

Developing a shared vision for inclusivity for the OSU Extension Master Gardener program

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The Home Horticulture Working Group is a long-standing working group composed of faculty and staff that coordinate the Extension Master Gardener (EMG) Program offerings at the county and state level. This summer, members of the group attended the 2018 National EMG Coordinators conference. Attendees came away with new ideas and observations from EMG Programs across the country that could improve the Master Gardener experience in Oregon. The working group recognizes that the current structure of Oregon's EMG program limits participation by many Oregonians. The majority of EMG volunteers are retired (74% aged 56 and older), white (95%), women (73%)¹. In order to increase diversity and inclusiveness of the EMG program, a new approach is needed. However, change is hampered by the fact that each county EMG program is independently coordinated, which makes it difficult and cumbersome to make statewide changes. Currently, changes to Oregon's MG Program are implemented in an ad hoc fashion, as county EMG coordinators vary in their motivation to pursue programmatic change, as well as the time and resources available to implement changes to Oregon's EMG Program.

In order to build a more inclusive EMG volunteer program that better reflects the demographics of our communities and supports the needs of county EMG coordinators, the Home Horticulture Working Group needs time to reflect. Currently, the working group meets between two-three times a year. Our meeting structure includes a full-day agenda of sharing program updates, resources, and ideas. Limited time has been available for strategic planning and higher-level discussions. Often, propositions for EMG program changes are stalled or sidetracked, because our group has not had the time to carefully consider not only what changes are needed, but how these changes should be implemented. Our Working Group needs time to carefully consider and discuss programmatic changes, with the guidance of a trained facilitator from outside of our group. The ultimate goal of these discussions will be how to craft an EMG program that is more accessible and inclusive to future participants, and how to implement changes in a way that is workable for EMG County coordinators.

We propose to use the working group innovation funds to create the time and space for deep conversations on future iterations of Oregon's EMG program. We will review Oregon's EMG program with an eye towards identifying structural changes that could be made to improve the experience for both coordinators running the program, and current and future EMG volunteers. An anticipated end result of this work is the development of a shared vision of inclusivity for the program, specific action items to make Oregon's EMG program relevant and useful to a broader audience, and a potential redesign of the course, better suited for both coordinators and participants.

¹ Langellotto-Rhodaback, G. A. and W. Miller. 2012. Demographics and perceptions of Master Gardener volunteers in Oregon. *International Journal of Volunteer Administration* XXIX(2): 20-27.

Before attempting in-depth discussions, the working group needs information on the current status of the county programs. Like many states, the delivery method of the Oregon EMG program curriculum varies from county to county. The first step we would undertake is to develop a survey to send to all county coordinators, asking them to describe how the program functions in their county. The survey would be open-ended and ask coordinators to describe delivery methods and practices that are working, as well as those that were tried but weren't successful. Our next working group activity would be for a smaller sub-team to review the completed surveys and organize the information into a report that would be distributed to all coordinators in advance of an in-person retreat. Our efforts would culminate in a facilitated, two-day retreat. The retreat would provide the time and space that EMG coordinators need for unhurried, thoughtful conversations. An outside, trained facilitator would help to guide the conversations towards productive discussion related to the future of Oregon's EMG program. Together, these efforts will enable us to re-envision and implement an EMG program that better serves all Oregonians, and best utilizes the talents of our EMG coordinators.

Budget (\$10,000):

- Off-site retreat facility rental, lodging and meals for 40-45 participants
 - Lodging = approximately \$5,360 (20 rooms X 2 nights X \$134/day lodging)
 - On-Site Meals = approximately \$1,640 (continental breakfast and lunch X 2 days X 45 people)
- At least one trained facilitator from outside the Master Gardener program with experience in volunteer organizations. (possibilities: eXtension.org or Energize Inc. https://www.energizeinc.com/about/training_and_consultation) = \$3,000 facilitation services, travel, and lodging

Timeline:

November 2018	Innovation funds awarded
Nov-December	Sub-team meeting; Survey development & launch
January 2019	Survey closed and report shared with working group for review
January-May	Retreat planning & coordination by sub-team
May or June	MG Coordinators Retreat
June 30, 2019	All funds expended
Fall 2019	Discussion of retreat outcomes and statewide implementation steps at quarterly Home Hort Working Group meeting
December 2019	Results shared at OSU Extension Annual Conference
May 2020	Results shared at National Master Gardener Coordinator's conference