Master Gardener Program

When making the decision to establish an Extension Master Gardener Program, the time and effort necessary to begin and maintain the program should be considered but, more importantly, the need for volunteer service must be established. An honest needs assessment is the first step in starting a County Extension Master Gardener Program. Secondly, you must be able to provide regular and ongoing support and oversight.

There are two groups of people immediately involved in an Extension Master Gardener Program: Extension employees and the volunteers who will serve in the program. Although there may be people in your county who would like to have the title Extension Master Gardener, you may not need the volunteer work that would result from the program. Keep in mind that the program is designed to produce certified volunteers to aid you in disseminating horticultural information to the public. It is not designed to be a course available to anyone without obligations on the part of the recipients. If you choose to offer portions of the training to the public, those individuals must understand that they are not Extension Master Gardeners.

It is important that you engage your volunteers and build relationships with them, so they have a full understanding of your role within the program and the scope and responsibility of their service.

Consider these questions:

- Is the office swamped with requests for horticultural information?
- Could volunteer assistance be used to answer these requests?
- Is there a demand on your time to give presentations?
- Could you use help with publicity and information processing as it relates to horticulture?
- Are there community needs for horticultural projects (e.g., 4-H clubs, school gardens, or others) not being addressed for lack of trained and willing volunteers?
- Would people in your area who are interested in gardening be able or willing to pay the required fees for participating in an Extension Master Gardener program?
- Are you able to provide office space, a computer, or basic supplies needed for volunteers to serve (i.e., accommodate the volunteers in your office space)?

If the answer to most questions is yes, then an Extension Master Gardener program may be particularly useful in your county.

Next, you will need to outline potential projects where EMGs can serve their time on an ongoing basis. This will tell you if you have volunteer jobs available.

Be aware that the smallest return on your efforts may occur in the first year of the program. You will be busy organizing the program, generating publicity, and setting up the training sessions.

Teaching the course can be done entirely by you, using the Texas Master Gardener handbook and with the aid of resource materials from Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. You may invite speakers from the community or nearby colleges if they provide research-based content, or you may utilize Extension specialists or agents.

(See the section in this guide on [Online Intern Training](#))

Some Extension offices find that winter/spring training seems to work well. Just as the volunteers complete training, the spring rush for gardening information occurs, providing plenty of opportunities to serve without a gap between graduation and service. Volunteers should be permitted to volunteer before the end of their training class. This helps tie the volunteer to the idea of serving.

From the beginning of the program, interns must realize they are being trained specifically to represent Extension and to help in disseminating research-based gardening information, not simply to improve their gardening skills. Other options exist to provide horticulture instruction without becoming an Extension Master Gardener.

Certified Extension Master Gardeners can help advise and guide the interns as they start the program in a mentorship role. Mentors can be assigned to one or more interns to walk alongside the intern as they learn and improve their skills. This will help build the intern's confidence and help them navigate the culture of your local program.

Managing a County Extension Master Gardener Program

When the purpose of the program is considered, management is of greatest importance, for only through active management can training and knowledge be used to meet the needs of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service and the community.

Some of the most successful County Extension Master Gardener Programs rely heavily on volunteer management and leadership. County Extension Master Gardener Programs often benefit by having an Association to assist in planning and administering volunteer activities and fundraising. Agents must play a significant role in advising the Association. (See section on [Associations](#)).

The following topics apply to Agent Resources. See appropriate section in this guide.

- [Volunteer Agreement](#)
- [Application Process](#)
- [Background Screening Process](#)
- [VMS](#) – mandatory reporting system; annual report numbers are pulled from this system. VMS is also a tool for agents to pull numbers for their reporting efforts.

Interviewing and Selecting Applicants

All applications should be reviewed to ensure that those wishing to join the program fully understand the mission and volunteer commitment. It is also wise to select applicants whose skill set fits the needs of the program.

Some counties interview and provide orientation. While the agent makes the final decision on each applicant, certified Extension Master Gardeners often help by

explaining the cultural norms of the program and offering an overview of projects. This can be a welcoming first encounter with the program.

There have been counties who during the interview process discover that an applicant simply wants the education and does not desire to volunteer. Previously those applicants would not be selected for the program. However, they are also our clients. There are now opportunities for the person who only wants education to learn while Extension simultaneously trains volunteers. For example, a county may choose to send this applicant to the Online Intern Class where they would only receive 35 hours. Therefore, they would not complete the full 50 hours to certify. It is, however, important to communicate clearly to this type of applicant that even though they attended some Extension Master Gardener training classes they are not certified or allowed to use the title Texas Master Gardener.

Some counties may believe that their numbers will drop if they offer a non-certification class. Knowing up front these applicants will not be volunteers will allow for a more realistic expectation for class retention.

Financial Responsibility

There is a difference between agency funds (EMG program) and external support group funds (EMG association). Funds such as the fees interns pay belong to Extension. Funds raised by a plant sale are the associations. Both funding sources are to be used to promote horticulture education and projects. It is Extension's responsibility to ensure any external support group that supports Extension is trained in financial stewardship and transparency.

Any volunteer who serves in a position that handles or manages funds must attend the agency's financial responsibility training for volunteers. This includes treasurers, financial auditors, committee chairs and those in leadership positions. This training offers best management practices regarding external support group funds. [Coming Soon to AgriLifeLearn.tamu.edu. \(update when live\)](#)

Fee-Based Programming

The following guidelines are provided for better understanding of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service's Fee-Based Programming initiative regarding the Texas Master Gardener program. Determination to charge a fee for an event will start locally with the County Extension Agent with input from Master Gardeners, District Extension Administrators, and Regional Program Leaders. To determine the amount to charge for an event, when applicable, will be based on expenses of the event, value of the event to the clientele, and the fee-based programming charge of \$10 or 10% whichever is greater.

Initial Training

- Extension Master Gardener Certification will incur a fee-based programming charge.

Major Educational Events

- Major educational events include but are not limited to short courses, workshops, field days, and conferences where expenses are common (food, speakers, travel, etc.); fee-based programming would be budgeted into the event fee.
- An event where an EMG is acting in lieu of or on behalf of the CEA and the event would normally require a registration, the fee-based programming charge would apply.

Volunteer Led Events

- Speaker's Bureaus and CEA presentations (e.g., Garden Clubs, Civic Clubs, Schools) typically would not charge a fee.
- Master Gardener Volunteer-presented lectures and talks would not charge a fee.
- MG Association fundraising events (if the major purpose of an event is to raise funds) would not be subject to fee-based programming.
- Internal Training of EMG Recertification is not subject to a fee. CEAs will conduct or identify recertification events to meet the 10 hours of required continuing education; these events would not have a fee for Master Gardeners.
- Membership dues for state and local associations will not be subject to fee-based programming.

Agents Only

The Agent's Only section of the txmg.org website is password protected specifically for use by agents or Extension employees only, to have access to information that they must submit and/or approve. Items found in that section include but are not limited to Advanced Training certificates and forms, milestone certificates, and wallet cards.

For more information about volunteer management, visit the Agency's Intranet resources on volunteerism.

Evaluating Projects

Evaluating projects allows the agent to monitor progress of goals and determine educational impact. Once a project is evaluated, it allows for adjustments as needed.

By planning the evaluation procedure at the beginning when goals are set, data can be gathered while the project is taking place. If volunteers are included in the planning and goal setting, the evaluation will make sense. In explaining the project's worth using hard figures that reveal the numbers of those seeking and receiving service, the economic impact for the community, and the intent to adopt Extension based practices will present a convincing case for continual support. Evaluations should be meaningful and timely. Some events need to have rapid reporting back and others should be assessed after a given time (i.e., 6 to 12 months).

Some projects will be easy to determine if the effort is worth the time and financial investment. Such as, having 500 people sign up for a presentation at a Home and Garden Show will determine that holding the presentation is worth the time and effort. Other projects may be more difficult. For example, does the number of visitors to a demonstration garden warrant the number of hours served maintaining and updating that garden or does writing a newsletter once a month with an open rate of 10% provide a proper return on time spent by a volunteer. Agents and volunteers must keep in mind the available resources including people, time, and financial support to build, continue, or discontinue projects, ensuring added value to our mission.

Evaluating Projects Using VMS

The Volunteer Management system can generate a multitude of valuable reports, allowing for the precise compilation of data in various formats.

Program Summary - total hours for the program by year or any specified date range

Project Summary - total hours served on a particular project, by year or any specified date range.

All Volunteer Summary - hours served per volunteer for a specific date range; may be sorted by status.

Volunteer Summary - hours served per volunteer, CEU's, contacts and pounds of produce in a specified data range.

Monthly Contacts - the summary of reported contacts made by the program in a designated month. Also available annually or a specified date range.

Start Year Summary - shows a volunteer's start year, along with total volunteer hours and CE units. This report only works if the start years have been entered into the database.

Hours Grid - complete list of all hours, with filter and search capabilities

Hours Grid by Category - complete list of all hours based on state categories, with filter and search capabilities.

No Hours Report - a list of Master Gardeners who have not served or reported any hours during their time in the program.

Recognizing Volunteers

Agents should show appreciation to volunteers for their service because their value to Extension is vast. There are many ways to do so, including verbally saying thank you, writing a thank you note, or hosting an appreciation event where individuals are recognized in front of their peers.

Newly trained volunteers appreciate receiving their certificates of completion of their education and service and receive their official Texas Master Gardener name badges (resources [here](#)). Sometimes the best recognition is receiving more responsible and meaningful work. Developing a relationship and understanding the personal motivation of volunteers can lead to the appropriate kind of award.

Service Milestones

Recognizing a volunteer's years of service is one way to show appreciation for their dedication to the program. Years of service in 5-year increments may be submitted using the form on the txmg.org website. Volunteers will be recognized at the Annual State Conference. Pins may be purchased [here](#). Pins are intended to be worn in conjunction with the official Master Gardener name badge.

Advising the Association

As an advisor to the association an agent must meet regularly with the Association, have input in the elected officers, and provide guidance in the support the Association offers the Program. Further, it is the agent's responsibility to ensure that the program's educational outreach is priority over Association activities.

The Association can add tremendous benefit to the Master Gardener program. For instance, associations often have non-profit status which allows greater flexibility for fundraising that helps the program. Further, association leadership and committees help organize training for their members (which are certified Texas Master Gardeners) or coordinate educational events for the public. It is imperative that with such intertwined goals between the two entities, the agent must ensure that program and association

boundaries are kept. For example, association fundraising dollars are to be kept in the association, where dollars acquired for an intern training class are Extension's funds.

Agents must be engaged in the association proceedings to remain in authority over the program and yet be supportive of the individuals and activities of the association. This will take time, but this relationship will prove to be beneficial.

Master Gardener Associations

Starting An Association

Extension Master Gardeners considering an association need to first determine the type of organization they want. The Extension Master Gardeners may want to establish an "organization" committee or task force to help evaluate options and make recommendations. In general, an informal association is loosely structured, with no formal rules, coordinated only by a chairperson. A formal association may operate under bylaws and elect officers to oversee the association.

The next level of formality in associations occurs through a desire to become a non-profit corporation. Such corporations require articles of incorporation and bylaws. Formal documents must be filed with the appropriate state offices for incorporation. Most County Extension Master Gardener Associations in Texas are incorporated as a federal 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation under the TMGA umbrella which simplifies the process. Please note, that there are differences between state and federal tax. It is the Association's responsibility to adhere to whichever applies.

IMPORTANT! One of the greatest benefits of being a non-profit corporation includes tax-exempt status. Being able to accept tax deductible contributions is another benefit and is important if funds are needed to finance projects.

Disadvantages of incorporation can be expense and complications to create and maintain the corporate structure; Generally, it can take 18-24 months to set up and the requirements of the law must be strictly observed. Obtaining legal counsel may be a first step toward attempting to incorporate and be sure the group understands the responsibility of the act.

The association is an external support group with an inward focus. The association helps members connect with each other and is highly involved in raising funds that support the educational efforts of the Extension Master Gardener program. The association also boosts morale, provides opportunities for fellowship and camaraderie, and supports volunteers through social events. This allows for cultivation of friendships and social connections.

The Association's goals and purposes should determine the organization. If the need is purely social, there is little reason for formality. If the intent is to conduct activities where attendant risk is possible, there will be a need for the protection of a formal organization so that the association may raise money and limit liability.

The best advice is to start small. Be informal first, get to know each other and establish an organizational identity. If formality is chosen, realize that there will be government bureaucracy that may require professional guidance.

Existing Associations

There is a distinction between being an AgriLife Extension volunteer and being a member of a Master Gardener association. A volunteer of AgriLife Extension supports Extension programming by disseminating information from AgriLife Extension to the communities. It is an outward push with the focus being on educational programming.

Extension Master Gardener programs are managed by Extension without an association; however, volunteers typically desire to contribute more to the program and to meet regularly. Volunteerism with the agency is priority over membership with the association. For example, recertifying annually is part of being a volunteer for AgriLife Extension. Paying dues is a part of the association. Both rely on the positive promotion of AgriLife Extension as an educational resource.

Extension is responsible for the oversight of external education, internal education for volunteers, basic program needs, communicating service opportunities, etc. Some associations may assist Extension in these directives plus provide additional funds and coordinate projects. However, it is important to note that these additional contributions and any assistance the Association provides must be approved by the agent as the responsible party for the program and who serves as an advisor to the Association.

Another primary reason for an Extension Master Gardener Association is financial support of the Extension Master Gardener programs. An Extension Master Gardener Program does not need a large amount to be effective. Generally, Extension is able to fund basic program needs. However, Extension often does not have the available funds needed for specific activities and projects. Extension has specific policies regarding Extension agents soliciting and handling monies from community organizations, foundations, or corporations.

Associations have more freedom to raise money needed through several means. Examples include conducting plant sales, donating unsolicited money received from speaking engagements, or soliciting grant funds or sponsorships for projects. Funds generated or received by Associations provide support for educational projects, computer, and office equipment for Extension Master Gardeners and/or agents, horticultural libraries and resources, or college scholarships.

Extension Master Gardener Associations must charter annually. This allows the local association to utilize the name and associated logos of the Texas Master Gardener program. The chartering process includes maintaining the following in the county office:

- List of elected officers, group name, and year group began.
- Copy of by-laws, articles of incorporation, 501(c)(3) documentation, EIN, and TDA nursery/floral certificate
 - The Association bylaws which must state that their membership is to consist of certified volunteers (Extension Master Gardeners) who serve as representatives of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, thus affiliating closely with the local county Extension office.
 - The name of the staff member of the local county Extension office who serves as Advisor to the Association leadership and attends meetings regularly.
 - The bylaws should state that the funds should be raised in support of the EMG projects.
- Copy of IRS form 990 or 990-N, filed annually.
- Current financial statement and budget for the coming year
- Annual financial review or audit report

[Appendix B](#) contains sample bylaws for Extension Master Gardener Associations.

TDA Nursery/Floral Certificate

An Event Permit is required to sell or distribute nursery products or floral items. One Event Permit equals one day (or any portion of a 24-hour period) of operation. If an association is selling online prior to the event, a license is needed for the day(s) of product pick-up only. Click [here](#) for more information.

Texas Master Gardener Program Endowment

An endowment has been established with The Texas A&M Foundation to ensure long-term financial stability, allowing the program to plan for the future, to undertake larger projects and weather economic uncertainties to continue the mission of the Texas Master Gardener Program. The funds will provide opportunities to support growth, the development of resources and local implementation to continue the mission of the program. Associations and individuals may donate to the [endowment](#).

Texas Master Gardener Association

The Texas Master Gardener Association (TMGA) is a corporation and an external support group just like local associations but at the state level. The purposes of the state association, as outlined in the [bylaws](#), are:

- To support local Master Gardener Associations.
- To provide information and resources to all EMG volunteers across the state
- To provide support and promotion for the Annual Texas Master Gardener Conference
- To provide assistance to local associations regarding non-profit status in accordance with the Internal Revenue Code.

As an Incorporated entity, affairs of the Corporation are managed by elected officers and by a Board of Directors. The Officers of the Corporation will be elected and will be President, First Vice President, Second Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer.

- A. Officers will serve one-year terms and may be elected to a second term.
- B. An Executive Committee consisting of the elected Officers and the immediate Past President shall perform the day-to-day functions of the Corporation. The Committee chair will be the Association President.
- C. A staff member(s) of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension with horticultural duties shall serve as advisor(s) to the Executive Committee.
- D. Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Corporation will be called as necessary, but at least annually, to conduct the business of the Corporation.

Standing committees of the TMGA include:

- A. Nominating Committee
- B. Financial Review Committee
- C. Awards Committee
- D. Outreach Committee
- E. Tax Advisory Committee
- F. Scholarship and Grant Committee

Each Association will elect or appoint two members to serve on the TMGA Board of Directors, as well as two Alternates. Each Director receives one vote, for a total of two possible per county. Duties of the Directors is as follows:

- A. Attend all TMGA Director's Meetings
 - i) Vote on TMGA business issues at quarterly meetings
 - ii) Present local Association issues, recommendations, and questions
 - iii) Using the posted meeting minutes, report TMGA business back to the respective local Association during business meetings
- B. Communicate between TMGA and local Association

- i) Provide roster including names and email addresses of county officers and directors using form provided on website
 - ii) Promote the Awards program within your local Association
 - iii) Advise TMGA of resources that your county Association needs
- C. Assist nominating committee with identifying officer candidates
 - D. Assist TMGA President in identifying committee chairs and members
 - E. Inquire about a decision or policy made by TMGA that may be unclear and inform the local Association membership

Bylaws

The most current bylaws can be found on the TMGA website under the “TMGA” heading.

TMGA Dues

Annual dues are paid to TMGA by member associations based on the size of their membership as of December 31st of the previous year. Dues payments must be postmarked no later than March 1 in the current year.

TMGA Charter

Similar to local association chartering, the TMGA also charters ensuring fiscal responsibility, communication between the organization and Extension, and timely filing of documents.

Leadership Training

This training is offered for any volunteer to learn or improve their leadership skills. Often a leadership workshop is offered in conjunction with the annual Texas Master Gardener conference.

Search for Excellence Awards

The Search for Excellence Awards Program (SFE) is a way for local associations to be recognized for their efforts and allow other volunteers to learn from the important work that is accomplished and honored. To be eligible for awards member associations must be in good standing. To achieve good standing, dues must be paid, chartering completed, the officer/director roster all must be submitted by the stated deadlines, and the VMS Reporting System fully utilized.

Currently TMGA recognizes and presents awards for exemplary achievement in the following categories: Youth - JMG, Youth – Other, Teaching Site, Workshop Presentation, Written-Recorded Educational Content, Research, Marva E. Beck JMG

Leader of the Year, Outstanding Individual Master Gardener, Outstanding Master Gardener Association, and the Wayne Rhoden Excellence in Service Award.

To learn more about the SFE Awards, click [here](#).

Appendix A

The History of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service

Important dates for Extension:

1862 - The Morrill Act created the Land Grant College and University System to provide education in the agriculture and mechanical fields.

1887 - The Hatch Act provided for the establishment of facilities in each of the states to conduct research needed to improve agriculture and related areas.

1890 - Congress provided for the establishment of an additional 13 colleges in the southern states for the education of minorities, and a land grant university was established in the District of Columbia.

1914 - The Smith Lever Act provided for the establishment of the Extension Service to distribute information, developed by the land grant universities and research stations, to the people where they live.

The function of the federal Cooperative Extension Service is to guide and evaluate state Extension programs.

Texas Extension Service differs from the State Department of Agriculture in structure and function. Extension's function is educational in nature, providing technical resources and developmental structure whereby residents can identify and address their concerns. All Extension functions are coordinated through the state land grant university system (The Texas A&M University System).

The function of the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) is regulatory or promotional in nature. It is the function of the TDA to regulate the rules governing the sale of agricultural products, including turf and ornamentals; to regulate the use of pesticides; to develop procedures for controlling epidemic pests; and to promote the sale and use of Texas agricultural products. The TDA is a department of the state government and as such is under the direction of the Governor's office.

Appendix B

County Master Gardener Association, Inc.

Bylaws

County Master Gardener Association
(In support of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service)

Article I

The name of this organization shall be the *County Master Gardener Association*.

Article II Objective

This organization shall be a non-profit, educational, literary, and charitable association to support Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. This organization will not be affiliated with any commercial enterprises. Its objectives shall be:

- to increase knowledge of gardening to the general public and its members
- to support and assist Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service
- to assist "Extension Master Gardener Interns" in fulfilling their volunteer commitment
- to raise funds to support the educational mission and activities of the Master Gardener program

Article III Membership

Section 1. Members of this organization shall be Texas Master Gardeners, certified or recertified by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension service.

Section 2. Non-voting associate membership shall be extended to participants of the Extension Master Gardener Intern training class. No dues will be required of associate members.

Section 3. To maintain good standing, each member must pay dues for the current year.

Section 4. Dues for the members of this organization are payable annually _____. New memberships during the year are to be prorated to January.

Section 5. Associate members will be accepted into full membership upon completing the Extension Master Gardener Program and paying their dues.

Section 6. Failure to attend five or more of the regular meetings of the association may result in loss of membership in the association.

Article IV Meetings

Section 1. Meetings will be held monthly on the first Thursday of each month.

Section 2. Special meetings may be called if the need arises at the discretion of the executive committee (see Article IX, Section 1). Members will be notified at least 3 days prior to special meetings.

Article V Fiscal Year

The fiscal year of this organization shall run from January 1 to December 31 of each year.

Article VI Officers

Section 1. Officers are known as the Executive Committee.

Section 2. The nominating committee shall select officers. The nominating committee must gain the approval of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension agent acting as the Extension Master Gardener Coordinator prior to adding anyone to the slate. The slate of candidates shall be presented in October.

Section 3. Officers shall be elected by secret ballot in the regular November meeting and will be installed at the December meeting. Officers will assume their duties upon installation.

Section 4. If applicable, The President-elect shall serve for 1 year, then succeed to the presidency for 1 year.

Section 5. Officers may be re-elected to the same office for a second term.

Section 6. All nominees for the office must be active members in good standing.

Article IX Executive Committee

Section 1. The executive committee will consist of the president who will serve as chairperson, president-elect (if applicable), vice president, secretary, treasurer, and the immediate past president who will serve as a non-voting, ex-officio mentor.

Section 2. A Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service staff member shall serve as an advisor to the executive committee.

Section 3. The executive committee will meet monthly or as necessary.

Section 4. In the event a vacancy occurs on the executive committee, such vacancy shall be filled for the remainder of the term by a person approved by a majority vote of the executive committee.

Article VII Duties of Officers

Section 1. The President shall

1. Preside over meetings of the organization.
2. Appoint the chairperson of each standing committee, and any special committees.
3. Be an ex-officio member of all committees except the nominating committee.
4. Work with the treasurer on the budget.
5. Co-sign checks along with the treasurer.
6. Review financial management modules provided by AgriLife Extension
7. If the Association is a member of the TMGA, ensure that the requirements are met by appropriate deadlines.

Section 2. The President-elect shall

1. Take charge of meetings in the absence of the president.
2. Assist the President.
3. Attend committee meetings at the president's request.

Section 3. The Vice President shall

1. Be chairperson of the bylaws committee.
2. Be chairperson of the program committee.
3. Be responsible for reserving the meeting room and ordering the necessary furnishings.

Section 4. The Secretary shall

1. Take care of all necessary correspondence.
2. Keep a current list of members' names and addresses.
3. Record and post the minutes of each meeting.
4. Keep a record of attendance at meetings.

Section 5. The Treasurer shall

1. Review financial management modules provided by AgriLife Extension
2. Receive all dues and monies for the association.
3. Keep an exact account of all dues, other income, bank deposits, disbursements, and other financial matters.
4. Pay all bills upon receipt of a written statement and purchase proof with the co-signature of the president.
5. Make a monthly financial report for the membership.
6. Present the financial records for audit annually.
7. Assist with the development of an annual budget to be approved by the Executive Committee (see Article IX, Section 1).

Article VIII *Committees*

Section 1. The standing committee chairperson shall be appointed by the president and announced at the first meeting of the year.

Section 2. Associate members may serve as members of committees.

Section 3. The standing committees if applicable and the duties of each are:

Educational Enrichment Program

1. The vice president shall serve as chairperson.
2. This committee is responsible for arranging programs for monthly meetings and additional educational enrichment programs, seminars, and field trips.
3. This committee will work with the Extension agent to ensure that all programs are appropriate and suitable for recertification requirements.

Communication

1. This committee may include social media, websites, newsletter, etc.
2. The chairperson will serve as content coordinator.
3. The committee will prepare and send a monthly correspondence to inform members of pertinent information.

Membership

1. The committee will consist of at least a chairperson.

2. The committee chair shall serve as an administrator for the VMS.
3. The committee will encourage associate members to become members upon their completion of the class.

Nominating

1. The committee will consist of a chairperson and two members who are not currently serving on the executive committee.
2. The committee will provide a slate of candidates for offices at the October meeting.
3. The committee will gain approval for any person put forth as an officer from the county agent.

Audit

1. The committee will consist of a chairperson and two members who are not currently serving on the executive committee.
2. The committee will audit the financial records in the presence of the treasurer and president annually.
3. Provide an audit report to keep on file.
4. Review financial management modules provided by AgriLife Extension

Article X *Parliamentary Authority*

The rules contained in Robert's Rules of Order revised shall govern the association in all cases in which they are applicable and when consistent with the bylaws of this association.

Article XI *Voting*

Section 1. A quorum shall consist of 25 percent of the active members.

Section 2. Election voting shall be by secret ballot.

Article XII *Amendments*

Section 1. These bylaws may be amended by a two-thirds vote of the membership.

Section 2. Notice of all proposed amendments to the bylaws must be presented at one regular meeting and distributed to the membership. Proposed amendments will be voted on at the next regular meeting.

Article XIII *Dissolution*

Upon the dissolution of the organization, assets shall be distributed to the Junior Master Gardener Program (or other AgriLife program) for tax exempt purposes within the meaning of Section 501(c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code, or corresponding section of any future federal tax code, or shall be distributed to the Federal Government, or to a state or local government, for a public purpose. Any such asset not disposed of shall be disposed of by the Court of Common Pleas of the county in which the principal office of the organization is then located, exclusively for such purpose or to such organization or organizations, as said Court shall determine, which are organized and operated exclusively for such purposes.

Note:

Bylaws are a set of guiding rules that govern the operations and management of an organization. They provide a framework for organizing functions, outlining structure, responsibilities, and decision-making processes. They are legally binding. Ideally, bylaws should not need major revisions, however, they should be reviewed every 3-5 years to ensure they remain relevant and effective.

Specific details that outline how business is conducted should be placed in a Policy and Procedures manual. Policies and procedures are also useful for incoming officers to guide them through the process(es) of their position. This can serve as a historical account of when and why changes are made.

Policies and procedure manuals should never conflict with the organization's bylaws or with AgriLife's Extension Master Gardener Management Guide. Examples of things to be included in a policies and procedures manual are the dollar amount of dues to be paid, the way information is communicated, and/or expands on the role of each officer and committee member. Finally, associations may want to put recertification requirements in their bylaws. Please note certification and recertification are an AgriLife decision and the only statement that is to be included in Association bylaws is that members must be certified or recertified according to AgriLife requirements.