



## Extension Master Gardener Project Guidelines and Proposals

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### Introduction

Very often, EMG projects and activities “spontaneously generate,” whether from a community request or from a volunteer who has an idea that meets a local need. Because the projects may or may not integrate with the planned educational programming to be implemented by EMGs, the opportunities that arise should be evaluated to see if they are appropriate Extension activities, whether they are feasible, and if there is sufficient commitment to ensure completion. New projects should be evaluated to determine how they fit into Extension program areas, such as sustainable landscape management, the unit’s Situation Analysis and the agent’s plan of work.

The local coordinator is responsible for ensuring the direction that projects and activities take. They are also responsible for ensuring that projects are completed in a fashion appropriate to VCE. If EMG projects and activities are planned outside of the educational program plan designed with local VCE agents and staff, then a Project Proposal and Authorization Form should be completed. Completion of the form requires a signature of a VCE personnel, who, by signing the form, is authorizing the event as a VCE activity. Some units may sanction projects that others do not. Project authorization is the purview of the local VCE office.

Projects and activities that are implemented without completion of a Project Proposal and Authorization Form are not considered EMG activities and do not count as EMG volunteered time, as VCE was unaware of the event and could not approve it as appropriate. Without completion of a project approval form, these activities are also not covered under VCE liability insurance.

Projects should be evaluated at their conclusion or on an annual basis. On-going projects need to be re-approved on an annual basis by the agent or coordinator.

**\*Unapproved events do not carry the liability shield of Virginia Cooperative Extension or Virginia Tech.**

### EMG Activity Report Groups

Activity report groups have been established by the State Coordinator’s Office of Virginia’s EMG Program. These groups help to focus the efforts of the local EMG unit as well as to capture data for reporting purposes. Some activities may cross over Activity Report Groups, when deciding where a project falls, choose the one best primary group.

### EMG Environmental Stewardship

This activity group would include projects such as urban nutrient management or other efforts to improve or protect water quality, work with pollinator gardens/ gardening for wildlife, cover crops, turf alternatives, gardening for climate change, emphasis on native plants, and how to safely use organic and synthetic pesticides etc. Projects that include information on integrated pest management, such as planting lower maintenance plants to reduce pesticide usage, water usage, or other inputs also fits into this category.

### EMG Youth & Horticulture

This activity group would include any projects where the target audience is pre-k through high school. Projects would be partnerships with 4H Youth Development, scout groups or similar, local boys’ and girls’ clubs, in-school or after-school clubs where gardening or horticulture is central to the activity.

## **EMG Economic Value of Horticulture**

This activity group would include projects where the economic value or impact of horticulture can be captured in ecosystem services, mitigating heat-island effects, impacts on property values, increase in local tax revenues directly tied to the greening of communities or business districts, money saved due to specific conservation practices which directly impact heating and cooling costs at a residential level. These projects must still have an educational component and are not simply beautification projects.

## **EMG Food Security (nutrition, production, preservation)**

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

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

## **EMG Human Health (quality of life)**

This activity group would include any projects involving horticultural therapy, working with disabled clients, and working with clients in assisted living and nursing home facilities. Likewise, any projects dealing with working safely in the garden, staying healthy through garden activities, and taking measures to avoid trauma or harmful exposures while gardening (e.g. using sunscreen or other means to block harmful UV rays or using insect repellents to avoid harmful diseases vectored by insects). Any projects related to improved quality of life as it relates to plants and gardening fit well into this category.

## **General Outreach and Education**

This activity group would include any public-facing programming that may not fall under other reporting groups.

## **Volunteer Management**

Volunteer development, EMG Trainee class management, training or other management roles within the local EMG Unit. These hours can be logged by any EMG performing these duties.

## **Continuing Education**

Continuing education for Extension Master Gardeners as approved by the local VCE EMG Coordinator.

## **Risk Management**

Everything that Virginia Extension Master Gardeners do involves some sort of risk. It could be risk to their own health and safety, risk to the health and safety of participants in the programs they lead, risk to property (like those new pollinator plants they are planting), risk to the natural resources, or risk to the reputation of the volunteers, chapters, program, Virginia Tech, Commonwealth of Virginia, and local community partners with whom they are volunteering.

To help Extension Master Gardeners and local agents and coordinators in approving projects, project proposals should include an identification and plan for risks likely encountered in the proposed project/activity. Tools to help with this can be found in document “Risk Management for Extension Master Gardener Volunteers”.

Additionally, all Extension Master Gardeners should be current on their triennial requirement to view the “Risk Management for EMG Volunteers” presentation, either presented locally or through the eLearning module in Better Impact.

## **Civil Rights**

All extension and EMG programs must comply with Civil Rights policies. Please review with your local agent or coordinator. All Extension Master Gardeners should be current on their annual requirement to view the “VCE Annual Civil Rights” eLearning module in Better Impact. In program planning, we want to highlight two aspects: collection of demographic information and “all reasonable efforts”.

## Demographic Information

Virginia Cooperative Extension asks that participants voluntarily respond to questions regarding their race, ethnicity, and gender. The cumulative demographic information is requested solely for the purpose of determining compliance with federal civil rights laws through the United States Department of Agriculture/ National Institute of Food and Agriculture. Participants' response(s) will not affect their eligibility to participate in Extension programs. By providing this information, they assist us in assuring that VCE programs are administered in a nondiscriminatory manner. Consult your agent or coordinator on the best method to collect this information for each program and report it to the unit office.

Programmatic contacts can be collected and counted as "unidentified" if participants decline to report their demographic information. Demographic information reporting is voluntary for participants, but the number of participants reached should be collected and reported for each program through Better Impact.

## "All Reasonable Efforts"

A sincere effort must be made to encourage participation by underserved audiences and to overcome barriers and concerns that might interfere with their participation. It is not enough to simply announce the program is open to all. "All Reasonable Efforts" are a combination of actions designed to communicate to all persons that program participation is open and that all are welcome and encouraged to participate in educational programs. Documentation is needed that "All Reasonable Efforts" have been made. Consult your agent or coordinator on the best method to collect this information and report it to the unit office.

## Evaluating EMG Projects/ Programs

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

## Additional Resources

The Virginia Extension Master Gardener Coordinator Manual, current edition, is available to agents and coordinators by contacting the EMG State Office.

VCE EMG Volunteer Handbook. The current edition is available for downloading from the unit's Better Impact Document Library.

EMG Risk Management worksheets from publication SPES-699NP.

Consult with your agent or coordinator on the appropriate VCE Demographic forms to use for individual programs.

The latest EAA form is available from your coordinator or agent via the VCE Intranet. **As of July '24 this policy is under review and on hold.**

Civil Rights and Risk Management presentations in eLearning modules in Better Impact.

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SPES-700NP



## Appendix I: VCE Master Gardener Project Proposal and Authorization Form

Project Name:	
Initial Proposal or Renewal	
Purpose:	
Value to the Community:	

**EMG Activity Report Group (place a check (✓) next to all that apply):**

	<b>Environmental Stewardship</b> – Educational programs that work to increase awareness and knowledge of responsible landscape management and natural resource conservation.
	<b>Youth &amp; Horticulture</b> - Educational projects where the target audience is pre-k through high school
	<b>Economic Impact of Horticulture</b> – Educational programs that focus on horticulture's importance and impact on daily life.
	<b>Human Health</b> - (Quality of Life) Educational projects involving horticultural therapy, working with differently abled clients, and working with clients in assisted living and nursing home facilities. Likewise, any projects dealing with working safely in the garden, staying healthy through garden activities, and taking measures to avoid trauma or harmful exposures while gardening.
	<b>Food Security</b> – Educational programs that aim to increase awareness of the benefits home food production, food systems, and locally grown foods.
	<b>General Outreach &amp; Education</b> - Public programming that may not fall under other report groups.
	<b>Continuing Education</b> – Continuing Education for Master Gardeners
	<b>Volunteer Management</b> – Volunteer development, intern training, or other management roles.

# General Information

Project Lead:

Project Co-Lead:

Number of EMGs Required:

Estimated Number of Volunteer Hours Involved:

Project Location:

Project Date(s) and Duration:

Cost of Project:

Funding Source(s):

Are Minors Involved?   Yes                      No

Are Seniors Involved?   Yes                      No

## Plan to Implement Project:

(please include cost information, use additional sheets if necessary)

## Plan to Evaluate and Report on Project:

(including reporting for Civil Rights Compliance such as demographic information and “All Reasonable Efforts” of event promotion)

## Plan to Bring Project to a Close:

### Attachments

Risk Management Planning Worksheet <sup>x</sup> (from publication SPES-699NP)

Risk Identification Worksheet <sup>x</sup> (from publication SPES-699NP)

Field Work Risk Management Checklist <sup>x</sup> (from publication SPES-699NP)

Equal Access Assurance Form (or already on file with office)

Any contract needing VCE approval/signature

Information needed for a request of a Certificate of Insurance by VT/VCE

<sup>x</sup> If required by agent or coordinator

### Signatures

Submitted by:

Date:

Approved by:

Date:

(VCE Agent or EMG Coordinator)

## Appendix II: Project Evaluation and Reporting

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

At the completion of each project or yearly, a project should be evaluated and reported on.

While no form has been developed or adopted by the EMG State Office, local units may create their own form in collaboration with their Agent or use a template offered by New River Valley and Nelson Units. These may be found at: <https://mastergardener.ext.vt.edu/current-resources/leadership/>.

### Recommended Minimum Reporting to Agent

- Form/Tool used for evaluation
- Contact Count for use by EMGs in Better Impact
- Demographic Contact Information for Civil Rights
- “All Reasonable Efforts” used for publicity/promotion