

RETENTION IDEAS AND APPROACHES FOR MASTER GARDENER ASSOCIATIONS

Introduction And Rationale For Retention Document: This document is intended for UW-Extension Master Gardener Advisors and Master Gardener organizations. The following is a compilation of ideas and approaches (some old and some new) that could be used, modified, ignored, etc. in the whole retention process from recruiting to keeping members on board for years to come. Take them and use them as you choose; not all strategies may be appropriate for all groups. It is suggested that you get some feedback on the ideas and approaches you are using, evaluate their success or failure, and modify them appropriately.

E UW-Extension Responsibility

A Association Responsibility

Æ Shared Responsibility – (can vary)

RETENTION STRATEGIES:

I. RECRUITMENT

- Æ** A. Recruitment of new candidates can be done by announcement in the local newspaper, distribution of brochures, or word of mouth (for example having an existing MGV recruit one or two of their friends).
- E** B. The selection process for recruits could include a questionnaire (to help determine the recruits specific areas of interest), an application form (to help determine if the recruit is truly interested in becoming a volunteer and not just looking for a garden class), or personal interviews to determine the recruits volunteer intentions, or any combination of the foregoing. Whatever selection process is used is the responsibility of the county Extension Agent. (A sample questionnaire follows this document.)
- Æ** C. ALWAYS emphasize that the PRIMARY purpose of our Volunteer organization is to teach others about horticulture and the benefits of gardening. The SECONDARY purpose is the horticultural training we receive. All literature, brochures, and presentations should emphasize the volunteer nature of our work.
- A** D. Training scholarships for limited resources individuals is encouraged, but must be funded locally.
- Æ** E. The interview process, if one is used, should be done by a committee made up of Extension Agents and Master Gardener Volunteers, and should follow the guidelines outlined in the Master Gardener Operating Policies.
- E** F. Some of the key factors to consider in determining which of the new candidates for MGV should be accepted into General training and the MGV program could include:
 - 1. Previous volunteer experience.
 - 2. Gardening expertise and experience.
 - 3. Communication skills (listening, talking, writing).
 - 4. Experience working with people of diverse races and ethnicities

5. Ability and desire to learn.
6. Interest in helping people or volunteering.
7. Ability to communicate in a language other than English.
8. Personal goals of the individual.

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- G. Non-accepted individuals should be informed that their application will be retained on file and that they will be notified when the next volunteer training session is offered. Details regarding non-acceptance should be general in nature - limited to comments on the number of candidates in relation to available space, the large number of qualified individuals, etc.

II. TRAINING

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- A. Individuals accepted into the program should be sent:
1. A Volunteer Agreement to read, understand, and sign;
 2. A list of volunteer opportunities from which to select a few that are of major interest to them;
 3. A class schedule; and
 4. A questionnaire if this has not already been completed.

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- B. The Volunteer Agreement needs to be signed but it should also be understood by the recruit. The agreement could be gone over at the initial interview, if there is one, or done with the whole new class of recruits at one of the early classes.

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- C. Collecting a deposit to be refunded upon attainment of Certified MGV status is not prohibited, but is also not encouraged.

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- D. Publish the name of each MGV student in the local newsletter or the local newspaper to congratulate them on their volunteer commitment.

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- E. If they do not have a lot of involvement with the training, the UW-Extension staff should have a lot of other contact with the new trainees so that the trainees will feel more comfortable when they have interaction with the UW-Extension staff later on.

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- F. Facilitators of training should provide substantial orientation and subsequent short presentations on specific topics in relation to the MG program.

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- G. Have officers of the Association (or Local Representatives, or Board of Directors of WIMGA) attend a couple of the training classes to tell the class about the Association and WIMGA and encourage them to be active members of the Association.

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- H. Ask the trainee for a commitment to a specific project at the beginning (preferably) of training or some time before training is completed (and get the trainee connected with a mentor).

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- I. Upon completion of training, publish the individual's name in the local newspaper, the newsletter, and announce their accomplishments at Association meetings.

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- J. Have new members join a committee (or two) to get them involved.

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- K. Upon attainment of Certified MGV, give recognition in local newspaper, newsletter, and announcement at local meeting.

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- L. All members of the Association, including the trainees or Interns, should be strongly encouraged to wear their name badges at Association meetings. If someone does not have a badge or forgets to bring it, they should wear a temporary name badge.

III. MENTORING

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- A. Assign a Mentor to each trainee early in the training process. If, for example, the recruit has selected a particular project to work on at the beginning of General training, a person who works on that project could be assigned as Mentor.

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- B. Regardless of when mentors are assigned, the Mentor should work with the trainee for at least one year.

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- C. If the trainee completes their volunteer hour requirement before training is complete, they could become a Certified MGV upon graduation and passing the test. (This

would be more likely if the trainee had a Mentor and a project or two to work on during training).

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D. Mentors should be accepted from the Association members who have certain qualifications. For example: (choose one or more of the following)

1. Must be a Certified MGV.
2. Have earned over 100 hours of volunteer service.
3. Have a strong motivation to help others.

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E. The Mentor can assist the Mentee by:

1. Making personal or phone contact with the assigned Mentee within one week of being assigned.
2. Making at least three other contacts with the Mentee during the first year to invite that individual to meetings and to volunteer activities, and meet the Mentee to discuss progress toward certification, etc.
3. Being available throughout the year to answer questions about programs and procedures, how the Association functions, and generally helping get the answer to any question the Mentee may have.
4. Encouraging the trainee's involvement in volunteer projects and in attending Association meetings and events, and helping the Mentee fill out reporting forms (such as Hours Reporting form).

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F. Mentors can benefit by:

1. Having the prestige of being "recognized leaders in their field."
2. Learning more about the organization.

IV. VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

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A. Each Association should compile lists of acceptable volunteer opportunities that are available. (It should be noted that generally all travel time is counted as volunteer time to and from volunteer opportunities, one exception being that travel to and from Association meetings is not counted.) All volunteer opportunities must be approved by the local UW-Extension Agent.

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B. Volunteer opportunities may include but are not limited to:

1. Serve as an officer of your Association.
2. Serve on a committee (or two) of your local Association.
3. Serve as a Local Representative or as a Director on the Board of Directors of WIMGA.
4. Work on any of the projects that have been approved as acceptable by your local Extension Agent.
5. Become a Plant Health Advisor.
6. Assist clientele who come into the Extension office for assistance.
7. Participate in design and operation of horticultural displays, exhibits, or demonstrations.
8. Write an article for your local or State Master Gardener Volunteer Newsletter.
9. Give a talk at a MGV program on a horticultural subject you know well.
10. Make presentations on horticultural topics to 4-H groups, youth organizations, youth clubs, etc.
11. Participate and organize school activities such as Arbor Day, Earth Day, and horticulture tours.
12. Participate in an Arbor Day planting, assist with a plant sale, bulb sale, etc.
13. Hold a wreath workshop each fall.
14. Assist the staff of a local garden, research station, church, or other site maintain annual and perennial beds.
15. Reestablish a prairie on public lands.
16. Help an environmental preservation group with its annual cleanup of public or private lands.

17. Plant propagation, seed starting, transplanting and division of perennials.
18. Work at establishing flower beds or gardens at County Fairs, or staff a garden information booth at the fair.
19. Work at a community garden where the vegetables are used to feed the hungry.
20. Assist your local UW-Extension Agent in doing whatever they want you to do.

V. CONTINUING EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES

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- A. Each Association should compile lists of acceptable educational opportunities that are available. (It should be noted that travel time to and from educational opportunities is not counted.) All educational opportunities must be approved by the local UW-Extension Agent.
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- B. Education opportunities may include but are not limited to:
1. MGV Association meetings that have educational programs.
 2. MG conferences (WIMGA annual conference, regional, international).
 3. Twilight meetings.
 4. Field days, trade shows, guided garden tours, etc.
 5. Horticultural seminars at local tech school, college, university, or botanical garden.
 6. Horticultural programs sponsored by WI DNR.
 7. Educational presentations by MGV groups.
 8. TV programs that have been approved by the local Extension Agent some programs that should be acceptable are "The Wisconsin Gardener," "Great Lakes Gardener," and "The Victory Garden."
 9. Radio programs such as Larry Meiller's "Garden Talk" on WPR (and the online archives).
 10. Specialized training offered through the MGV Program office.
 11. Brown Bag MGV monthly WisLine.
 12. Materials from the UW-Extension Media Collection.

VI. RECOGNITION AND AWARDS AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

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- A. The State Master Gardener Program provides awards for certain levels of achievement. Local groups may want to develop their own additional programs to thank MGVs for their service.
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- B. Recognition and rewards could include the following:
1. Small awards for attainment of certain goals (e.g. 1000 hours volunteer and 250 hours education, 500 hours of volunteer and 250 hours of education, etc., the higher the goal attained the higher the reward) such awards to be used for some form of individual continuing education, field trips, attending a state conference, etc.
 2. A scholarship (or two) for Advanced Training for the member of the Association who had the best attendance over a certain period.
 3. A valuable horticultural book for the most education hours in a period.
 4. No local or state dues for all Certified MGVs "In Good Standing."
 5. A cash mileage allowance to people who attend conferences and who carpool.
 6. MGVs who have attained levels of volunteer service above a certain level should be recognized yearly (verbally at the annual awards meeting if nothing else). For example, everyone who has attained 1,000 hours of volunteer or more should have their total hours read at the meeting.
 7. A special year end "Rewards" dinner where the main course, all trimmings, and all beverages are paid for by the Association.
 8. A program such as a "Special Recognition" program could be started to reward the "over-achievers." Levels of achievement could be Bronze, Silver, and Gold, for example. Each level of achievement would be rewarded with a certificate,

announcement at meetings, newspaper and newsletter publication, and have a bronze, silver and gold star to wear on their name badges.

9. A certificate, plaque or trophy for outstanding leadership or other significant contributions.

10. Any other special awards or recognition that you can think of for extraordinary service.

VII. OTHER

- A** A. Potluck dinners (separately or in conjunction with the regular Association meeting) or other functions where a little socializing can be done. Monthly meetings would be ideal if possible.
- A** B. Have a few select people who are assigned as "Greeters" to welcome the new MGV Interns or new MGVs to meetings for maybe 6 months.
- A** C. Be willing to accept MGVs who move from other areas in the state into your organization with little or no requirements other than showing they have met the education and volunteer hours requirements the past year.
- A** D. Have coffee klatch meetings to talk about gardening and to do more socializing among Association members.
- A** E. Keep in contact and keep all members of your Association up to date with Association news and other horticultural articles of interest with a newsletter (monthly, bi-monthly, quarterly, etc.).
- Æ** F. Have a local Web site that has a lot of Association information on it (online calendar, present and prior newsletters, a list of upcoming meeting dates and locations, etc.), that the Association members are aware of and know how to use.
- A** G. Keeping members of the Association current and up to date on their dues may be easier by sending them a Dues Invoice as a reminder when dues are due.
- A** H. If some of the members of the Association cannot attend evening meetings, then think about having some meeting during the day.
- Æ** I. Try to have at least one approved (for volunteer credit) project for every one of your Association members.

Compiled by the Retention Committee of the Wisconsin Master Gardener Association.

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SAMPLE QUESTIONNAIRE

From: _____County UW-Extension

Dear Prospective Master Gardener Trainee:

On behalf of the _____County UW-Extension, the _____County Master Gardener Volunteers wish to welcome you as a prospective MGV for the Spring 200__ training session. In order for us to get to know each other, we would appreciate it if you would jot down a few items of information so that we can serve your interests better.

1. Name _____
2. Address _____
3. City/State/Zip Code _____
4. Phone/E-mail _____
5. Reason(s) you want to take MG training _____

6. From the attached list pick the # 1 project or area in which you would like to start your Volunteer service and write it here: _____

7. Questions you may have of the UW-Extension or the MGVs: _____

At the beginning of or during the course of training you will be introduced to one of our certified MGVs, who participate in our mentoring program, to help you attain your goal of becoming a certified Master Gardener Volunteer.

Please return this questionnaire to _____before training begins.