MASTER GARDENER ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES May 4, 2022

The meeting of the Extension Master Gardener Advisory Committee was called to order at 10:00 am by Candice Hart. The meeting was held in person at the Champaign County Extension Office as well as via Zoom. Also in attendance were: Bruce Black, Heather Coyle, Barb Dahlbach, Debra Fearn, Sarah Fellerer, Brittnay Haag, Nancy Kreith, Jenny Lee, Judy Panico, Gwen Podeschi, Sarah Vogel, Jennifer Warren, Jana Waite, Jane White, and Vicky Wyffels.

- 1. Introductions were made. Minutes from the January 12 meeting were approved.
- 2. There are three open positions on the committee: two in the Northeast and one in the South. The open positions were previously held by Pat Gunnerson (NE, Kendall, MG), Nancy Kreith (NE, Cook, Staff) and Austin Little (S, Franklin, Jackson, Perry, Randolph, and Williamson counties, Staff). We thank Pat, Nancy and Austin for their contributions to the committee.
 - All three officers agreed to continue in their current positions: Chair May Bach, Co-Chair Gwen Podeschi, and Secretary Judy Panico.
- 3. We reviewed the 2021 MG Program Summary Data report which listed key metrics for 2019, 2020 and 2021. Of note was number of Service Hours and Value of Hours Donated. 2019 reported 189,302 hours with a value of \$6.1 million. Both metrics dropped severely in 2020 and showed some rebounding in 2021 as Covid restrictions eased and more volunteer opportunities were available. 2021 reported 137,602 hours with a value of \$4.6 million. The MG Program Summary Data will be included in the MG Annual Report and will be available on the MG website.
- 4. The majority of the meeting was used to discuss the preliminary 2021 MG Program Survey results. The results were raw data without grouping of similar comments or stratification to determine county specific comments.
 - The response rate was 27%, lower than we hoped, with 82% female respondents, 99% non-hispanic, 97% white, and 89% 60 years or older, very much in line with our overall demographics. Overwhelming majority (93% or more) plan to stay involved with the MG program this year and would

recommend the program to others while 98% believe their volunteer work is valuable.

One of the key areas we wanted to focus on with the survey was regarding the number of volunteer hours required to be a MG. Currently, the program requires 60 volunteer hours over 2 years to become a MG and 30 hours annually in subsequent years to continue in the program. 32% of respondents indicated they volunteered 31-50 hours in 2021. 20% volunteered less than 30 (14%) or no hours (6%). These 2021 hours could still be impacted by Covid restrictions limiting outside projects or volunteer reluctance to get out in the community. 18% indicated the 60/30 hour requirement was difficult to attain. We agreed to reduce the hours requirement starting in 2023 to 40 hours over 2 years for Interns and 20 hours annually for MGs. Interns who are going through training in 2022 but do not complete their volunteer requirement this year will have the lower requirement next year.

Continuing Education hours will remain at 10 hours annually. CE topics with the highest interest included Natives (51%), Garden Tours and Interpretation (46%), and Weed Identification (45%).

As we reviewed the Survey results and comments, we briefly discussed many aspects of the MG program including:

- The need for more independent projects
- A state-wide Help Desk platform so MGs could respond to client questions/emails from home including an on-line fillable form for clients to submit questions and photos
- Additional on-boarding training for Trainees who want to become MGs
- Creating MG Emeritus status for MG alumni who still want to be involved but perhaps can no longer physically volunteer
- All counties have a contact person but not all counties have Program Coordinator or Educator
- Continuing themes of accessibility, accommodation and diversity

- Cost of MG education varies across the state while other states have one price for all counties
- 5. Candice hasn't had time to work on the rebranding efforts for the on-line MG training. The rebranding effort is being done to limit confusion since the training is open to both individuals who want to volunteer as Master Gardeners and individuals who want the horticulture knowledge but do not plan to volunteer. Since it is currently labeled "Master Gardener" training, it can be confusing to the latter group.
- 6. State awards applications and instructions were sent out to county coordinators last week. Applications are due June 13. We will need to complete judging the applications by July 29. We agreed 2020 and 2021 award winners should be listed in the awards program, have colored ribbons on their name tags, and be acknowledged as a group at the awards ceremony.
- 7. The 2022 state MG conference will be held at the Tinley Park Convention Center September 8-9. Thursday includes tours and dinner in the garden. Friday has keynote, three breakout sessions, awards and vendors. Most of the tours and speakers are already set up. We are hoping for about 300 attendees. Registration is planned for early June.
 - The 2023 conference is planned for Peoria for September 7-8, 2023. Work has already begun. The 2024 conference location needs to be confirmed with Lake County.
- 8. The Mastering Urban Tree Health and Tree Identification advanced training has 127 people enrolled. Hands on workshops need to be scheduled but will also include MGs who completed the on-line portion but have not attended the hands on training. Grant ends in June but Candice will try to get it extended.
- 9. Work on the GivePulse volunteer hour reporting system is still on-going. When ready, two counties will conduct user trials with the target of going live state wide January 1, 2023.
- 10. The UIE Communications Team is developing an MG marketing plan including cohesive state-wide promotional materials for different audiences,

including Spanish materials. Signs and tablecloths are also being addressed.

The apparel company that had been selected to produce MG apparel has been non-responsive so the Communications Team is looking for another new vendor. A conference T-shirt will be available for pre-order. Counties can order their own MG apparel but they must ensure they are using the correct logo and order through an approved vendor.

- 11. Travis Burke has approved a part-time position for the MG manual rewrite project. Candice is working with Travis on the job description. Hope to get this position filled in the next few months. Rewrite should include more current trends, expanded discussions on relevant topics and perhaps a Spanish edition. Ideally, on-line or hybrid training could also be developed in Spanish.
- 12. Candice shared information she obtained from the Virginia MG program to address diversity and inclusion. Virginia recently revamped their program so they no longer charge a fee for their MG manual which is now on-line. If Trainees want a printed version, it is \$35. Instead, they charge a \$100 program fee which goes to the state.

UIE charges \$300 for training which includes the cost of the manual (\$250). Hybrid and in-person training allows the local county to choose a fee to cover their costs in addition to the \$300. The costs of training can put training out of reach for some portions of our communities.

Several ideas were discussed around reducing training costs to be more inclusive and reach a more diverse audience:

- Local county can choose to provide a partial fee waiver or scholarship, however people may not realize that this options exists today. Some counties have billed trainees who didn't volunteer required hours after completing training when they were given a partial fee waiver.
- What can be done to reduce manual costs how much does it cost to actually print it? Can it be digital so a trainee can easily access it on a phone or iPad?

- Marketing team needs to look at existing MG audience and identify new audience we want to reach. During civil rights review, counties should look at total demographics for volunteers (race/ethnicity/gender) compared to county demographics to help identify the audience they need to reach.
- Can we offer a pledge system where a new trainee pledges to volunteer for X hours over the requirement in return for lower training costs?
- Master Naturalist program worked with researchers on campus to participate in a research study on suggested steps to diversity. This might easily be applied to the MG program.
- 13. Other business We should share independent/smaller projects that can be easily replicated across the state so everyone doesn't have to invent new projects. Some counties struggle to find large projects and this could help MGs identify what can be done locally. Projects could be shared on MG website, in a workshop or in a 5 minute video series included in the monthly MG training.
- 14. The next meeting will be held on August 17 from 1:30 to 3:30 pm via Zoom.

Meeting adjourned at 1:53 pm. Respectfully submitted by Judy Panico, secretary.