

**MASTER GARDENER PROGRAM
PEL PROJECT, 2011-2012**

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Project Charter (Phase I): Strategic Positioning and Restructuring of the University of Minnesota Extension Master Gardener Program

Sponsor: Julie Weisenhorn, Master Gardener Program

Project Overview

Background and Opportunity Statement

The University of Minnesota Master Gardener Program is not currently sustainable and is unable to continue to serve its mission: ‘To support Extension by providing volunteers trained in horticulture to educate the public with research based information on the best practices in consumer horticulture and environmental stewardship. The Master Gardener program will provide an environment for its volunteers that is friendly and supportive so their training, experience, and enthusiasm will produce maximum benefits to their communities.’ Currently, there is significant inconsistency in the deployment of this program across the state, thus inhibiting the ability to educate and train both volunteers and communities in a coherent and reliable manner. It is vitally important to devise a new strategic plan and restructuring in order to maintain and grow a successful Master Gardener Program that can contribute to both the mission of the University and the betterment of local communities.

The project will involve two phases. The first phase is to develop a number of possible scenarios that can be vetted and translated into a business and implementation plan that optimizes on the research-based expertise of the Master Gardener volunteers while providing a management structure allowing the program to thrive. This phase of the program will conclude in spring 2012.

The second phase of the project will explore revenue generation for the state-wide Master Gardener program, specifically the viability of an online gardening course for home gardeners. A

business plan will be created addressing market demand, integration into the existing Master Gardener Program, and obstacles to implementation.

This project charter specifically addresses the first phase of the project.

Project Goals

By Spring 2012, a new management plan will be identified for implementation, resulting in a more sustainable Master Gardener Program.

Strategic Questions

Who are the stakeholders in this process?

How are other successful Extension Programs structured?

What are the needs of the stakeholders in our state?

What are the key portions of the Master Gardener Program to be considered in this process?

What the ideal structure of a Master Gardener Program look like?

Approach

Market Research: Include searches of current structures of similar programs.

Focus Groups: Use a Visioning Sessions to gather information from key stakeholders.

Interviews: Talk with the Dean of Extension to ensure product aligns with her needs.

Project Scope and Deliverables

Starting: October, 2011

Stopping: May, 2012, Present in June, 2012

In Scope:

- Participate in review/analysis of data collected from surveys, interviews, etc
- Participate in design team sessions as able
- Participate in visioning sessions
- Select an area of interest in the management plan that is of interest to our group to work on in Phase 2 of the project
- Participate in drafting management plan to present to the Dean
 - *Evaluate implementation

Timeline:

Survey Sent (Stakeholders) and Results Received, End of October, 2011

Interview Dean as key stakeholder November, 2011

Identify Building Blocks to create management plan, November, 2011

Participate in Visioning Session with Stakeholders, December, 2011

Help develop and present Management Plan to Dean, Jan/Feb, 2012

Define and initiate Phase 2 of the project, January, 2012_
Complete report and poster for presentation, Feb-May, 2012

Project Benefits

Successful implementation of a sustainable management plan will result in:

- The University being able to maintain its visibility in and outreach to the community as a resource, supporting its mission for dynamic public engagement and it's pillar of excellence as an exceptional organization (being a responsible steward of resources, focused on service...)

Project Team

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Background/History of the Master Gardener Program:

Opportunity Statement: The first phase is to develop a number of possible scenarios that can be vetted and translated into a business and implementation plan that optimizes on the research-based expertise of the Master Gardener volunteers while providing a management structure allowing the program to thrive.

History of the University of Minnesota Extension Master Gardener Program

The first Master Gardener program was started in Washington State University by David Gibby and Bill Scheer as a way to emphasize urban horticulture through their extension program. After a large spike in urban growth, the demand grew for education on urban horticulture and the first Master Gardener program in the early 1970's began. Volunteers were recruited and trained as Master Gardeners. Training included classroom teaching for volunteers on horticulture and related topics and volunteers were also required to pass exams to receive the Master Gardener title. This program proved to be a vital extension of services from Washington State University. Due to the program's success it grew throughout the country into all 50 states and Canada where other Master Gardener programs have been started.

The University of Minnesota Extension Master Gardener program was developed by Horticulture faculty in 1977 with a class of 25 people¹. Its academic home is the University's Department of Horticultural Science. Like the program at WSU, the University of Minnesota Extension Master Gardener program teaches foundation classes in horticulture and related subjects to people with an interest in gardening and in sharing research-based information with people in their communities. The mission of the Master Gardener program aligns with the land grant mission of Extension:

¹ <http://www1.extension.umn.edu/master-gardener/about/>

*The mission of the University of Minnesota Extension Master Gardener program is to support Extension by providing volunteers trained in horticulture to educate the public with research based information on the best practices in consumer horticulture and environmental stewardship.*²

People interested in becoming Master Gardeners apply to and are accepted by their local program. The University of Minnesota requires that Master Gardeners volunteer 50 hours as interns and 25 hours annually after that*. Last year the program had over 128,000 hours of volunteered, the equivalent of \$2.6 million in value to the communities of Minnesota³

When the program was developed at the University of Minnesota, it was established in each of the 87 counties in Minnesota. In most cases, volunteers were supervised by a county agent. . The main role of the Master Gardeners was answering home horticulture questions.

In 2003, University of Minnesota Extension restructured on a regional basis. As part of this regionalization, counties were now responsible for funding local Extension positions as part of a Memorandum of Agreement between University of Minnesota Extension and county administration. This resulted in the loss of some positions, including some county staff that formerly supervised local Master Gardener programs. Unfortunately, Extension did not choose to re-organize the Master Gardener program under this regional structure, leaving it as a county-based program. The loss of staff left some local Master Gardener programs without leadership except from the remote state office, resulting in volunteers taking on leadership responsibilities. While this is admirable and many have done an outstanding job, relying on volunteers to shoulder the administration of a local Master Gardener program is not a long-term, sustainable model for the future.

² 2012 UMN Extension Master Gardener Volunteer Manual, pg. 3

³ Based on the Independent Sector's annual estimate of the average value of a volunteer hour, which was \$21.36 in 2010. <http://z.umn.edu/6e9>

Structure of the UMN Extension Master Gardener Program

To support and manage the more than 2,200 volunteers contributing annually to the Master Gardener program, the program relies on a small state support staff which consists of a state director (Julie Weisenhorn) and state program manager (David Moen). The state director provides the overall vision for the program as well as educational content through a connection to the Department of Horticultural Science. The state program manager provides administrative oversight for the local programs, and is responsible for working with Extension regional directors to promote and expand the program through Minnesota.

The level and type of direct staff supervision, management and coordination of volunteers and local programs varies greatly across Minnesota. Historically, the state Master Gardener office was responsible for educating Master Gardener volunteers. County Extension educators were responsible for the creation of county Master Gardener programs and the supervision and management of volunteers.

In the most recent restructuring of Extension in 2003, state and federal revenue shifted to support educators that have statewide responsibility for education and research in specific areas. Those positions no longer included responsibility for volunteer supervision and management of local programs.

Consequently, different variations in program structure emerged. Specifically, they include: 1) programs with Master Gardener Coordinators, 2) programs with Local Extension Educators, 3) programs with county support staff, 4) Volunteer-led programs, or 5) counties with no organized Master Gardener program.

Master Gardener Program Structures at the County Level

- **Master Gardener Coordinators** – Nine counties; oversight of 35% (885) of total

volunteers; positions vary from 100% time to less than 20% time based on county funding; focused solely on supervising and managing the local programs and volunteers.

- **Local Extension Educators** – 18 counties; oversight of 27% (613) of total volunteers; percentage of time allocated varies from county to county; responsible for educational programs as well as supervision and management of local Master Gardener volunteers.
- **County support staff**
 - Two counties; oversight of 4% (91) of total volunteers; coordination responsibility written into job description; percentage of time allocated varies from county to county;
 - Eight counties; coordination responsibilities assumed, but not necessarily written into job description; provide support services, but not management, to 7% (159) of total volunteers; serve as key contacts for the program; percentage of time allocated varies from county to county.
- **Volunteer-led (no direct staff coordination)** – 36 counties; 26% (590) of total volunteers with 250 in two counties (Washington, Dakota); may have access to limited service / administrative assistance from the Extension office if one exists. Master Gardener program coordination and management became the responsibility of local support staff or the volunteers. In this case, accountability for actions of volunteers shifts from the county to the state staff and requires that Master Gardeners assume some of those staff roles in order to still have a local program.
- **No organized Master Gardener Program** – 12 counties have no organized Master Gardener program and no staff support; however 13 volunteers in those counties reported hours in 2010.

Source: Master Gardener Program Management Plan: Program Information Sheet.

Phase I: Summary of Efforts

In an effort to understand the needs of the Master Gardener Program moving forward, a number of activities were undertaken in the fall of 2011. Originally, an interview with the Dean of Extension, Bev Durgan, established the goals and parameters of the project. A Visioning Session with key stakeholders further delineated the roles and responsibilities within the current program as well as providing pivotal ideas of ways the program could evolve to meet its changing needs. A SWOT analysis following the Visioning Session outlined the essential components of an effective program moving forward. Finally, in order to establish cohesive feedback regarding the future of the program, our group worked closely with consultants to provide a writing plan for the strategic restructuring of the Master Gardener Program.

Interview with the Dean of Extension, Bev Durgan (11/22/2011):

In November, there was a meeting with the Dean of Extension to discuss her goals for the Master Gardener Program restructuring. The Dean is a key stakeholder in this project and, as such, understanding her idea of a successful program is vital to ensuring the success of the proposal and ultimately the program itself. She noted a few key areas of priority from her perspective.

The volunteer experience was the main feature the Dean outlined. Her main concern was to ensure that the Master Gardener Program serves the volunteers well. To that end, she wants to ensure adequate and ongoing support (in terms of knowing from whom they can get necessary information) and training, both technically and in leadership competencies. Overall, the Dean stressed that she prefers to put resources toward better trained and fulfilled Master Gardeners (that we already have) versus measuring success by increasing the number of volunteers. That being said, she noted the need to ensure that the system created will be able to refresh the pool of volunteers, but not beyond the ability of the University to support. Ideally, a new system would ensure a consistency in the volunteer experience, possibly a checklist-type approach that standardizes the recruitment, interview and volunteer activities, continuing education/quality control, and technical expertise. Additionally, this same standardization would include what the volunteers can expect from the University, such as continuing education, the latest research and information, clear resources for questions and tools/input for managing conflict. It is important that volunteers feel a part of the same team, with the same mission. Additionally, effort should be made to determine the motivation of an individual to become a Master Gardener in order to determine how best to ensure they remain happy and fulfilled volunteers. Finally, the consistency of the message that Master Gardeners provide the public is seen a vital improvement

to be made moving forward. There needs to be a unified message coming from Master Gardeners around the state and they need to be clearly recognized as part of the University of Minnesota and Extension. We want volunteers who are proud to be Master Gardeners and proud to represent the University of Minnesota.

The organizational structure of the program was also discussed. The Dean is open to organizing the program in any number of ways. She does not feel married to the county-structure and mainly wants to ensure that the program is sustainable. She stressed that Master Gardeners tend to be happier and feel more appreciated when they feel connected/get one-on-one contact with the state. She also noted the complexity involved in determining how resources and structure should be organized around the metro area and out-state regions (in terms of considering both population and need). She noted that some of the currently most successful Master Gardener Programs utilize a local coordinator and so it would be important to consider the function of this role and what the program may look like without this role. In general, she is willing to entertain any number of scenarios in terms of structure moving forward, but wants to ensure that there is more accountability locally and a clear tie to the state and University.

In terms of financial resources for the program, the Dean's largest concern is ensuring that the program is sustainable. Additionally, she wants to ensure that the restructuring process itself carefully considers the most advantageous way to utilize its resources (i.e. toward what the University should be putting the limited resources it has). In terms of the ongoing decreasing budgets, the Dean mentioned that it may be important for the volunteers to be able to self-organize (and this could go along with some of the leadership training mentioned above).

The Dean sees one of the key missions of the program to be extending the research and resources of the University further than it would otherwise be able by having a strong volunteer-

based, state-wide program. There is a significant opportunity for the restructuring of the program to catapult it to greater success. There is a growing demand for the expert knowledge provided by this program as a younger generation seeks knowledge about urban gardening, organic/local foods, and sustainability issues in general. A successfully restructured program can be poised to meet this need and heighten the visibility and appreciation for the University of Minnesota, Extension, and, specifically, the Master Gardener Program.

Visioning Session (11/28/2011)

A key component of Phase 1 of our project was participating in a visioning session for the Master Gardener program. The purpose of this visioning session was to allow key stakeholders to imagine what the future of the Master Gardener Program might look like. Key stakeholders in the program were invited, including Master Gardeners, Extension Educators, Program coordinators, volunteer leaders, and members of the Minnesota Association for Volunteer Administration. The visioning session was facilitated by Jan Williams and Sean Schuller, consultants overseeing the design team working on the Master Gardener restructuring proposal.

The visioning session began with a discussion of the current state of the Master Gardener Program. Facts and trends about the program were reviewed, as well as finances, organizational structure, and volunteer demographics.

Participants were divided into groups to complete a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) Analysis of the current state of the Master Gardener Program. Specifically, groups were asked to discuss SWOTS as they related to three areas: organizational structure/operations; financial structure (current revenue/expense model); and volunteer management. This SWOT Analysis was summarized by the PEL team and can be found later in this report.

The small groups were then asked to brainstorm the future state or vision for the same three areas. Specifically, they were asked to consider alternative structure models, alternative revenue/expense models, and alternative volunteer management models that would maximize impact. Groups reported out to the large group and then participants were able to vote for the solutions/visions/ideas they felt were of the highest priority.

The facilitators then used this information to develop quick sketches of the Master Gardener program of the future. Feedback gathered would be used for the final restructuring proposal.

As a PEL team, participation in the Visioning Session provided an invaluable opportunity to hear from key stakeholders in the Master Gardener program. We were able to hear from educators, volunteers, and program leaders what they felt were key strengths and weaknesses of the program. This gave us a broader base of knowledge as we moved forward with our project and identified what role our PEL team could play in assisting with the restructuring of the Master Gardener program.

Synthesis of SWOT Analysis

Master Gardener Visioning Session – November 30, 2011

At the Master Gardener Visioning Session, participants were asked to participate in a SWOT (strengths, weakness, opportunities, threats) Analysis of three pieces of the MG program: Volunteer Management, Operations, and Finances. The results of this analysis are summarized below.

1) VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT

Strengths

Perhaps the greatest strength as it relates to volunteer management is the volunteers themselves. MG volunteers are dedicated, passionate, motivated, and have a strong continuing education desire. The local and statewide network for volunteers is strong. Volunteers have high impact and high responsibility. This aligns well with what volunteers today, baby boomers in particular, are seeking in a volunteer experience.

Experts in the field train volunteers leading to a solid educational program. In addition, city and state websites as well as Julie Weisenhorn's blog allow for consistent communication. These aspects of the program allow volunteers to provide one on one education and technical assistance to the public.

Opportunities

Improving standards and consistency is one area in which the participants at the visioning session saw many opportunities for growth and change. Clarifying the expectations for volunteers in the Master Gardener program, having consistent standards for ongoing education, and clarifying the role of service versus education for the MG program were all mentioned. In

addition, having volunteers recommit to the mission of the MG program each year was suggested.

Networking among volunteers could be improved by using more electronic and on-line services or an internal listserv moderated by a coordinator.

Many opportunities exist to capitalize on the existing volunteer population or to grow and diversify the volunteer population. There was the suggestion to seek younger volunteers; on the other hand, it was also mentioned that the increase in baby boomers creates a population of skilled, experienced potential volunteers. Current volunteers may be seeking opportunities for greater involvement or a higher level of responsibility. These volunteers should be encouraged to chair committees or seek other leadership opportunities.

Opportunities also exist to raise the visibility of the master gardener program. There are many needs in communities around the state that may result in growing interest from previously disengaged constituents. Forging more personal connections between volunteers and constituents could be explored. The MG program could also coordinate with the Master Naturalist program to increase visibility and also explore other models of volunteer management.

There are also opportunities to provide more incentives for volunteers and to improve the recruitment and interview process for new volunteers.

Weaknesses

The MG program has a very large group of volunteers and it is easy to get lost within that. In addition, there is little sense of being part of the larger University of Minnesota community. Volunteers also feel a disconnect between the state program and local volunteers.

In addition to this the theme of lack of connection and unity is a lack of support, both financial and personal for volunteers. Coordination of volunteers depends on the availability of funding and resources, which is difficult in counties with little or no staff. Out of state volunteers may not have sufficient support in the form of a leader that knows how to utilize each volunteer's strengths or even to just serve as a go-to person for every location. Volunteers are not supported equally across the MG program.

Participants also saw weaknesses regarding quality control within volunteer management of the MG program. There is little coordination among counties, little training for volunteers and how to train volunteers, and differences in personal motivations and reasons for wanting to stay involved in the MG program, as well as differences in communication. There is a sense that some do not support the mission of the MG program, but there is a lack of accountability. This leads to problems with maintaining quality in the teaching and educational aspects of the MG program.

Threats

Finances present a large threat to the organization, both personal financial issues and organization financial issues.

The personal cost of being a volunteer can be high, with gas prices and the cost of the core course. From an organizational standpoint, there is a lack of funding on the local level which is needed for operations and projects. The possibility of county funding decreases also has implications for volunteer management. To increase volunteer numbers, there needs to be support at the local level.

Time constraints for volunteers are another threat. In parts of the state, particularly rural areas, competition for volunteers is high.

The inconsistency that was mentioned as a weakness was also mentioned as a threat. Inconsistent messages lead to poor public perception and possible liability issues, which can lead to disgruntled volunteers. There need to be clearer expectations for all involved. Local master gardeners are not aware of or interested in state oversight of the program.

Lastly, increased electronic communication was discussed as an opportunity, but these can also be a threat as there may be the perception that this does not serve as well as face to face training and communication.

2) OPERATIONS

Strengths

Flexibility emerged as a theme when discussing strengths in the operation of the MG program. Having autonomy at the local/county/regional level allows the program to address unique needs of each community and set of volunteers.

Visibility was also cited as a theme. Participants felt extension educators and the state director were visible and accessible.

Being part of the University of Minnesota is another strength of the program. MG volunteers have continuing education opportunities through the University. The reputation of quality, objective, non-biased, applied research in particular was noted. Relationships with the Research and Outreach Centers (ROCs) also were mentioned.

Being a statewide program and having a presence in greater Minnesota was mentioned as well.

Opportunities

Partnerships with the government, DNR, MCPA, SWCP, and the ROCS were all mentioned as possible opportunities for the program. Creating specialized training and levels of experience were mentioned, as well as the flexible management of the system statewide. While some may see the current economy as a threat, this was mentioned as an opportunity in relation to food security and the ways that the MG program can promote and capitalize on that issue. Participants noted there could also be ways for extension to do more in the way of marketing for the MG program.

Weaknesses

Differences in needs for the program around the state were a common theme in weaknesses. This manifests itself in a number of ways, most notably communication. Although on-line communication has been suggested as a way to improve and standardize messages, some volunteers are unwilling or unable to embrace these methods of communication, particularly in greater MN where on-line access may be more difficult. Those involved with the program in greater MN also may have fewer opportunities for face to face interaction which negatively impacts communication. In addition, it may also lead to the perception of a “metro versus everyone else” mentality in the program.

Although flexibility was noted as a strength, it may also be a weakness. Different resources for different local programs create inconsistencies in how the program is delivered. Some volunteers may know more than other volunteers. Whereas flexibility allows local programs to customize themselves to the needs of their constituents it also means there is a lack of standardization across the state. There is a perception that there is less accountability and that some membership is rigid and unwilling to change.

The U of M bureaucracy is also seen as a weakness in the program.

Threats

The economy was seen as a threat. Participants noted that academic research cuts into profits. In addition, the plethora of gardening information that is available and competition from business and licensed professionals to provide education also threaten the economic viability of the MG program. This limits the ability to have enough staff, educators, content, and resources.

Again, lack of consistency and conflicting information were mentioned as threats to the MG program.

Three areas were mentioned in the operations SWOT analysis as strengths and weaknesses: Quality, on-line reporting and on-line learning. As has been mentioned, lack of consistency leads to varying levels of quality in the program. While on-line learning and reporting could be strengths, difficulty in access to the internet in some parts of the state or rigidity of volunteers may have a negative impact on how successful this would be.

3) FINANCES

Strengths

At the local level, there is no centralized financial accounting. Counties raise their own money, which gives them control to use their funds as they see best for their county. Most volunteers are willing to raise money and this local control allows volunteers to set the priorities for spending.

All volunteers are required to take the core course which carries a fee. This provides a source of revenue for the program that can be counted on. In addition, volunteers provide a base of adults with income, who have friends. Presumably these friends could be recruited into the program or be donors for various fund raising efforts.

Master Gardeners provide a valued and sometimes needed service to their communities that can be both economic and the impact of the service can be both economic and environmental.

Opportunities

Participants identified a number of opportunities to increase funding for the MG program. Seeking grants (perhaps through legacy grants?), asking volunteers and the community for donations, seeking sponsorships (direct cash or in-kind), seeking trade show booth fees at the annual conference, developing products, and seeking additional funds from the administration of the MG program were some of the suggestions.

To assist with volunteers who may struggle with paying for the core course, it was suggested to have a scholarship program or approach local businesses to create sponsorships for core course participants. This could also potentially allow for charging a higher fee for the course, resulting in increased revenue.

It was also discussed that there could be opportunities for partnerships with other associations, such as MNLA or with local nurseries through a Master Gardener Day. Continuing education opportunities could also be explored. If these continuing education opportunities provided value to volunteers, they may be willing to pay for them which would result in a source of revenue.

Project based initiatives were also discussed. A central pool of funds for county/regional based Master Gardeners to use for projects would be useful. Projects with a mix of a public and private focus (working with private businesses) might also provide revenue opportunities for the MG program.

The MG program should also look at the value of what they provide to local communities and the state and determine if that can be translated into a revenue opportunity.

Weaknesses

Lack of consistency is one weakness that was identified in several ways. Although no centralized accounting allows for flexibility, as with operations it also leads to disparity in resources. Some counties are well funded; others are not. There was also a concern about the lack of uniformity of relationships with private enterprise. There seems to be confusion about what is acceptable and what isn't, which leads to the second weakness: uncertainty.

Uncertainty in several areas also leads to financial weakness. There needs to be more transparency both with knowing where money that is donated goes to and also with the state knowing what counties are doing. Regarding relationships with private enterprise, participants were not sure if there was a policy about this at either the state or county level. Some participants were also concerned about working with private businesses and if that would compromise the integrity of the program. Restrictions placed by the U of M on counties' ability to solicit for donations were also mentioned. Participants felt that the state office needs to give greater direction in financial matters.

This relates to a third area of weakness: Communication. Participants felt there was a lack of communication with volunteers and wanted more transparency in financial matters.

The cost of the core course was an area of concern as well. Participants felt the reliance on fees from the core course limited the diversity of funds. In addition, the cost may be prohibitive for some potential volunteers and could lead to a lack of diversity in the volunteer force. Particularly for those in rural areas, the core course cost may be too much. Limited scholarships to help cover the cost limits volunteers.

There were also more philosophical issues that were seen as weaknesses for the program. Participants feel they have to balance education with fund raising. This leaves little time for fund raising. Perhaps even the idea of fund raising can be seen as a weakness. It was suggested that the program needs to think in a more entrepreneurial fashion. There is also the sense that some volunteers feel that “we aren't in this to make money” and that this inhibits their desire to raise funds or even sense the need for fund raising.

Threats

Again, the economy was listed as a major threat to the financial management of the MG program. Participants felt that the economy could result in a drop in enrollment of the core course, drop in county support, and uncertainty in year to year funding. There could be less funding from U of M Extension as well.

Relationships between the MG program and private enterprise are also seen as a threat. It is sometimes unclear who benefits from these relationships and how closely the MG program should be associated with private businesses.

As has been mentioned before, the cost of being a volunteer is also a concern for some and can also be seen as a threat. The cost of being a volunteer varies depending on where a volunteer is located, as travel for programs and face-to-face meetings can be significant for volunteers in some parts of the state.

The MG program is dependent on funding to have a quality program, so any of the above mentioned scenarios would pose a significant threat to the program's ability to provide quality programs, support the staff needed for a successful program, and ultimately the ability to achieve the mission of the MG program.

Current State of the Master Gardener Program (Fall, 2011):

The Master Gardener Program is not currently sustainable and is unable to continue to serve its mission: ‘To support Extension by providing volunteers trained in horticulture to educate the public with research based information on the best practices in consumer horticulture and environmental stewardship. The Master Gardener program will provide an environment for its volunteers that is friendly and supportive so their training, experience, and enthusiasm will produce maximum benefits to their communities.’ Currently, there is significant inconsistency in the deployment of this program across the state, thus inhibiting the ability to educate and train both volunteers and communities in a coherent and reliable manner. It is vitally important to devise a new strategic plan, including restructuring, in order to maintain and grow a successful Master Gardener Program that can contribute to both the mission of the University and the betterment of local communities.

Currently, the Master Gardener Program is positioned to embrace an opportunity to restructure and optimize the effectiveness of the program. To that end, there has been an effort to engage key stakeholders and gather input from a number of viewpoints. This has and will continue to occur through surveys, interviews and a strategic visioning session. There are three main areas in which the program is being evaluated and redefined: Operations, Volunteer Management and Financial Structure.

The Operational/Organizational Structure of the current Master Gardener Program relies on a county-based structure. This feature has both positives and negatives associated with it. The current structure allows for flexibility and agility within the counties to respond to local needs and provides a clear presence within the county communities (easily identifiable). Possible changes moving forward include moving toward a regional system, which could utilize

as many or as few local chapters according to demand. The local chapters themselves could embrace a president-, vice-president-, secretary-, treasurer-system built on volunteers. This type of a system maintains the benefits of the county system by sustaining the local nature of the programs, allowing them to address the specific and unique needs of the community. At the same time, this organization also allows for local chapters based on need/demand. Finally, the regional structure ensures that local chapters have a tie to the state and the University; this approach will aid in consistency in programs across the state (as messaging from the University would come to local chapters from only five individuals).

The system for Volunteer Management of the Master Gardener Program currently varies greatly across the state due to the current organizational structure. The level of staff supervision, management of volunteers, coordination of work, and the programs offered are different. Although Master Gardeners all take the same core course, the similarity in experience may end there. This lack of consistency in the volunteer experience region to region also impacts the experience of the communities and those using the services of the Master Gardeners. One of the positives noted in the current system is that the core course is considered a strong foundation. Ideas for moving the program forward embraced this core set of knowledge and stressed the continued training of volunteers and the consistency of the expectations for volunteers in terms of contributions to the program. Training was seen as key to the success of the Master Gardener Program moving forward; specifically, continuing to take advantage of the expertise resources available from the University of Minnesota faculty as well as ensuring volunteers have the most current research-based information to provide to the public were seen as vital. Finally, ensuring that volunteers are vetted, trained, and capable of delivery consistent messages in engaging ways was seen as a key to success moving forward.

Due to the most recent restructuring of Extension in 2003, the Financial Structure of the current Master Gardener Program is county-based and thus, inconsistent across the state. As such, some groups have money that they obtain through fundraising, some receive money from the county, and although there is state money, it may be unevenly distributed. Additionally, some groups have a dedicated county office home-base while others do not. Finally, some counties have a dedicated program coordinator while others rely solely on volunteers. This type of system is not sustainable and therefore, it is necessary to determine a new structure for the future. One of the main ideas generated regarding finances involves partnerships with a number of possible groups. Of particular interest was leveraging the Research and Outreach Centers (ROCs) throughout the state to build mutually beneficially relationships with this group. Other ideas include building a structure that utilizing fundraising, grant-writing and/or entrepreneurial efforts. It may be advantageous to consider adding a position dedicated to these efforts, such as a development officer.

As can be ascertained by the summary above, the Master Gardener Program is poised to make great changes in the near future. As key stakeholders, facilitators, coordinators, and Master Gardener volunteers brainstorm multiple possible scenarios for the program moving forward, it will be essential to ensure the final proposal meets the needs of the University of Minnesota/Extension, the Master Gardener Program and the state of Minnesota- ensuring sustainability while achieving its mission.

Project Charter (Phase II): Business Case for an online education series to be used for sustainable revenue generation for the University of Minnesota Extension Master Gardener Program Sponsor: Julie Weisenhorn, Master Gardener Program

Overview of the Project

Background and Opportunity Statement

In existence since 1977, the University of Minnesota Master Gardener Program provides volunteers trained in horticulture to educate their local communities on best practices in consumer horticulture and environmental stewardship. In 2010, over 2,000 volunteers statewide provided nearly 129,000 total volunteer hours reaching over 243,000 adults and 55,000 youth. The program is coordinated by the University of Minnesota Extension and has its academic home in the Department of Horticulture.

Currently, the program is undergoing a strategic reorganization with the goal of better aligning its mission of providing trained and enthusiastic volunteers to educate communities with a sustainable program structure. The scope of the first phase of the project was to develop a number of possible scenarios that can be vetted and translated into a business and implementation plan that optimizes on the research-based expertise of the Master Gardener volunteers while providing a management structure allowing the program to thrive.

Based on information gathered during Phase 1, the focus of this second phase of the project will be exploration revenue generation for the state-wide Master Gardener program, specifically the viability of an online gardening course for home gardeners. A business plan will be created addressing market demand, integration into the existing Master Gardener Program, and obstacles to implementation.

This project charter specifically addresses the second phase of the project.

Project Goals

1. Exploring revenue generation for the state-wide Master Gardener program utilizing current content of the Master Gardener Core Course and the ProHort student option (comprised of general public interested in horticulture education and/or industry professionals pursuing certification units).
2. Assessing the viability of online education to the general public as a revenue generating source.

Strategic Questions

1. What opportunities exist to utilize the current content of the Master Gardener core course to generate independent revenue to support their strategic goals?
2. What market demands exists for such an offering? (Who would take this class? What are their goals?)
3. Would such a program be sustainable (What is the appropriate pricing? What are the start-up costs?)
4. What are the obstacles to implementation (past and present)?
5. What market competition may already exists?
6. How would this program incorporate/integrate into the current MG program?
7. What policies, structures or procedures are in place or need to be in place to allow for MG program to generate revenue?

Approach

Market Research: Include searches of current offerings by other universities, community educations, local businesses and professional associations.

Focus Groups: Talk to people who have taken the current offering, prospective groups.

Interviews: Talk to individuals who took the course now. Talk to CCE. Talk to arboretum. Tim Kenney, Neil Anderson.

Request for Proposals: If appropriate demand exists, attempt to identify development costs for the associated program.

Scope of the Project and Deliverables

1. Business plan that both provides justification and suggests a path forward for the Casual Gardener Program.
 2. Poster for the PEL session.
 3. Final Report that details our total involvement in the MG restructuring.
- Things that are beyond the scope of the project include: course development, implementation, business agreement, et cetera.

Timeline

JANUARY: Start initial ground work (what already exists, identify relevant stakeholders, SWOT analysis). Verify IRB.

FEBRUARY: Early: Design instruments. Late:

MARCH: Analysis and draft business plan.

APRIL: Business plan due.

MAY: Polishing the business plan, putting together poster and drafting the final report.

Project Benefits:

Successful completion of this project will provide clarity for the direction of the Master Gardener Program in terms of revenue generating opportunities. Further it should outline the variables for consideration prior to initiating an Online Course.

Project Team

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Background: Financial Summary of the Master Gardener Program

Opportunity Statement: Based on information gathered during Phase 1, the focus of this second phase of the project will be exploration revenue generation for the state-wide Master Gardener program, specifically the viability of an online gardening course for home gardeners. A business plan will be created addressing market demand, integration into the existing Master Gardener Program, and obstacles to implementation.

The original financial goal of the Master Gardner program was to break even. In order to make some improvements and remain sustainable the program would like to have a profit. Currently, the statewide Master Gardner program budget is operating in the red. The cost of delivering services continues to rise, but revenue has not changed in recent years. In order to move from operating in the red to producing a profit it is imperative that the statewide Master Gardner program generate additional revenue.

Historically, the University of Minnesota Extension subsidized the Master Gardener budget but has since discontinued this practice. U of M Extension expects the Master Gardener program to become more entrepreneurial if they want to continue to operate.

In addition to the statewide Master Gardner program budget, each county maintains their own independent budgets. The county budgets are extremely inconsistent in terms of how records are kept and how much income and expenses each county has. The fiscal connection between the state-wide program and each individual county is also inconsistent and unclear.

The statewide Master Gardner program budget's main source of income is the Master Gardner core course. The Master Gardner program class has approximately \$70,000 in revenue annually. The non-staff cost of running the class, including printing of course materials and

supplies for the class, is approximately \$15,000 annually. The staff cost consists of a Civil Service program assistant, a position that was cut to half-time from full-time.

The statewide MG program budget appears to be in the red due to a large negative carry forward from year to year. The budget summary dates back to 2008-2009 during which there was a \$-31,445.62 carry forward. The following year, 2009-2010, the carry forward was \$-60,927.91. In 2010-2011 they had a \$-47,623.25 carry forward and it appears that is the program plans to have at least a \$-10,673.03 carry forward into 2011-2012. The initial negative carry forward occurred due to needs for expensive unbudgeted updates. Administrators of the state-wide Master Gardner program have been making fiscal cuts in hopes of breaking even. The half-time program assistant has left and the position will not be filled at this time. Due to this vacancy the program will experience enough salary savings to break even for this fiscal year.

In conclusion, the Statewide Master Gardener program needs to explore and implement initiatives that will generate revenue and cost savings. Some possibilities for revenue generation include:

- Additional course offerings
- Cost recovery charge from the county programs
- Donations/Fundraising

Phase II: Summary of Efforts

Upon evaluation, it became clear that one of the greatest needs of the Master Gardener Program is a consistent revenue stream. A Business Case supporting a revenue-generating online education series became the objective of this project. To that end, three main tasks were undertaken. Market research was conducted to establish competitive advantage. A focus group was convened to validate the concept and explore various possibilities. Finally, a survey was conducted to determine the target market for this course, including cost points and the most likely successful modules. The end result was a Business Case supporting an online education series and outlining the criteria for successful implementation of this concept, with the goal being a self-sustaining Master Gardener Program.

Market Research Executive Summary

There is a large volume of gardening resources online in terms of basic gardening tips, advice, articles, blogs, short videos, and basic instructions. These resources are hosted by nurseries, associations, universities, and individuals. Although online gardening resources are plentiful, an online, reliable, consistent, progressively informative resource from a reputable source on one website is difficult to find. There are very few high quality online gardening classes available online. The few online gardening classes include master gardener courses, some university casual gardener classes, a class offered by a gardening association, and one class offering continuing education units.

- Minnesota and Oregon both offer their states' Master Gardener courses online.
- Cornell University offers eight different general gardening courses online. These courses are hands-on, interactive, and require a two to four hours per week commitment. The courses range from six to eight weeks in length and costs range from \$300 to \$500 per class. The topics include: Organic Gardening, Intro to Garden Design, Teaching and Learning in the School Garden, Botanical Illustration I, II, and III, Plant Propagation, and Planning and Organizing Sustainable Gardening Programs for Children, Youth, Adults, and communities.
- The National Gardening Association offers classes called "The Learning Garden" but all the links for course descriptions and registration are broken.
- A website called Universal Class offers a basic gardening online course for 1 continuing education unit. The course lasts 6 months and costs \$35.00. Universal Class is not a recognized authority or source of higher education.

Host	What	Cost
Water District of Southern California	Computer based tutorials on being mindful of water use	Free
Cornell University	Variety of online courses such as: 3 levels of Botanical illustration, Garden Design, Organic Gardening, and Plant Propagation	\$300-\$400
Doug's Gardening Center	Variety of basic gardening courses- no interaction	Free
Utah State Extension	Plant Disease and Chemicals online lecture	Free
University of Maryland	Collection of PDF resources on Horticulture topics	Free
University of Connecticut	Pest Management online course	Free
Brigham Young University	Planning and Preparing your garden online class and Growing Vegetable, Fruits, and Nuts online class	Free

There are also a variety of gardening courses individuals can take from St. Paul and Minneapolis Community Education providers. These courses are not online and would not be accessible at the learner's convenience but on the Community Education Schedule. These classes range from 4 hours of instruction to 1 hour of instruction and range in price from \$37/class to \$10/class.

Focus Group: Preparation and Outcomes

Focus Group: Preparation

One tactic used to determine the viability of the proposed online education series was a focus group. We decided to comprise our focus group of students of the University of Minnesota course “HORT 1003: Horticulture for the Home Garden”. This course is also referred to as the Master Gardener Core Course. HORT 1003 is offered online as well as in person. The content of this course would be similar to the proposed online series.

Students register for the Core Course in one of three groups:

- Master Gardener Interns – students taking the course as a step towards becoming a Master Gardener volunteer
- ProHort students – students taking the course for their own education or continuing education units
- Credit students – students taking the course for University credit

For the focus group, we targeted only ProHort students that had taken the Core Course within the last three years. ProHort students most closely match the target audience for the proposed online series.

A request for participation was sent to 67 ProHort students that had taken the course between 2009-2011. Four students responded that they were willing to participate. To round out the focus group, we also recruited two Master Gardener volunteers. These are students who would have taken the course as Master Gardener Interns. Our focus group thus consisted of six participants: four ProHort students and two Master Gardener volunteers.

The goal of the focus group was to seek input from the participants about their experience with the Core Course and also gather feedback about the proposed education series. Ten

questions were prepared and can be seen in Appendix C. A transcript of the Focus Group can be found in Appendix E.

Summary

Four of the participants took the course for a work-related reason – they either work at a retail store, manage gardens, or manage volunteers. None stated that the Core Course was required for their work, but rather that they took it to gain knowledge to help them in their jobs. Two of the participants took the course because they love gardening and simply wanted to increase their knowledge. All of the participants of the Focus Group expressed interest in the proposed online course and stated it would be something they would consider taking. An understanding of why they took the Core Course will be useful in marketing the proposed online class to different audiences.

The group was split fairly evenly as to who took the Master Gardener Core Course in person or online. Even those who took the course in person used the online course to make up sessions they missed. The participants expressed that they like having continuing access to the information online although they are no longer in the course.

Several themes emerged when participants were asked what was most enjoyable or useful about the Core Course. The first of these were two benefits of the online course. Participants noted that the Core Course online course had “better visual” presentation than what they received in the classroom. One participant noted that the classroom course still used slides in a carousel which were sometimes faded and blurry. Another stated that, “I liked the internet because you get a better photograph and you really know what a leaf spot looks like, as opposed to a black and white handout.”

The online Core Course also allowed participants to move at their own pace. One participant liked that “if an interruption comes I can stop and come back and rewind.” In addition, having the information online allowed participants to go back and review content that was not clear the first time through. At a later point in the focus group, a couple participants again mentioned that the pace of the class was “too fast” and there was too much information presented in a short amount of time. Participants liked the “freedom” that the online course provided to work at their own pace, but did note that “you miss things from other people in the class.” Balancing this desire for a self-paced course with the ability to interact with other students should be considered when developing the proposed online education series.

The last theme that emerged was the timeliness of information. Two participants noted that some of the information in the course was outdated. They cited handouts that had not been updated for a number of years and incorrect information about the presence of Emerald Ash Borer in Minnesota. Although instructors were quick to highlight changes and note outdated information, participants stated that with the proposed online course it would be critical to update the material on a regular basis. Participants stressed this point repeatedly, with one participant stating, “I really want the stuff to be more up to date...I want the most current everything. That is why I thought the online course would be updated constantly as opposed to be stuck to a published book.” There was an expectation that an online series would not be static, but that someone would be updating information on a regular basis and that a student in the online series will potentially see new information each time they access the website.

Participants were asked which modules/topics would be most interesting and least interesting to them if they were to register for the online education series. Fruit and vegetable gardening was noted as being of the most interest, as well as potentially being of interest to the

general public. One participant stated that there should be a “large focus on vegetables, especially with everyone growing their own right now.” Another noted that she had been to a few community events on fruits and vegetables and the room was “packed. People are really into it.” Organic gardening was also mentioned several times. A couple participants noted that turf was not a very interesting subject; however, one participant mentioned that the speaker on turf “made it come alive.” This may be one challenge for the proposed online series: How do you translate a dynamic speaker into an online course?

A suggestion from the focus group was to bundle topics together into a series. This generated a fair amount of excitement. For instance, a series on “Growing Food” could cover fruits, vegetables, and organic gardening. A series on “Caring for Your Yard” could cover turf, soil, and shrubs. A series on “Plants” could cover perennials and annuals. Weeds, pest management, indoor plants, and gardening in small spaces were also mentioned as potential topics.

There were some challenges noted in an online course, such as missing the discussion and interaction with the instructor and others in the group. Participants did mention liking guest speakers and having hands on demonstrations. These may be difficult to manage in an online course. Live chat was mentioned as a possible way to combat this, but if the course is self-paced this may pose problems as students may not be studying the same content at any given time. Participants noted that utilizing videos and quality images could potentially work in place of hands on work demonstrations or experience. One participant also liked the idea of having a location where students could go to see examples of topics being discussed. Online quizzes or a question and answer board were mentioned as possibly being useful additions to the proposed online education series.

When asked how many modules they thought they might take, answers were varied from three-quarters of the modules listed to only two to four modules. Two participants felt that in winter they would be more likely to take courses. Two participants noted that keeping the material updated would influence their decision to take more modules. Flexibility was important. One participant noted that this would be very individual and situational. A student with children may make very different choices than someone who is retired. Two participants noted that they would be more likely to register in the winter, when they have “down time” with their jobs. One participant stated that one desire of an online course is “freedom of doing it whenever you have time.”

One aspect of the conversation we did not foresee was that participants continually came back to the possibility of the online, module based education series being an alternative to the Master Gardener Core Course for Master Gardener certification. Despite the fact that we told them this was not the intent, they came back to this throughout the conversation. They liked the idea that if you took all of the modules, you could become certified as a Master Gardener after completing your volunteer hours.

This may have affected how they responded to the question about how much they would be willing to pay for the education series. One suggestion was to take the cost of the Master Gardener Core Course and divide it by how many modules there are. Another suggestion was to have pricing comparable to what a community education class would charge. Another suggestion was that \$45 to \$50 for a 90-minute course was reasonable. It was also suggested to have a senior citizens rate. Most of the participants also stated that being affiliated with the University of Minnesota would affect what they would pay for the course, but it must be “unique to the Minnesota gardener and something they can’t just get on YouTube.”

The participants had many suggestions for the series. In addition to incorporating live chat, videos, and grouping topics into series, they also suggested adding video streaming that would show the time lapse of growth of particular plant or weed species, having a place where people could go to see hands-on the topics that are being discussed, paying a “subscription” fee to maintain access to the information after the education series is completed, and having modules be “transferrable” to become certified as a Master Gardener.

Overall, the focus group participants seemed excited at the prospect of an online education series and had good experiences with the online content when they took the Master Gardener Core Course. They expressed that this was something they would be interested in as a way to continue their knowledge. Being part of the University of Minnesota Extension Master Gardener Program was key. As one participant said, “If it was between a community ed[ucation] class and the U of M, I’d go with the U of M class, hands down.”

The following recommendations and points to consider are presented, based on information from the Focus Group.

- A key take away from the focus group was the need to update information. People expect that information online will be updated regularly and they will be getting the most current information. If people have access to a module for an entire year, they may expect to see fresh information as they move through the module. The Master Gardener program should consider how this might happen and who would be responsible.
- The online course needs to be fresh and different from the Master Gardener Core Course. Hiring a web designer that can give the online education series a significantly different feel than the Core Course is recommended.

- Consider grouping modules together into series, perhaps with a discount if you take all three modules in a series.
- Consider how this will be different from the Core Course. It needs to be clear that this is not an alternative to the Core Course and is not a path to certification as a Master Gardener. How will this be communicated to students in the online education series? How will it be branded as different from presenting the Core Course content in a different format?
- How will interaction with others be managed in a self-paced course? Focus group participants stated that the inability to interact with other would be a challenge. Consider ways to encourage interaction with others, even if the course is self-paced and students may be at different parts of the module they are studying.
- How can the education series be marketed not just to possible students, but their employers as well? If potential students are people who may need the series for their job, how can the value of it be marketed to their employers as well?

Survey: Preparation and Outcomes

A second tactic used to determine the viability of the proposed education series was an online survey developed through the University of Minnesota's survey development tool UMSurvey. Three populations were identified for study: ProHort students who did not participate in the focus group, volunteers at the University of Minnesota's Landscape Arboretum, and subscribers to the University of Minnesota Extension's Yard and Garden Newsletter. These three target populations were identified for study because we believed it would provide us with a broad sample of respondents that either closely matched the target audience for the online education series or because they represented individuals that had previous experience with programs offered by the Master Gardener Program or Landscape Arboretum and would therefore be able to provide important insight about future curricular offerings.

Twenty-four survey questions were developed for the survey and were broken up into four distinct sections (see Appendix D for complete questionnaire). Section 1 consisted of 10 questions pertaining to the respondents experience and interest in gardening. This section also incorporated questions related to how the respondent preferred to obtain gardening related information. Given the suggested medium of the proposed education series, Section 2 included three questions related to the respondent's usage of the internet. Section 3 provided the respondent with a brief description of the proposed curricular offering and asked a series of questions related to their interest in the proposed online series and preferences about potential topic areas to be covered by the future series. Section 4 concluded the survey with several demographic questions.

To develop the survey, the group first talked with the project sponsor about the informational needs required in helping inform the decision-making related to the proposed

online course. Several topic areas were identified, including: interest in the proposed education series, importance of features associated with online gardening education, and preference for topics to be covered. In addition to these areas of interest, we also felt it was important to incorporate questions to differentiate the types of individuals responding to the survey. These included questions related to their experience and interest with gardening, their typical resources for gardening information, their internet usage, as well as relevant demographic information.

Following the informal discussions with the Master Gardener program related to their informational needs, the PEL team began constructing the survey, paying particular attention to question wording, question response sets and question ordering. To this end, the PEL team utilized several resources to assist the process, including survey design texts and existing surveys relating to gardening or master gardener education. After the initial draft of the survey was complete the PEL team solicited feedback from a variety of individuals including: the project sponsor, the Associate Director of the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum, master gardener volunteers, institutional research professionals and other individuals with a casual interest in gardening. The resulting feedback was invaluable and incorporated into the final survey.

Summary of Survey Results

Given the semi-open nature of the survey, it is impossible to calculate an exact response rate to the survey; however, the number of responses was quite low. Specifically, we received seven completed surveys from the group of ProHort students, eighteen completed surveys from Arboretum volunteers (approximately 570 possible), and one hundred and fourteen respondents from *Yard and Garden News* subscribers. This resulted in a total sample of 139 respondents for analysis. This poses several important limitations for analysis that are worth describing right away. First, given the low response rate of the survey, it is improbable that our sample accurately

represents the population from which it was drawn. The small sample size poses a second challenge in that it precludes accurate inferences between relevant sub-group of individuals as there are too few respondents to ascertain precise estimates. Third, in addition to issues related to the representative nature of the sample, we also know that the sample is heavily comprised of Master Gardeners; specifically more than fifty percent (54.6%) of our sample identified themselves as Master Gardeners. Given that the proposed online educational series is intended to be something different from the current Master Gardener course and is meant to target the casual gardener, the utility of responses by current Master Gardeners is uncertain at best.

To assess the respondent's interest in the online education series the survey provided a brief description about the proposed offering⁴ and asked them to identify their interest on a five point Likert scale where the responses ranged from 'Very Low' (1) to 'Very High' (5). The mean response for all survey respondents was 3.50 (between 'Moderate' and 'High'). Among survey respondents, Master Gardeners indicated the least interest in the proposed online course offering (n = 76, m = 3.25, sd = 1.15). Interest in the proposed online course offering was greatest⁵ among avid gardeners (n = 41, m = 3.90, sd = 0.83) followed by avid gardeners (n = 13, m = 3.69, sd = 1.18).

⁴ Specifically the description read: "The University of Minnesota Extension Master Gardener Program, in collaboration with the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum, is considering developing a new online gardening education series designed for home gardeners. This proposed education series is comprised of learning modules based on the horticulture content taught in the Master Gardener core course with the Arboretum as the virtual classroom. However, participants do not have a volunteer obligation to Extension or the Arboretum nor do they carry the title of "Master Gardener" upon completion of the education series. Learning modules in this education series focus on topics such as herbaceous plants, trees and shrubs, indoor plants, soils and composting, lawn care, and vegetable gardening. Individuals may customize their learning experience by selecting modules of interest in any order, and will have access to the content online for up to one year. This is a self-directed class series and modules can be completed at one's own pace. Individuals will be able to print out a certificate, verifying their completion on the module."

⁵ Technically two subgroups had slightly higher mean averages, professional gardeners and subsistence gardeners, but both subgroups had too few responses (n < 5) for analysis.

Next respondents were asked to assess the importance of the potential features that could be included in the proposed online education series and identify if they were ‘not important’, ‘somewhat important’, ‘important’, or ‘very important’. Specifically the seven features the respondents were asked to assess included: 1) faculty interaction, 2) self-paced learning, 3) self-directed curriculum, 4) online access to references, 5) certification of completion, 6) extended access to materials and 7) a general introduction to issues related to gardening/landscaping.

Figure 1 provides the results for each of subgroups in our analysis.

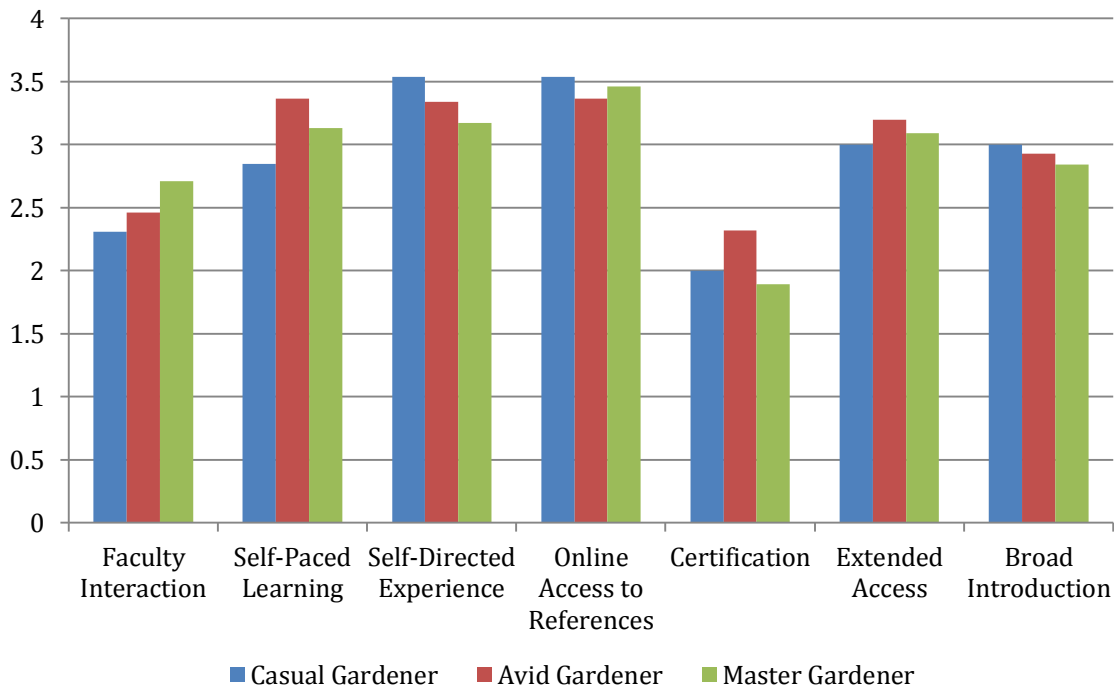


Figure 1 Features most important to respondents when considering the proposed education series.

Among casual or occasional gardeners it was clear that the two most important features were the ability to tailor the experience to their needs (mean = 3.53) and online access to additional gardening references (mean = 3.53). This group of individuals also indicated that extended access to resources (mean = 3.00) and a broad introduction to gardening and

landscaping (mean = 3.00) were also clearly important. For those self-identified as being avid gardeners the two most important features associated with proposed course offering was the ability to learn at their own pace (mean = 3.36) and the ability to access additional gardening references online (mean = 3.36). The ability to tailor the experience to the respondents personal needs followed next (mean = 3.34). The opportunity to interact with professors was consistently ranked low on the list of potential features (mean = 2.31 for casual gardeners, mean = 2.46 for avid gardeners). This is particularly important, as the lack of faculty interaction was an area the PEL team worried would represent a potential weakness for the proposed education series, but the data show that this is not necessarily the case.

Respondents were also asked to identify their preference for topics to be covered in the proposed education series. Specifically, respondents were provided with thirteen potential topics, which they were asked to rank on a four-point scale ranging from ‘unimportant’ (1) to ‘very important’ (4). Figure 2 provides mean responses by gardener type for each potential topic to be covered in the online educational series; the figure illustrates some consistencies between individuals self identifying as either casual or avid gardeners.

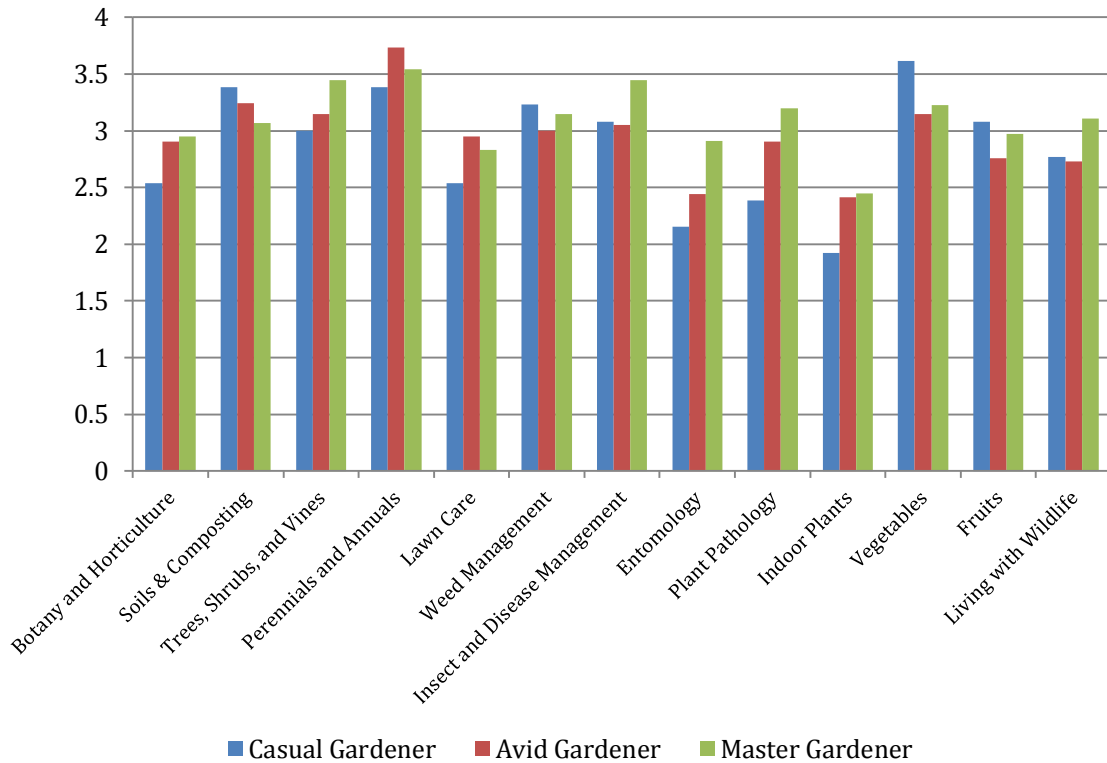


Figure 2 Topic preference by gardener type.

Among casual or occasional gardeners there was a clear preference for a course on vegetable gardening (mean = 3.62) followed by soils and composting (mean = 3.38) and perennials and annuals (mean = 3.38). Among individual identifying themselves as avid gardeners the top preference was for course content to cover perennials and annuals (mean = 3.73) followed by soils and composting (mean = 3.15) and vegetables (mean = 3.15). This commonality of preference among the target audience provides, in our opinion, a clear path forward in terms of development of course content for the proposed education series.

Individuals who self-identified as Master Gardeners also identified a high interest in the topic of perennials and annuals (mean = 3.53), with the next highest preferences being trees, shrubs and vines (mean = 3.45) and insect or disease management (mean = 3.45). Unfortunately,

the survey did not ask respondents why they indicated high interest in a topic. This, we are not able to say if the Master Gardeners who responded to the survey were personally interested in the topic, or if their interest is due to topics they are frequently asked about when serving as a Master Gardener in the community.

Considerations. Several important considerations emerged in the survey data that are worth considering carefully before proceeding. First, while respondents seemed favorable to the idea of an online education series designed for the casual gardener, it is important to recall that the response rate is quite low. While this produces obvious challenges for generalizations, it is worth considering the possibility that the response rate may also represent a market signal about interest in online gardening education. Recall that the invitation letter solicited feedback from participants by explicating the Master Gardener Program's desire to develop an online gardening education series for the casual gardener. While low response rates are not uncommon in survey research, it is at least worth considering that the low response may provide some information about the underlying demand for such a course.

Second, results from the survey also illustrate that casual or occasional gardeners are not in the habit of spending much money on either gardening or gardening education. All of the self-identified casual gardeners in our survey indicated that they spent 10 percent or less of their annual gardening budget on education related activities. With 62 percent of respondents indicating that their annual budget was \$250 dollars or less for all of their annual gardening expenses, the data from this survey would tend to suggest that finding an ideal price point may be a key challenge to success. In terms of respondents who self-identified as avid gardeners the story is a little different. The median respondent in this category identified spending between \$250 and \$500 on their annual gardening budget with between 10 to 25 percent of that budget

going to all their education-related expenditures. While this technically expands the potential price point, it is important to consider that this reflects all their annual educational spending and moving too far up the price scale may force the avid gardener to choose between different resources while most likely pricing out the casual gardener.

Business Case for Online Course

1. Business Opportunity

The mission of the University of Minnesota Master Gardener Program is: ‘To support Extension by providing volunteers trained in horticulture to educate the public with research based information on the best practices in consumer horticulture and environmental stewardship. The Master Gardener program will provide an environment for its volunteers that is friendly and supportive so their training, experience, and enthusiasm will produce maximum benefits to their communities.’ In late 2011 and early 2012, a substantial effort was undertaken to restructure the Master Gardener Program in order to ensure the ability of the program to continue to meet its mission in the community. The rationale for the strategic restructuring was in part to position the program to be financially sustainable. In its current form, the financial structure of the program is inconsistent and not viable, partially due to the county-based arrangement of the program throughout the state of Minnesota. During the creation of the final proposal for the program restructuring, the significance of the establishment of a revenue generating source became apparent. An opportunity arose to work with the Director of the program, Julie Weisenhorn, to establish a way for the program to generate revenue. To that end, it has been determined that an online education series, open to all gardeners and utilizing the Master Gardener core course material, may aid in the generation of an independent revenue stream for the Master Gardener Program.

2. Objectives and Approach

The goal of this project is to explore the online education series proposal and its viability to generate revenue among potential gardening customers. Market research has been

conducted, focus groups were held, and surveys were analyzed in order to fully vet the concept; the strongest plan will be proposed as the approach moving forward. If successful, the Master Gardener Program will implement the proposed online education series (likely in conjunction with the Arboretum) and will establish an independent revenue stream for the program moving forward.

3. Business Drivers

The primary business drivers of this proposal are increased revenue, service improvement, and outreach. Improved revenue generation is essential for the Master Gardener Program to maintain current levels of service and outreach.

4. Key Goals

- A. Measure the interest among local gardening communities in an online class type of setting.
- B. Determine whether or not any other market competition exists for this potential class.
- C. Measure potential demand for an online course.
- D. Determine the best format for online delivery (session based selection versus grouped session based class selection)
- E. Identify key road blocks and obstacles to implementing this class.
- F. Identify startup costs and appropriate pricing for the class.

5. Impacted Groups

Organization/Name	Type of Impact
The Master Gardener Program	Initial start-up time and resources will be substantial. Web design and maintenance will be essential.
The Arboretum	Hosting the site and receiving an increase in web traffic.
Faculty within Extension	Time and resources to design course.

6. Findings and Final Recommendations

1. The purpose and scope of the education series must be clear. In the focus group, participants thought that this would be an alternative to obtaining Master Gardener certification, which is not the intent of the online education series. Therefore, the description of the course must describe this and state that it is strictly a class to educate the casual gardener on different topics based in the Master Gardener core course.
2. In analyzing survey data our group was able to determine that most gardeners would rather spend their money on gardening than education for gardening. Survey respondents indicated they would be willing to pay up to \$50 for gardening education, so the price point of the online series should try to match this.
3. The focus group discussed the benefits and challenges of online learning as it related to their experience in the Master Gardener Core Course. Although being able to work at one's own pace is a benefit, it also presents challenges for interacting with other students that may move more quickly or slowly. Being able to balance the pace of

- work for students moving at their own pace with the desire to interact with other students and the instructor should be considered.
4. Information must be timely and accurate as the focus group expressed concern about this. Make sure the information provided is always up to date. People will not only be utilizing these courses for gardening education, but also as a way to stay updated on any new trends or concerns for the gardening community.
 5. After analyzing survey data the respondents indicated that they would most like to take courses on perennials and vegetables. This topic should be one of the first offered through the education series.
 6. Research costs for web design and maintenance of the website. Participants in the focus group stated that they expect this online course to be updated frequently and incorporate things such as quizzes, video, chat, and other features.
 7. The launch of this program must be flawless. This will have the University of Minnesota's name attached to it, thus, expectations are high. Flaws must be minimal as people's first impressions are strong. A successful launch of the online education series is critical.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Restructuring Proposal

**MASTER GARDENER:
PROGRAM OF THE FUTURE**

MANAGEMENT PLAN

DRAFT FOR CONSIDERATION

UNIVERSITY
OF
MINNESOTA
EXTENSION

MASTER GARDENER VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

February 9 | 2012



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

The Master Gardener Program has seen a decline in financial support which is threatening its ability to effectively execute its mission. Since the program's inception in Minnesota in 1977, the program has been structured around a county funding model to support the operations of the program. In today's economic climate, competing demands for financial resources have led to a reduction in county support. In order to address this challenge, the Master Garden program launched an ambitious project to redefine the Master Gardener "Program of the Future."

Project Description

A design team, a group of President's Emerging Leaders, and a team of consultants worked over a period of six months to gather and analyze data from various stakeholders, brainstorm solutions, and determine recommendations. This report provides the roadmap for improving the current structure, processes, and roles; growing revenue to sustain the organization; creating strong strategic alliances; and ensuring that volunteers are managed and recognized for their contributions to the mission of the Master Gardener Program.

Data Collection & Key Findings

Data collected from a variety of stakeholders indicates that there are opportunities for improvement in the areas of operations, volunteer management, and finances. Specifically, key findings include:

- The need to build a **sustainable management structure** to support a state-wide program;
- The need to address **volunteer support**, particularly in rural areas;
- The need to **train volunteers** beyond the core courses and better prepare them as leaders while recognizing their contributions; and
- The need to identify **new revenue opportunities**, reduce expenses, and create efficiencies.

Recommendations

There are a number of recommendations in this report that will allow the Master Gardener Program to achieve a future with an effective governance structure, highly-trained and engaged volunteers, and sustainable revenue. Recommendations are presented in a format to allow leadership the flexibility to implement different options while addressing many of the considerations that need to be evaluated prior to implementation.

Two management scenarios highlight opportunities and benefits of the recommendations compiled in a *Potential Model* and an *Ideal Model* that can both lead to a sustainable program of the future. Key factors include a healthy revenue stream, operational efficiencies, volunteer management and recognition, and dissemination and delivery of research-based best practices related to horticulture. There are a number of financial scenarios that would facilitate implementation of the recommendations in this report. As an illustration, this report explores a *Conservative* model and a *Growth* model which outline different revenue and expense scenarios over a five year period.

Implementation

Categories of activities have been grouped into a suggested order of completion based on implementation of the *Ideal Model*. Each category aligns to the business plan framework and includes a number of considerations that should be explored during the implementation planning process.



PROGRAM OVERVIEW

MISSION

To support University of Minnesota Extension by providing volunteers trained in horticulture to educate the public with research-based information on the best practices in consumer horticulture and environmental stewardship.

Extension's mission is to bring University research and education statewide to improve economic, social, and environmental conditions through its network of faculty and staff by collaborating with individuals, organizations, and communities to develop and deliver research-based education and information that is relevant, practical, and valued.



HISTORY

The University of Minnesota Extension Master Gardener™ program is an internationally-recognized volunteer program. It exists in all fifty states, in Canada and in the United Kingdom. Nationally, there are nearly 100,000 Master Gardener volunteers from all walks of life. They reach about 5 million people each year – the equivalent of more than \$100 million in value to communities.

The University of Minnesota Extension Master Gardener™ program started in 1977 with the first class of 25 people and is coordinated through University of Minnesota Extension with research and outreach alignment through the Department of Horticultural Sciences. Currently, 81 of 87 counties have Master Gardener Programming in their communities.

PROGRAM VOLUNTEERS



The Master Gardener program would not exist without the dedicated support of its volunteer corps of individuals trained in research best practices related to horticulture. Master Gardeners volunteer 50 hours the first year as interns and 25 hours annually thereafter to become certified active Master Gardeners. In 2010, there were 2,269 active volunteers who contributed over 128,000 hours to their communities that directly benefitted schools, community gardens, youth programs, environmental education programs, farmers markets and more. This equates to an annual value worth more than \$2.6 million per the federal rate for charitable giving of time. Active volunteers also participate in continuing education of 5-12 hours per year to remain up-to-date on current horticultural topics and techniques. In 2010, the Master Gardener volunteers participated in 30,100 hours of continuing education.



BACKGROUND

NEED FOR CHANGE

In today's competitive marketplace and ever-changing social, political, and financial landscape, it is critical for organizations to continually assess their current environment, both internally and externally. The Master Gardener Program has seen a decline in both state and county financial support which has created a tipping point for the program to sustain itself into the future based on current finances and operational and volunteer management practices.

Since 1977, many counties provided funds to support the operations of the programs but competing demands for financial resources, especially in today's economic climate, have not allowed for the same level of support. The Program Director and Program Manager embarked on a process to assess the current operational, financial, and volunteer management components of the Master Gardener Program and looked to stakeholders to inform the "Program of the Future" to ensure that the Master Gardener program remains not only strong, but can grow to meet the needs of Minnesota's citizens.

The Master Gardener program's goal is to provide an environment for its volunteers that is friendly and supportive so their training, experience, and enthusiasm will produce maximum benefits in their communities. Currently, there is inconsistency in the deployment of this program across the state, thus inhibiting the ability to educate and train both volunteers and communities in a coherent and reliable manner. It is vitally important to devise a new business model with strategies to sustain and grow a successful Master Gardener Program that can contribute to both the mission of the University and the betterment of local communities.

The Master Gardener Program is poised to make changes that will create a program of the future ensuring sustainability while achieving its mission.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

The University of Minnesota Extension Master Gardener Volunteer Program sought to gather information from its program stakeholders, both internal and external, to inform a sustainable organizational structure focused on volunteer management and program longevity. This report outlines two management scenarios that show opportunities and benefits that will lead to a sustainable organization for the future. Key factors include a healthy revenue stream, operational efficiencies, volunteer management and recognition, and dissemination and delivery of research-based best practices related to horticulture.

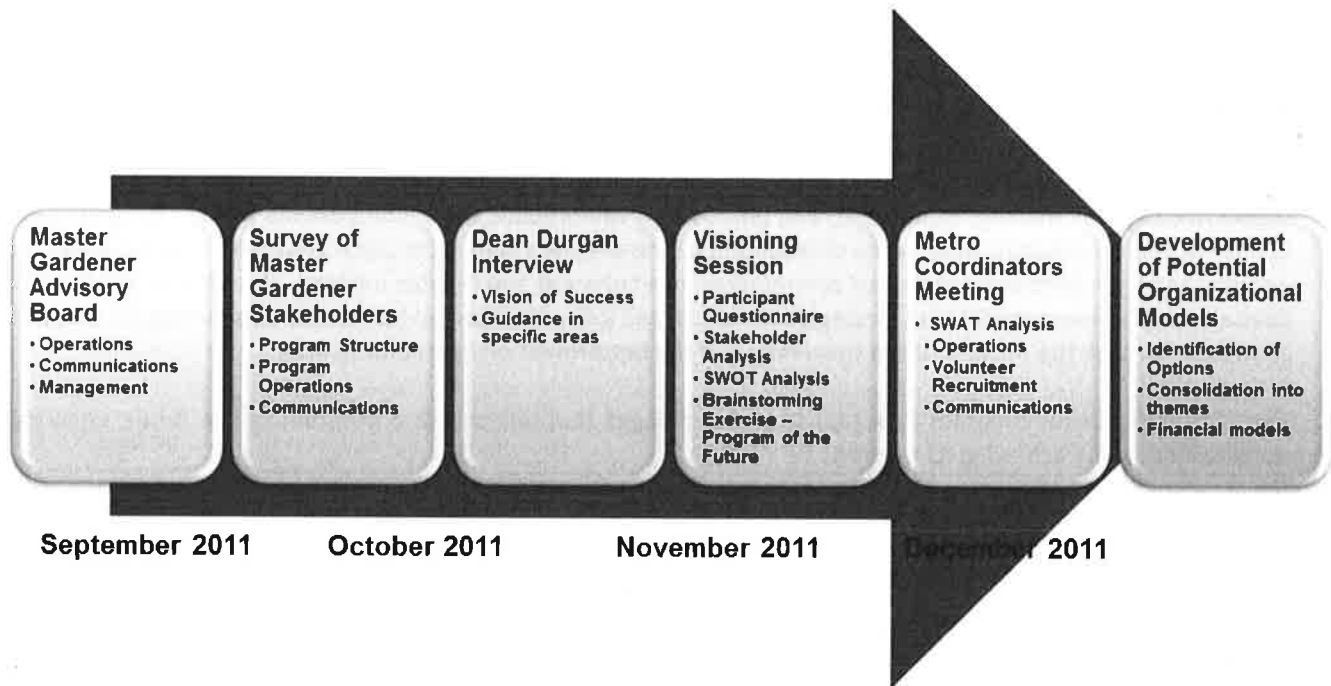
The Master Gardener Program has strengths that can be capitalized upon as it moves into the future. A design team, a group of President's Emerging Leaders, and a team of consultants worked over a period of 6 months to gather and analyze data from various stakeholders, brainstorm solutions, and determine approaches. This report provides the roadmap for improving the current structure, processes, and roles; grow revenue to sustain the organization; create strong strategic alliances; and ensure that volunteers are managed and recognized for their contributions to the mission of the Master Gardener Program.



DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

In order to understand what changes the Master Gardener Program would need to make to better serve its volunteers through a new organizational model, the design team conducted a needs assessment with stakeholders of the program. The needs assessment sought to identify the needs and strengths of the organization and the staff who work with the volunteers that ultimately serve the citizens of the state of Minnesota.

The design team utilized a combination of data collection methods which included: 1) a workshop with the Master Gardener Advisory Group; 2) a survey of Master Gardener stakeholders; 3) an interview with Extension Dean Bev Durgan; 4) a facilitated visioning session with a variety of Master Gardener stakeholders; and 5) a focus group with Metro Coordinators. The timeline below summarizes the data collection process:



Master Gardener Advisory Group

In September 2011, MGSAB members completed a workshop focused in three critical areas of the Master Gardener program: Operations; Communications; and Management. As part of the event, members broke into small groups to answer specific questions in each of the focus areas. The members also discussed improvement ideas and then shared the results with the entire group. A discussion of the major themes facilitated by Terry Straub and Rebecca Noran followed the brainstorming exercise. Output from the event was used to inform areas of focus throughout the project.



Master Gardener Survey

The purpose of the MG Survey was to collect ideas and experiences from a diverse range of people who are involved in the Master Gardener program to inform a new management plan for the program around program structure, operations, and communication.

The Master Gardener Survey asked each participant to identify key elements of the program structure, operations, and communications, after which it asked them to comment on each elements' importance and efficacy. In October, 105 individuals were asked to participate in the survey, with 50 (47.6%) completing the survey which closed in November 2011. Respondents represented a diverse group of stakeholders who serve a variety of roles affiliated with the MG program including Extension Educators, MG Coordinators, MG Volunteer Leaders, Support Staff, and many others.

Results of the survey were compiled by Tom Bartholomay, Research and Evaluation Specialist for EFANS, and Whitney Meredith, Evaluation Coordinator for EFANS. The survey results were used to inform the Visioning Session and as key elements in the development of the findings and recommendations presented in this report.

Interview with the Dean of Extension, Bev Durgan

On November 22, a structured interview with the Dean of Extension, Bev Durgan, was completed by Rebecca Noran and Cory Goracke-Postle, members of the Master Gardener planning team. The dean was asked questions relating to the vision of the program, the program's role in extension, and her expectations for the program. The dean provided a wealth of guidance that was used to clarify areas of focus for the program review and considerations for many of the recommendations contained in this report.

Visioning Session

A Visioning Session to brainstorm the Master Gardener 'Program of the Future' was held at the St. Paul campus in November 2011. Participants from across the state representing different roles were led by external facilitators through a series of exercises designed to elicit ideas on different ways the program could adapt to meet the current challenges faced by the organization and to capitalize on future opportunities to grow the program. Participants reviewed the mission and relevance to the University and communities, identified internal and external stakeholders, outlined strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) to understand the current operating landscape, and brainstormed potential improvements to help provide a framework in which to explore improved or alternate scenarios for the future organization

Visioning Session Pre-Survey

Participants were asked to complete a brief five question survey in advance of the visioning session. The survey was intended to encourage the participants to consider some of the broad themes that would be



discussed during the event and to capture opinions without influence from other participants. Fourteen of the twenty participants completed the survey.

Stakeholder Analysis

A stakeholder analysis was conducted in order to focus the group collectively to understand the various audiences being served by the Master Gardener program. Participants identified internal and external stakeholders impacted by the program and discussed the complexity of working to satisfy many demands.

SWOT Analysis

Participants were asked to participate in a SWOT (strengths, weakness, opportunities, threats) exercise to analyze three core areas of the Master Gardener program: Volunteer Management, Operations, and Finances.

Brainstorming

Participants utilized their creative and analytical skills to brainstorm ideas to create a sustainable and growth-oriented program. Because of the time constraints not all of the ideas were thoroughly vetted but through a dot-voting exercise the leading ideas from each area were discussed in detail.

Metro Master Gardener Coordinators Meeting

On November 30, 2011, eight MG Coordinators from the Minneapolis/St. Paul metropolitan area met with the state Program Director and state Program Manager to discuss opportunities to improve the MG program. The group completed a SWOT (strengths, weakness, opportunities, threats) exercise to analyze three core areas of the Master Gardener program: Volunteer Management, Operations, and Communications. Output from the work session was reviewed along with input from other stakeholders in order to identify themes consistent across several stakeholder groups.

Design Team

The design team met during six work sessions between November 2011 and January 2012 to analyze the data collected from stakeholders. The consultants facilitated planning sessions with the team by questioning current practices, proposing options for various management and operational structures, and presenting best practice business and volunteer management practices for the group to consider. Through discussion and brainstorming the group was able to talk through a number of ideas, strategies, and considerations.



KEY FINDINGS

The stakeholder feedback data collected indicate that there are opportunities for improvement in the areas of operations, volunteer management, and finances. Specifically, these include:

- The need to build a **sustainable management structure** to support a state-wide program;
- The need to address **volunteer support**, particularly in rural areas;
- The need to **train volunteers** beyond the core courses and better prepare them as leaders while recognizing their contributions; and
- The need to identify **new revenue opportunities**, reduce expenses, and create efficiencies.

There is resounding agreement amongst stakeholders that the program's mission is focused on education and sharing research-based information and providing training and information is its key process to ensuring that volunteers have the knowledge and tools to disseminate horticultural information to citizens.

Many stakeholders feel that the mission of the current program could be better realized. There is concern that not all homeowners and citizen's needs are being fully served; there was inconsistent support for volunteers and communities because of reduced paid staff to coordinate volunteer activities; current training for volunteers does not expand beyond horticulture expertise; and stronger connections between the state/university program and local communities was needed.

The biggest challenge for the program was having adequate resources to support the volunteers, especially at the local level. Declining financial resources and uncertainty surrounding state and county support make it challenging for the program to sustain itself at the current level of support. There are opportunities to capitalize and grow revenue through strategic partnerships, grants, sponsorships, and shared resources.

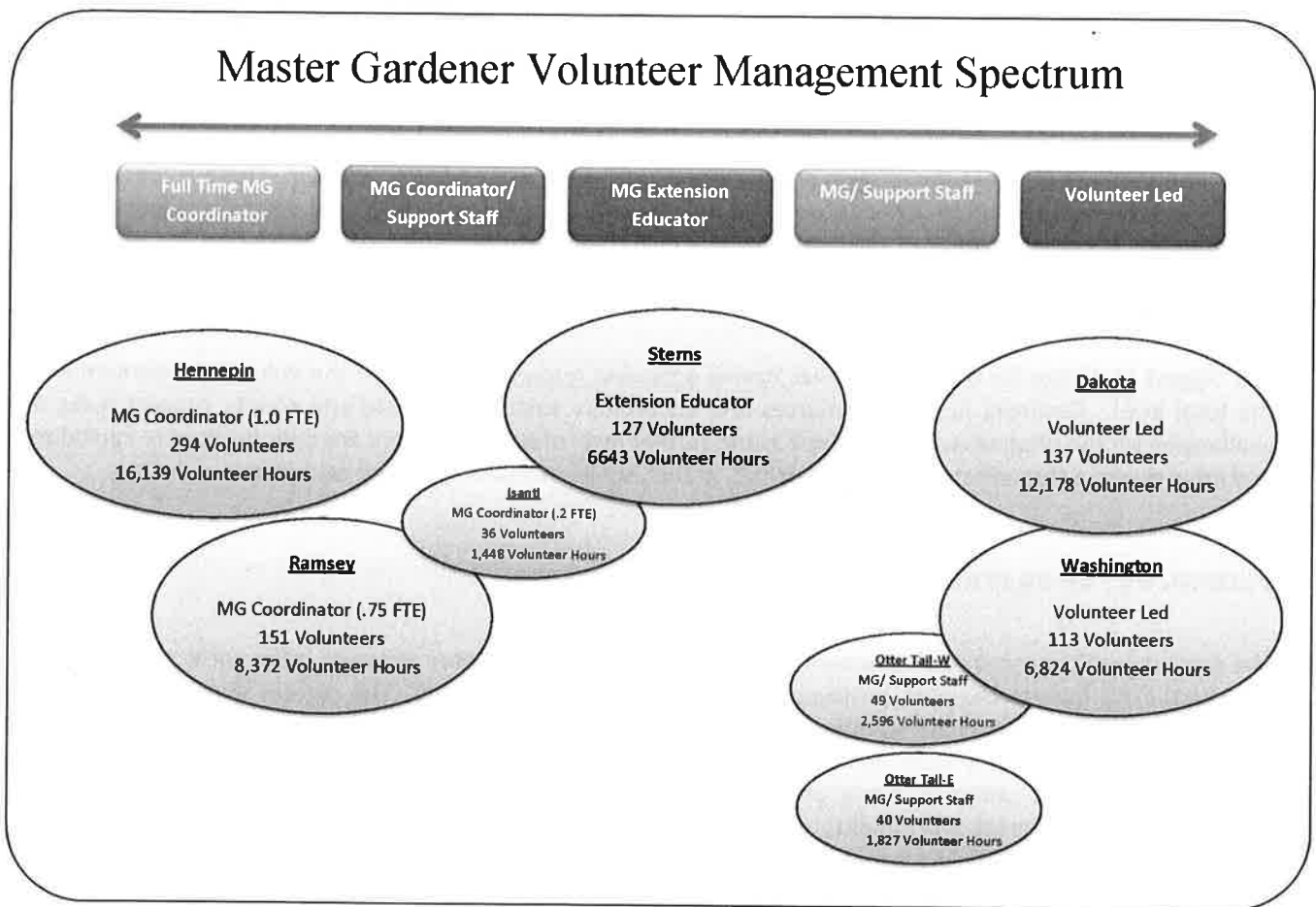
FINDING #1: OPERATIONAL/ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

The Operational/Organizational Structure of the current Master Gardener Program relies on a county-based structure. This feature has both positives and negatives associated with it. The current structure allows for flexibility and agility within the counties to respond to local needs and provides a clear presence within the county communities (easily identifiable). Possible changes moving forward include moving toward a regional system, which could utilize as many or as few local chapters according to demand. The local chapters themselves could embrace a president-, vice-president-, secretary-, treasurer-system built on volunteers. This type of a system maintains the benefits of the county system by sustaining the local nature of the programs, allowing them to address the specific and unique needs of the community. At the same time, this organization also allows for local chapters based on need/demand. Finally, the a regional oversight structure ensures that local chapters have a tie to the state and the University; this approach will aid in consistency in programs across the state.



FINDING #2: VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT

The system for Volunteer Management of the Master Gardener Program currently varies greatly across the state due to the organizational structure. The level of staff supervision, management of volunteers, coordination of work, and the programs offered are different depending on the county in which the volunteers are located. The graphic below highlights the variability of volunteer management from counties with full-time, paid coordinators (Hennepin) on one end of the spectrum, to counties that are completely volunteer led (Dakota, Washington) at the other end of the spectrum.



The roles and responsibilities for volunteer management are inconsistently managed by paid MG Coordinators, Extension Educators, County Support Staff, and volunteers leading to confusion, and in some cases frustration, by volunteers who are not receiving a consistent level of support. Over time, counties have been reducing funding for paid volunteer management positions, leading to several counties shifting to the right along the volunteer management spectrum.



Although Master Gardeners all take the same core course, the similarity in experience may end there. This lack of consistency in the volunteer experience from region to region across the state impacts the experience of the communities and those using the services of the Master Gardeners. One of the positives noted in the current system is that the core course is considered a strong foundation. Ideas for moving the program forward embraced this core set of knowledge and stressed the continued training of volunteers and the consistency of the expectations for volunteers in terms of contributions to the program. Training was seen as key to the success of the Master Gardener Program moving forward; specifically, continuing to take advantage of the expert resources available from the University of Minnesota faculty as well as ensuring volunteers have the most current, research-based information to provide to the public, were seen as vital. Finally, ensuring that volunteers are vetted, trained, and capable of delivering consistent messages in engaging ways was seen as a key to success moving forward.

FINDING #3: FINANCIAL STRUCTURE

The Financial Structure of the current Master Gardener Program is largely county-supported and thus, varies from county to county dependent on available funding. As such, some groups have revenue that they obtain through fundraising, some receive money from the county, and although there is state money, it may be unevenly distributed. Additionally, some groups have a dedicated county office home-base while others do not. Finally, some counties have a dedicated paid Master Gardener coordinator while others rely solely on volunteers and if this trend continues, the Master Gardener Program is at grave financial risk. This is not sustainable and therefore, it is necessary to determine a new structure for the future.

There is strong support to increase revenue through strategic partnerships with a number of possible groups and organizations. One suggestion that emerged from the visioning session was leveraging the Research and Outreach Centers (ROCs) throughout the state to build mutually beneficially relationships with this group. Researchers could increase capacity with volunteer support and volunteers could gain insights and contribute directly to research. Other ideas include building a structure that utilizes fundraising, grant-writing and/or entrepreneurial efforts. It may be advantageous to consider adding a position dedicated to these efforts, such as a business and marketing manager who would be focused on the financial aspects of the program. Sharing resources across other Extension programming is one opportunity to reduce operating costs overall as well as pooling volunteer management to reduce staff expenses.

KEY FINDINGS SUMMARY

As with all change efforts, there is concern that a new organizational model with new ways of operating will cause disruption to the program because of staff and volunteer's *resistance to change*. Over half of the participants in the visioning session expressed their biggest concern with a new organizational model was concern about the volunteers' ability to embrace needed changes. The MG program has a rich culture and norms that will take time to change. Focusing on strengthening connections between the educators and volunteers along with incremental process improvements will allow greater consistency and program focus.



BUSINESS PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS

The goal of a business model is to improve business operations of the enterprise. The Master Gardener Program's core process is to deliver horticulture information using best practices developed by University of Minnesota researchers and faculty through its cohort of volunteer Master Gardeners who then disseminate this critical knowledge to Minnesota's citizens to support the mission of the University of Minnesota. The following table shows the standard business elements and components for any organization and the current status of the Master Gardener Program in relation.

Elements:	Component Include:	Status of Master Gardener Program:
Marketing	Value	Demonstrated
	Customer segments	Articulated
	Distribution channels	In person/online
	Customer relationships	Internal/external defined/opportunity for growth
Finance	Cost Structure	Opportunity to grow through educational offerings
	Revenue Model	Current need to reduce costs/opportunity to grow
Operations	Core Capacity	Opportunity to redefine/create efficiencies
	Partner Network	Opportunity to grow to support program
Human Resources	Roles/Responsibilities	Opportunity to clarify (paid vs. volunteer)
Legal	Risk/liability	Opportunity to strengthen

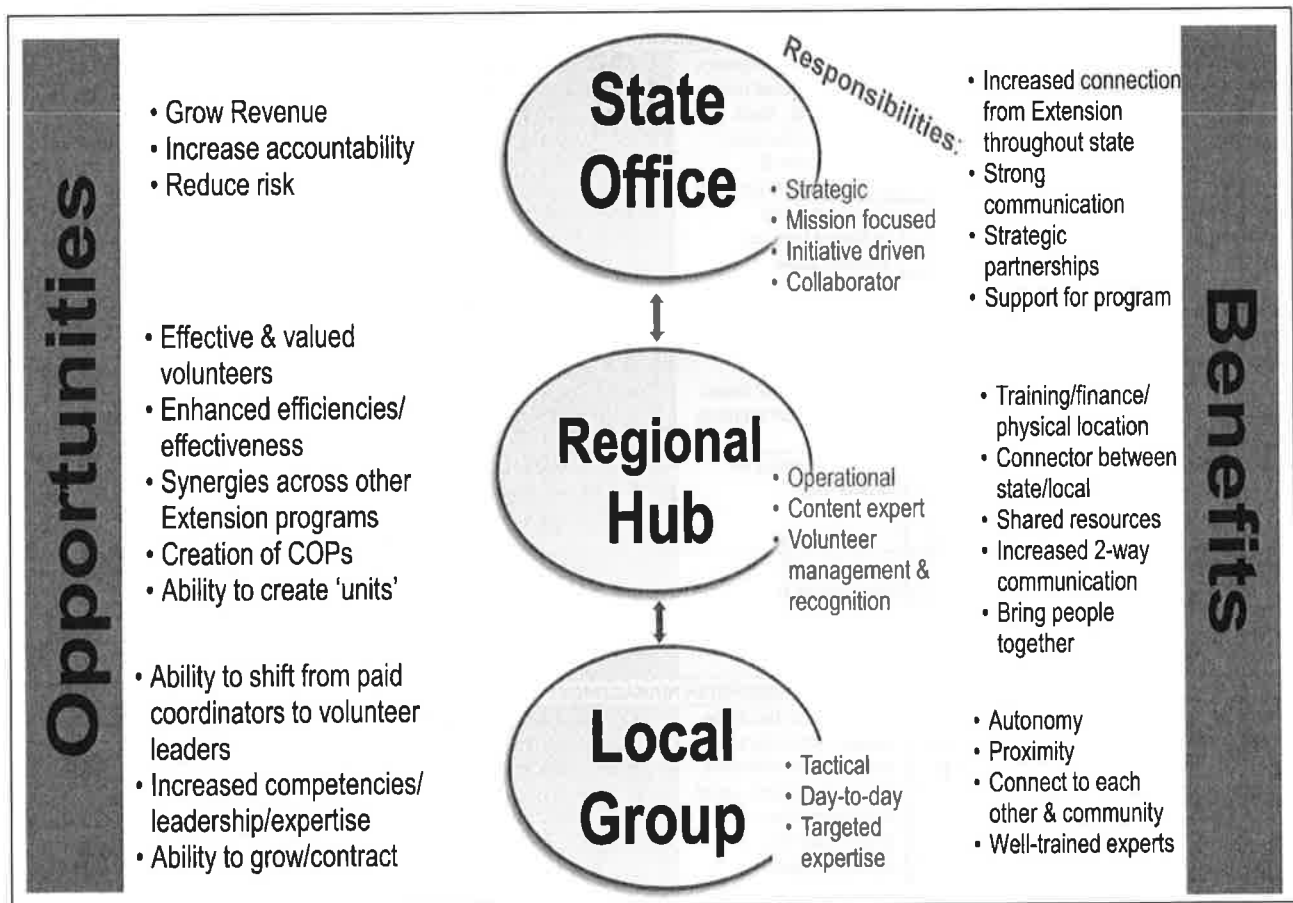
Based on analysis of the current program structure, the following table illustrates the prioritized opportunities for improvement and the key strategies to effect needed changes in the program structure and management.

Priority:	Opportunity for Improvement:	Key Strategies:	Internal	External
Human Resources	<i>Efficiencies/effectiveness:</i> Staffing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivery of information • Other administrative functions • Volunteer Management 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Implement regional hubs 2. Create regional management function 3. Clarify roles; reporting structure 4. Determine 'unit' within hubs (groups of locals) 	✓	
Operations	<i>Restructure:</i> Oversight of volunteers & grow membership	Governance of local groups (county-paid coordinator and volunteer leadership structure)	✓	
Legal	<i>Reduce risk to University</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Implement governance structure 2. Define roles/responsibilities 	✓	
Financial	<i>Grow revenue</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnerships • Fees to local groups (not supported by county) such as fundraising or sponsorships 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Determine shared resources 2. Create framework for self-funding of groups in exchange for support, training, professional development 		✓
Marketing	<i>Create/deliver expanded horticulture expertise</i> areas and volunteer leadership and competency training	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Grow educational-delivered training (for a fee) 2. Create professional development training as a benefit to volunteers 3. Create specialized communities of practice 		✓



RECOMMENDATIONS

There are a number of recommendations in this report that will allow the Master Gardener Program to thrive and grow toward a future with an effective governance structure, highly-trained and engaged volunteers, and sustainable revenue. This graphic gives an overview of the opportunities and benefits that could be realized utilizing a three-tiered organizational structure.





ORGANIZATIONAL MODEL RECOMMENDATIONS

The following table compares three organizational models at a high level that could be used for the Master Gardener Program. The **Current Model** outlines key areas where there are gaps and potential risk to the program. The **Potential Phase I Model** outlines areas that can be changed that will provide the foundation for an **Ideal Phase II Model**. There a number of considerations that include: 1) collection of additional data to inform decisions, 2) creation of strategic relationships, and 3) shifting or increasing revenue to support initiatives.

Roles & Responsibilities	Current Model	Potential Model (Phase I)	Ideal Model (Phase II)	Options
OPERATIONS				
Organizational Structure	County based. State office program oversight.	Local Groups (chapters, units). Regional Hub for Training. State office for Volunteer Management & program oversight.	Regional Hub for Volunteer Management & Training. Local Groups (chapters, units). State office program oversight.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Implement a shift to local groups in areas that experience reduced county funding ✓ Could have multiple offices in regions
Governance Structure	Inconsistent in areas with county support. Not enforced in volunteer led counties.	Formalized and enforced in areas without county support.	Formalized and enforced in all areas including those with paid and unpaid leadership.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Enforce a minimum/maximum size ✓ Require specific reporting (annual charter, budget, work plan)
Brand/Program Identity	County focus. Lack of control on state brand.	U of MN Extension only. One brand state-wide.	U of MN Extension only. One brand state-wide.	
Project Selection	County/local focus.	State focus areas identified. Local focus based on local support.	State focus areas. Local focus based on local support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Develop a list of suggest projects based on extension priorities ✓ Counties that contribute funding can select a percent of the projects
Program Training	Delivered at a central location serving the entire state.	Convert training to online only.	Deliver horticulture training in the Regions. Develop specialty training in focus areas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Grow online training options
Educator Roles	Informal	Formalize different horticulture roles within volunteers to capitalize on strengths and interests.	Formalize different horticulture roles within volunteers to capitalize on strengths and interests.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Develop 'communities of practice' (state-wide, virtual)
VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT				
Volunteer Management	Managed inconsistently across the state based on the county funding model (Paid MG Coordinator, Paid Extension Educator, Paid support staff, or Volunteers only)	Oversight by the State Office. Administrative support from the state Assistant position. Local management by a paid Coordinator role or Volunteer Leader.	Oversight by a paid Regional Manager who represents the state in each area. Local management by a paid MG Coordinator role or Volunteer Leader.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Pilot the Regional Manager role in one area such as West Central ✓ Structure the Regional Manager role from .25 FTE to 1.0 FTE position. ✓ Create a volunteer center where state or regional center staff could provide support for multiple volunteer programs (4H, etc.) ✓ Current coordinators in a region could play the role of Regional Managers
Leadership Training	Limited	Create different 'competency' roles within volunteer leaders to capitalize on strengths and interests.	Create different 'competency' roles within volunteer leaders to capitalize on strengths and interests.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Partner to create training for volunteer leaders
FINANCIAL				
Financial Management	Focus is on the state budget only.	Focus is on the state budget only (no Business & Marketing manager). Limited revenue generating opportunities.	Establish state-wide financial targets managed by a Business & Marketing Manager that include all areas of the program. Add revenue to support new	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Convert the Program Assistant to a Business Manager (or incorporate responsibilities into the Regional Manager role) ✓ Grow Pro-Hort enrollment and/or on-line modules for a fee (24/7 capacity) ✓ Charge local groups a fee to cover costs through local revenue or sponsorship



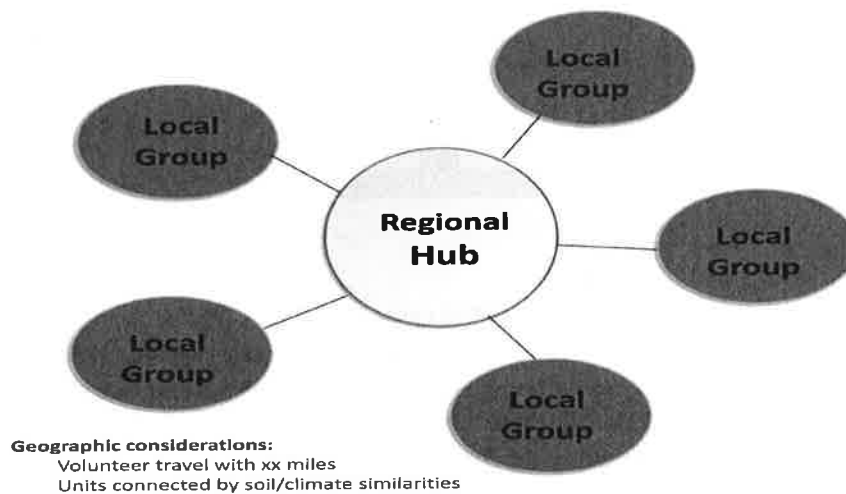
Roles & Responsibilities	Current Model	Potential Model (Phase I)	Ideal Model (Phase II)	Options
			Regional Manager positions. Account management overseen by Regional Managers.	(counties, partners) ✓ Seek 'capacity building' grants ✓ Develop specialist revenue (training for garden center staff, presentations, etc.)

RECOMMENDATION #1: ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

Objective: To have a strong statewide presence and impact on the citizens and communities of Minnesota delivered through Master Gardener volunteers using horticultural best practices developed by faculty through their research efforts.

Strategies:

1. **Regional Hubs** – Utilize hubs in each of the five regions across the State of Minnesota where educators and staff can serve as support to paid coordinators and volunteer Master Gardener leaders. These hubs would serve as a central location to perform the program administration duties. Educational training and information dissemination could be delivered from the hubs, allowing volunteers to gather, network, and share specialized information from surrounding local areas and share information across their county borders to address local challenges.



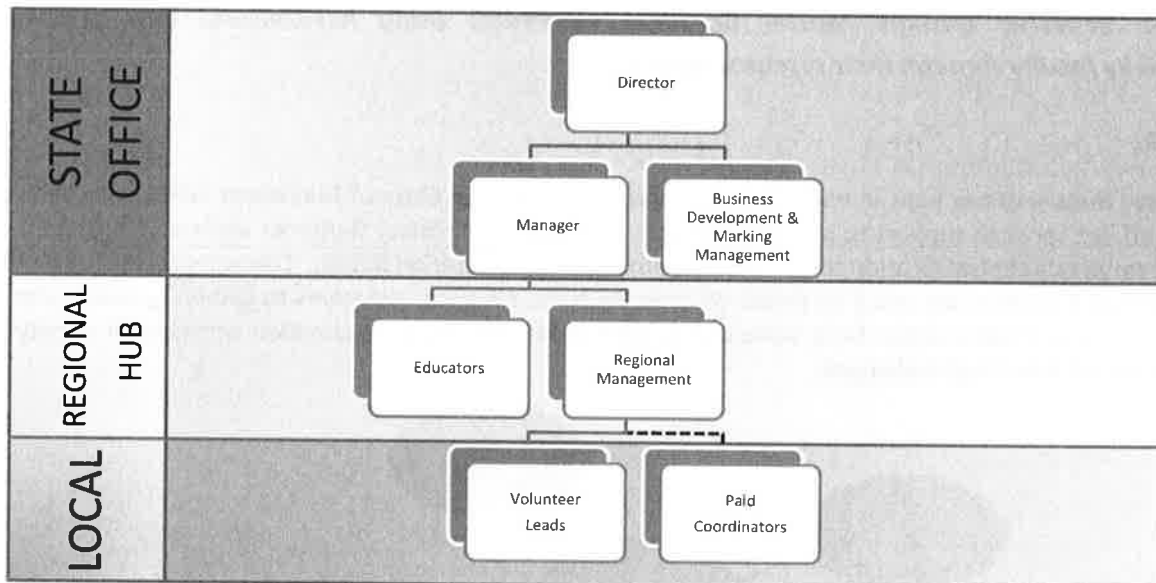
Considerations:

1. Determine if all 5 regions should be set up in the same manner or to pilot a hub to gather more information on logistics.
2. Determine the geographic area for each hub to ensure that volunteers can/will travel to meet and attend trainings/meetings/events.
3. Determine grouping of local units related to common soil, climate, or other specializations.
4. Set clear expectations about what administrative duties will be conducted at hub locations.
5. Set clear accountability up to the state office and down to local groups.
6. Assess synergies with other extension staff and programs that could be created after a thorough operational analysis.



2. **Reporting Structure** – A clearly defined reporting structure will not only allow for a presence at the state, regional, and local level, it will provide clear accountability, reduce legal and financial risks, and allow for increased synergies across educators, staff, and volunteers. This structure allows for autonomy at the local level, synergies at the regional level, and frees up the state office to drive key initiatives while growing revenue through strategic partnerships. Responsibilities can be aligned to focus at the strategic, operational, and tactical level which will create efficiencies and effectiveness across the program.

Proposed Reporting Structure



Considerations:

1. Determine what amount of FTE effort is needed to carry out specific duties.
2. Determine if current county-paid administrative support staff be mandated to take MG training to better answer questions. Or utilize volunteer governance to reduce dependence on staff.
3. Determine if current county-paid coordinators be transitioned to take on management responsibilities at the regional hub. Assess if counties would support this.
4. Need to revisit current coordinator position descriptions and modify.
5. Need to create position description for regional position.
6. Need to review/create role with increased responsibilities for volunteer recruitment, retention & recognition



3. **Roles and Responsibilities** – Having clearly defined roles at the state, regional, and local level will help ensure that the quality of individuals in the program can be measured through well-developed criteria and clear lines of authority and responsibility. Benefits include: 1) state staff can focus on strategic initiatives and increase revenue through new partnerships, cost-sharing, sponsorship, and educational offerings, 2) regional educators can focus on teaching and disseminating knowledge and potentially increasing revenue to the program by identifying groups and organizations outside of the current model, 3) regional management could focus on supporting administrative duties that ensure a well-run and fiscally responsible program and provide oversight and support to paid coordinators and volunteer leaders, and 4) volunteers will be equipped to self-manage their groups and maintain local autonomy.

Proposed Roles & Responsibilities		Director	Manager	Business & Marketing	Educator	Regional Mgt	Paid Coordinator	Volunteer Leader
State	Strategic							
	Set program direction	✓						
	Determine initiatives	✓						
	Develop partnerships	✓						
	Grow program offerings	✓						
	Manage accountability/risk	✓						
	Liaison to counties		✓					
	Set financial targets/oversight		✓					
	Determine/benchmark metrics		✓					
	Financial Management			✓				
Grow/manage grants/sponsorships			✓					
Marketing			✓					
Regional	Operational							
	Identify training/knowledge				✓			
	Develop curriculum				✓			
	Deliver training				✓			
	Content expert				✓			
	Coordinate COPs & regional specialization				✓			
	Volunteer Management					✓		
	Volunteer Recognition					✓		
	Develop competencies					✓		
	Liaison between state/local					✓		
Resource to local groups					✓			
Coordinate training logistics across local groups					✓			
Local	Tactical							
	Day-to-day activities						✓	✓
	Drive county initiatives						✓	
	Coordinate with other locals						✓	
	Liaison between county, local & region						✓	
	Liaison between local group & region							✓



4. **Governance** – With declining county support and lack of paid coordinators across all of the counties within the state of Minnesota it is critical to put in place a volunteer structure that can self-sustain a local group. When local groups do not have a paid coordinator, a governance structure will allow for volunteer Master Gardeners to step up and serve in leadership roles to manage the day-to-day work and to create a cohesive and well-functioning group to carry out Extension’s mission with the citizens. This volunteer workforce can ultimately reduce operating costs. This structure not only maintains accountability of the individual volunteers, it lessens the risk for the University of Minnesota and its oversight and management of these volunteers. Local groups will maintain their autonomy and can still serve their unique communities. Having the elements in place for groups without paid staff oversight will allow the program to stay strong even when funding is reduced by individual counties.

Considerations:

1. Need to develop by-laws/agreements for local groups.
2. Need to define volunteer leadership roles/responsibilities.
3. Need to train leadership in their roles.

5. **Local Groups** – Local groups know their communities and citizen’s needs the best. Many volunteers have the desire to give back to their communities, connect with individuals with similar interests, and many are life-long learners. To accommodate the various motivations for volunteers it is important to create volunteer groups that are geographically accessible, are sized in such a way that members feel appreciated and are not unduly burdened with rules and regulations. Volunteers must have leadership to ensure accountability and reduce risk. The local groups must provide oversight of the volunteers that conforms to local, state, and federal rules and regulations.

Considerations:

1. Determine criteria and optimum size for a group to exist.
2. Determine financial support required for a group to operate.
3. Create agreements with the state office (expectations, etc.).
4. Determine if current large groups could be split and if small groups in geographic proximity could be consolidated.
5. Assess members in current groups to see if there is a need to expand/contract.
6. Create agreements to make sure local initiatives tie to the state.
7. Examine current processes and determine if some operating activities can be simplified or discontinued.

**RECOMMENDATION #2: VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT & RECOGNITION**

Objective: *To have leading-edge training and support of horticulture and leadership skills to equip and engage volunteers utilizing clear roles and responsibilities and providing opportunities to reward and recognize individual contributions.*

Strategies:

1. **Regional Training** – distribute training for volunteers to regional areas rather than the current centralized approach. This would expand training access to more of the rural areas, allow for development of unique content based on local needs and have the potential to reduce costs due to less travel. Regional training would connect people within their geographic area, increasing their link to the local communities.

Considerations:

1. Determine how much training should be developed for unique regional needs.
 2. Assess and determine available/ideal physical locations for training delivery in each region.
 3. Determine geographic distance that could serve as a guideline for training delivery.
 4. Determine what training should be delivered on-line versus on sight.
 5. Conduct market research on training audiences beyond Master Gardeners (potential revenue).
2. **Leadership Competencies** – create structured leadership roles for volunteers in order to capitalize on strengths and interests. This provides the support for a governance structure for local groups without a paid coordinator to perform necessary volunteer management responsibilities and complete administrative tasks. Formalizing the administrative roles also may help recruit volunteers who are looking for professional development opportunities or looking for ways to use some of their strengths beyond their horticulture knowledge.

Considerations:

1. Determine appropriate leadership roles and needed competencies.
 2. Identify training needs to support each role. Curriculum development & delivery.
 3. Formalize the process to take on a leadership role within a local group.
 4. Develop change/communication plan to roll out changes to volunteers.
3. **Educator Roles** – create structured horticulture subject matter ‘expert’ roles or ‘communities of practice’ within volunteers on specific topics in order to capitalize on strengths and interests.

Considerations:

1. Determine appropriate horticulture expert roles and communities of practice.
2. Identify training needs to support each role. Curriculum development & delivery.
3. Formalize the process to take on a horticulture expert role.
4. Determine how manage and communication with/amongst the experts.
5. Develop change/communication plan to roll out changes to volunteers.



4. **Volunteer Impact** – create program priorities at the state level which are communicated to local groups and then create a measurement system to evaluate the impact volunteers are having at fulfilling the state program priorities and those of counties or local community needs.

Considerations:

1. Determine what metrics would be available to quantify the impact beyond the current quantity of volunteer hours.
 2. Assess impact of a new measurement system on recruitment, retention, and volunteer recognition.
 3. Create and administer a volunteer motivation and engagement survey.
 4. Develop a change/communication plan to roll out changes to volunteers.
5. **Consolidate Extension Volunteer Support** – examine all volunteer programs managed through University of Minnesota Extension to determine if some of the volunteer support resources could be pooled. The volunteer management could be based out of the Regional areas and be leveraged across the various programs (4H, Master Naturalist, Master Gardener, etc.) to deliver a richer experience to volunteers, reduce staff time for oversight, and may allow for economies of scale for purchasing and other operating expenses. There may be efficiencies from eliminating duplication of efforts in areas like leadership training and administrative tasks such as background checks or tracking volunteer hours.

Considerations:

1. Determine areas of greatest opportunity for consolidation.
2. Examine resources currently available for each Extension volunteer program and determine shared opportunities to reduce costs.
3. Determine physical/virtual locations and communication channels.

RECOMMENDATION #3: FINANCIAL

Objective: To have a fiscally sustainable Master Gardener program that effectively capitalizes on revenue opportunities and efficiently manages costs in order to grow the program capabilities.

Strategies:

1. **Pro-Hort Enrollment** – increase the revenue generated from the Pro-Hort program by increasing overall enrollment in the traditional training program while exploring opportunities for new revenue from on-line training capabilities or specialty training. The current Pro-Hort program charges students a premium fee much higher than the volunteer rate. Approximately 30 students are currently enrolled in the Pro-Hort program. The potential exists to expand this program to generate additional revenue to help the program fulfill its mission.

**Considerations:**

1. Examine opportunities to create on-line 24/7 modules which could be offered state-wide.
 2. Complete market studies to determine the market potential for Pro-Hort offerings.
 3. Work with local businesses (garden centers, etc.) to determine if their staff would benefit from U of M Extension training.
 4. Determine the staff time/cost to build new training offerings.
 5. Determine if additional educators are needed for increased enrollment.
 6. Set enrollment and revenue targets for the program.
 7. Explore other educational offerings
2. **Sponsorships** – seek financial support for local groups from different organizations including counties, businesses or other groups through direct dollars or in-kind gifts. Modify how the counties currently contribute financial support to enable pooling of multiple county resources to fund one local group or portion of a regional manager role. Seek external partnerships/grants to sponsor a local group.

Considerations:

1. Determine the cost per local group or per MG volunteer.
 2. Analyze incentives for sponsorships (marketing, etc.).
 3. Examine costs of administrative support like supplies and background checks.
 4. Determine state, federal, and private funding opportunities.
 5. Examine if sponsorship focus should be directed toward specific needs like meetings space, supplies, volunteer recognition or other targeted activities.
3. **Fundraising Plan** – develop a sustained plan for raising revenue managed at the state level with local groups contributing to the effort. Develop a business and marketing function at the state level that can determine programs that have the greatest success and work with regional hubs and local groups to execute the plan. This would give local groups the tools they need to fund their groups and eliminate the need to find sponsors if groups can raise their own funds.

Considerations:

1. Determine who should manage the checking accounts and financial oversight for local group revenue and expenses.
2. Determine costs for training and administration of Master Gardeners and determine a local fee paid to the state office to help fund the overall program. Need to consider per MG or flat rate.
3. Need to develop a strategic collaborative framework (partners to pursue, etc.).
4. Determine grant opportunities.



4. **Program Assistant Position** – convert the state office program assistant position into a Business and Marketing Manager role or incorporate those responsibilities into the Regional Manager role. Charge this role with responsibilities including budget oversight, financial planning, marketing, and relationship management. The current vacancy of the position creates an opportunity to redefine the role. By focusing on the business and marketing functions, this role could help the program identify opportunities for revenue growth and potential cost reductions.

Considerations:

1. Develop a position description if it is a stand-alone role. If part of the Regional Manager role, need to define the responsibilities.
2. Determine the interface with the foundation and determine the objectives for relationship building.
3. Understand the current financial landscape at the state, county and local levels.

Financial Modeling

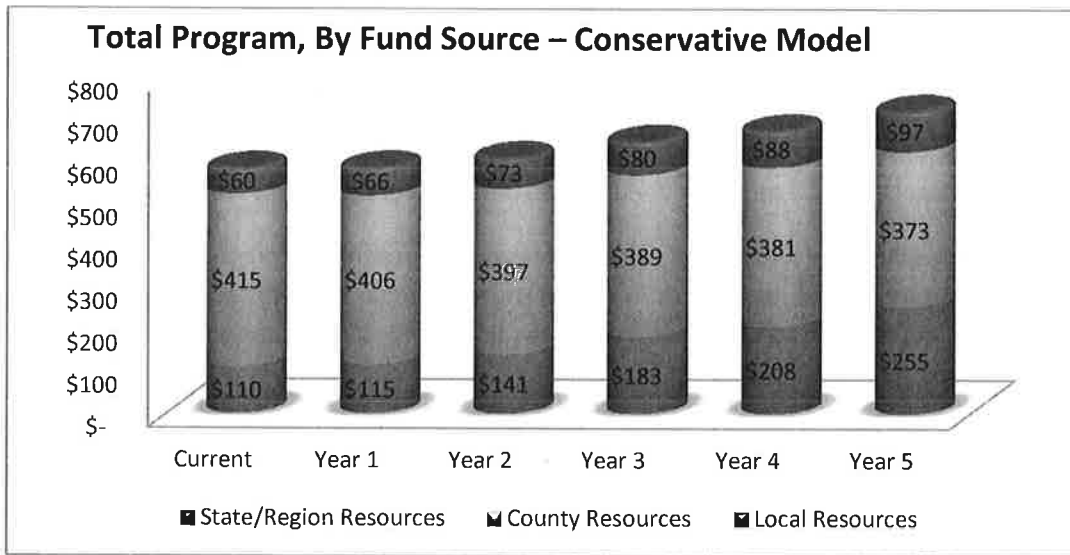
There are a number of financial scenarios that would facilitate implementation of the recommendations in this report. As an illustration, the following two models outline different revenue and expense scenarios.

The first is a more **Conservative Model**, which slowly increases state revenue resources through minor growth in the core course and slightly aggressive growth in the Pro-Hort program. County resources in this model drop slightly over time due to small decreases primarily in the funding of MG Coordinator positions.

As county funding decreases, a Regional Manager role is gradually added beginning with a .25 FTE position in year 1 and growing to 1.5 FTEs by year 5. Local programs are built up to replace the funding lost from the counties. The overall program shows a slight growth in resources over 5 years, but the mix of resources shifts from 71% county funding down to 51%, while state/region funding increases from 19% to 35%.

5-Year Financial Forecast: Conservative Model

Total Program:	Current	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
(Dollar)						
State/Region Resources	\$ 110	\$ 115	\$ 141	\$ 183	\$ 208	\$ 255
County Resources	\$ 415	\$ 406	\$ 397	\$ 389	\$ 381	\$ 373
Local Resources	\$ 60	\$ 66	\$ 73	\$ 80	\$ 88	\$ 97
	\$ 585	\$ 587	\$ 611	\$ 651	\$ 677	\$ 724
(Percentage)						
State/Region Resources	19%	20%	23%	28%	31%	35%
County Resources	71%	69%	65%	60%	56%	51%
Local Resources	10%	11%	12%	12%	13%	13%
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

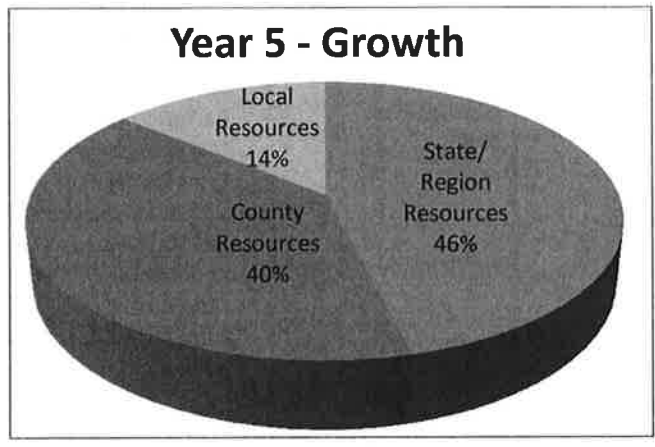
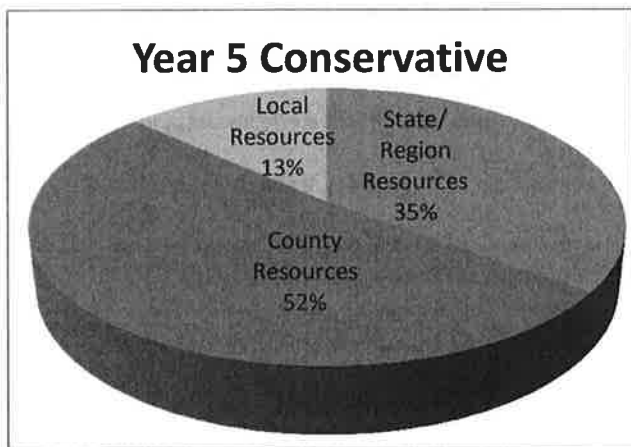
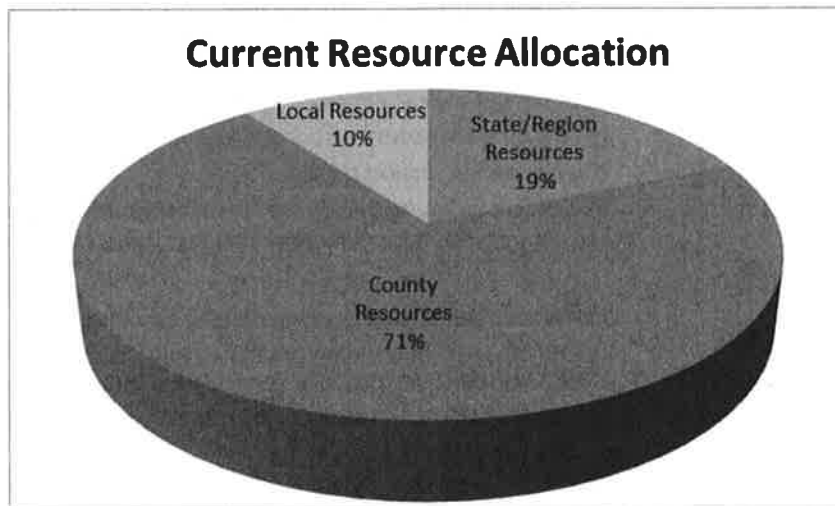
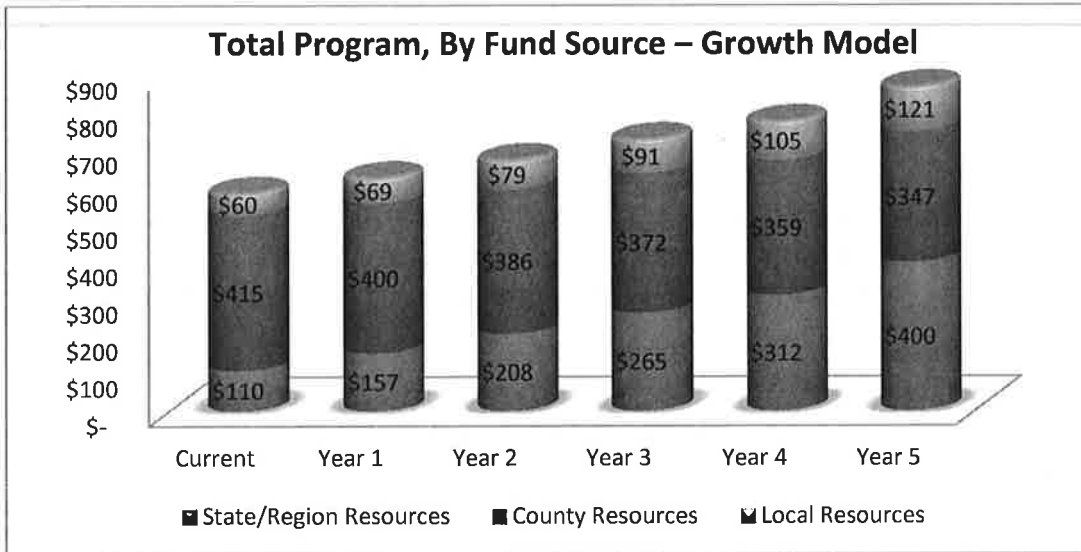


The second model introduces a more aggressive **Growth Model**. Under this model, revenues grow rapidly through expansion of the Pro-Hort program, on-line training modules, sponsorships and revenue from local groups. Regional Managers are added over time growing from a .5 FTE position in year 1 to 3.0 FTEs by year 5.

County resources drop rapidly over a 5 year period with local resources making up some, but not all of the decrease. The overall program grows despite the drop in county funding due to the significant revenue growth at the state/regional level shifting from 19% of funds to 46% at the end of year 5.

5-Year Financial Forecast: Growth Model

Total Program:	Current	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
(Dollar)						
State/Region Resources	\$ 110	\$ 157	\$ 208	\$ 265	\$ 312	\$ 400
County Resources	\$ 415	\$ 400	\$ 386	\$ 372	\$ 359	\$ 347
Local Resources	\$ 60	\$ 69	\$ 79	\$ 91	\$ 105	\$ 121
	\$ 585	\$ 697	\$ 679	\$ 780	\$ 765	\$ 826
(Percentage)						
State/Region Resources	19%	25%	31%	36%	40%	46%
County Resources	71%	64%	57%	51%	46%	40%
Local Resources	10%	11%	12%	13%	14%	14%
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%





IMPLEMENTATION

There are a number of recommendations and considerations contained in this report. Using the Criteria for Decision Making worksheet can assist the design team in determining priorities for implementation based on ease and impact/benefit. Below are the categories of activities grouped in a suggested order of completion based implementation of the 'ideal model.' If the 'potential model' is chosen, then some of the considerations may be tabled until a future time. Additionally, a comprehensive change/communication plan should be developed to inform and engage the faculty and volunteers.

Priority:	Rationale:	Considerations:
Human Resources	<p><i>Role Clarity</i></p> <p><i>Accountability</i></p>	<p><u>State:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set clear accountability up to the state office and down to local groups. • Determine the interface with the foundation and determine the objectives for relationship building. • Develop a strategic collaborative framework (partners to pursue, etc.) <p><u>Regional:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set clear expectations about what administrative duties will be conducted at hub locations. • Determine if any current county-paid coordinators should be transitioned to take on management responsibilities at the regional hub. Assess if counties would support this. • Review/create role with increased responsibilities for volunteer recruitment, retention & recognition (Regional Manager/Management) <p><u>Local:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revisit paid coordinator position descriptions and modify. • Determine appropriate volunteer leadership roles/responsibilities/processes and needed competencies. • Formalize the process to take on a horticulture expert role. <p><u>Current County:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine if current county-paid administrative support staff be mandated to take MG training to better answer questions. Or utilize volunteer governance to reduce dependence on staff.
Financial	<p><i>Fiscal management and accountability</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set enrollment and revenue targets for the program. • Perform financial modeling to determine cost effective efficiencies and revenue generation approaches • Examine costs of administrative support like supplies, background checks and other expenses. • Determine costs for training and administration of Master Gardeners and determine a local fee paid to the state office to help fund the overall program. Need to consider per MG or flat rate. • Determine who should manage the checking accounts and financial oversight for local group revenue and expenses.



Priority:	Rationale:	Considerations:
Operations	<p><i>Create efficiencies and effectiveness</i> <i>Share resources</i> <i>Reduce costs</i></p> <p><i>Create/deliver expanded horticulture expertise area and leadership and competency training</i></p>	<p><u>Space/location:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine if all 5 regions should be set up in the same manner or to pilot a hub to gather more information on logistics. • Assess synergies with other extension staff and programs that could be created after a thorough operational analysis; determine areas of greatest opportunity for consolidation. • Assess and determine available/ideal physical locations for training delivery in each region. • Determine the geographic areas for each hub to ensure that volunteers can travel to meet and attend trainings. • Determine if the grouping of local units have commonalities related to soil, climate, or other specializations. <p><u>Local Groups:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine criteria and optimum size for a group to exist. • Determine if current large groups could be split and if small groups in geographic proximity could be consolidated. • Assess members in current groups to see if there is a need to expand/contract. • Examine current processes and determine if some operating activities can be simplified or discontinued. <p><u>Training: Curriculum Development & Delivery.</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train volunteer leadership in their roles. • Train horticulture 'expert' volunteers/communities of practice. • Determine how much training should be developed for unique regional needs. • Determine what training should be delivered on-line versus on sight. • Determine the staff time/cost to build new training offerings. • Determine if additional educators are needed for increased enrollment. • Examine opportunities to create on-line 24/7 modules which could be offered state-wide. <p><u>Information Technology:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine physical/virtual locations and communication channels. • Examine opportunities to create on-line 24/7 modules which could be offered state-wide.
Legal	<p><i>Reduce risk to University</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop by-laws/agreements for local groups (also ensures local initiatives tie to the state).



Priority:	Rationale:	Considerations:
Marketing	<p><i>Grow Partnerships</i></p> <p><i>Grow revenue</i></p> <p>Clear measures of success</p>	<p><u>Market Research/Data Collecting:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct market research on training audiences beyond Master Gardeners. • Complete a study to determine the market potential for Pro-Hort offerings. • Create and administer a volunteer motivation factors and engagement survey. <p><u>Revenue Generation:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine state, federal, and private funding opportunities. • Work with local businesses (garden centers, etc.) to determine if their staff would benefit from U of M Extension training. • Explore other educational offerings. • Analyze incentives for sponsorships. • Examine if a sponsorship focus should be directed toward specific needs like meeting space, supplies, volunteer recognition or other targeted activities. <p><u>Metrics:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine what metrics would quantify the impact of the program beyond the current quantity of volunteer hours. • Assess impact of a new measurement system on recruitment, retention, and volunteer recognition.



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Please direct any questions or concerns about the content of this report to either author.*



GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Communities of Practice – group of individuals with a shared interest, skill, or knowledge on a particular expert area.

Competencies – individual characteristics, including knowledge, skills, abilities, self image, traits, mindsets, feelings, and ways of thinking, which, when used with the appropriate roles, achieve a desired result. Competencies contribute to individual exemplary performance that creates reasonable impact on business outcomes.

Financial Structure – the revenues and expenses at all levels of delivering the Master Gardener Program.

Organizational Structure/Operations – the administrative structure for the Master Gardener Program including governance, leadership, operational management, support staff, and agreements with other entities.

Master Gardener Program – the entire program related to Master Gardeners in the state of Minnesota.

Stakeholder – a person, group, organization, or system that can be affected by an organization's actions.

Training Program – the education and training delivery of information for Master Gardener volunteers.

Volunteer Recognition – the process of acknowledging and rewarding the experience, knowledge and effort to carry out the work of the program.

Volunteer Management – the entire process of recruiting, training, managing, and retaining volunteers.

**APPENDIX: (Julie/Dave to confirm what should be included)****STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS****Internal**

- Educators
 - Extension
 - Agricultural
 - Horticultural
 - Researchers
- Coordinators (other MG supporting roles)
- Volunteers - master gardeners (unpaid capacity to carry mission into the community)
 - Lakeshore owners
 - Gardeners
 - Lawn/home care
 - Educators
 - Social advocates

Motivations include: 1) Learning, 2) Social, and 3) Giving back to the community

- Board of Regents
- CFANS
- Research Outreach Centers

External

- Potential program participants
- Decision makers (policy, financial):
 - Local governance
 - County Boards
 - Elected officials
- General community (any resident of MN with Qs)
 - Lakeshore owners
 - Gardeners
 - Lawn/home care
 - Educators

- Schools/Libraries
- Health Clinics
- Youth (those interested or exposed to)
 - Future adult volunteers
 - Education
 - Enrichment/underserved
- Partners/Collaborators (similar/overlapping interests):
 - Community:
 - Non-profit/civic organizations
 - County fairs/State Fair
 - Agriculture:
 - Farmer Markets
 - Food
 - 4-H
 - Horticulture:
 - Garden Centers
 - Community gardens
 - Horticulture industry/businesses
 - Horticulture society
 - Junior Master Gardener Program
 - Environmental:
 - Department of Natural Resources (Naturalist Program)
 - Soil and Water Conservation
 - Lakeshore Associations

Both

- Arboretum
- Future Master Gardeners of America

Other appendices....

FINANCIAL MODEL - CONSERVATIVE

Master Gardener: Program of the Future

5-Year Forecast - Conservative Model

(all values are estimates, in thousands)

Item	Model	Current	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
State/Regional:							
Revenue:							
Core Course Enrollment	Grow 5% per year	\$ 77	\$ 81	\$ 85	\$ 89	\$ 94	\$ 98
Pro-Hort Enrollment	Grow 20%/yr (1-3), 10% (4-5)	\$ 17	\$ 21	\$ 25	\$ 30	\$ 33	\$ 36
On Line Specialty Modules		\$ -	\$ 10	\$ 20	\$ 35	\$ 50	\$ 65
Local Group Fees		\$ -	\$ 10	\$ 15	\$ 20	\$ 25	\$ 35
Grant/Gift/Sponsorship	Increase over time	\$ 5	\$ 10	\$ 15	\$ 20	\$ 25	\$ 35
Total Revenue		\$ 99	\$ 132	\$ 160	\$ 194	\$ 226	\$ 269
Expenses:							
State Program (current)		\$ 110	\$ 110	\$ 110	\$ 110	\$ 110	\$ 110
Regional Manager(s)	Add positions over time	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 21	\$ 63	\$ 83	\$ 125
Training/Misc. Expenses		\$ -	\$ 5	\$ 10	\$ 10	\$ 15	\$ 20
Total Expense		\$ 110	\$ 115	\$ 141	\$ 183	\$ 208	\$ 255
Net Surplus (Deficit):		\$ (11)	\$ 17	\$ 19	\$ 11	\$ 18	\$ 14
Local/County:							
Revenue:							
County Funding		\$ 415	\$ 406	\$ 397	\$ 389	\$ 381	\$ 373
Local Revenue Earned	Grow 10% per year	\$ 60	\$ 66	\$ 73	\$ 80	\$ 88	\$ 97
Total Revenue		\$ 475	\$ 472	\$ 470	\$ 469	\$ 468	\$ 469
Expenses:							
County MG Coordinators	Assume 3% decrease/yr	\$ 250	\$ 243	\$ 235	\$ 228	\$ 221	\$ 215
County Ext. Educators	Assume constant	\$ 115	\$ 115	\$ 115	\$ 115	\$ 115	\$ 115
County Support Staff	Assume 3% decrease/yr	\$ 50	\$ 49	\$ 47	\$ 46	\$ 44	\$ 43
Local Expenses	Grow 10% per year	\$ 30	\$ 33	\$ 36	\$ 40	\$ 44	\$ 48
Local Group Fees Paid to State Office		\$ -	\$ 10	\$ 15	\$ 20	\$ 25	\$ 35
Total Expense		\$ 445	\$ 449	\$ 449	\$ 449	\$ 450	\$ 456
Net Surplus (Deficit):		\$ 30	\$ 23	\$ 21	\$ 20	\$ 19	\$ 13
Total Program:		Current	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
(Dollar)							
State/Region Resources		\$ 110	\$ 115	\$ 141	\$ 183	\$ 208	\$ 255
County Resources		\$ 415	\$ 406	\$ 397	\$ 389	\$ 381	\$ 373
Local Resources		\$ 60	\$ 66	\$ 73	\$ 80	\$ 88	\$ 97
		\$ 585	\$ 587	\$ 611	\$ 651	\$ 677	\$ 724
(Percentage)							
State/Region Resources		19%	20%	23%	28%	31%	35%
County Resources		71%	69%	65%	60%	56%	51%
Local Resources		10%	11%	12%	12%	13%	13%
		100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

FINANCIAL MODEL - GROWTH

Master Gardener: Program of the Future

5-Year Forecast - Growth Model

(all values are estimates, in thousands)

Item	Model	Current	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
State/Regional:							
Revenue:							
Core Course Enrollment	Grow 10% per year	\$ 77	\$ 85	\$ 93	\$ 102	\$ 113	\$ 124
Pro-Hort Enrollment	Grow 50%/yr (1-3), 30% (4-5)	\$ 17	\$ 26	\$ 39	\$ 58	\$ 76	\$ 98
On Line Specialty Modules		\$ -	\$ 15	\$ 30	\$ 50	\$ 80	\$ 120
Local Group Fees	Based on chapter size	\$ -	\$ 20	\$ 35	\$ 40	\$ 45	\$ 50
Grant/Gift/Sponsorship	Increase over time	\$ 5	\$ 20	\$ 30	\$ 40	\$ 40	\$ 40
Total Revenue		\$ 99	\$ 166	\$ 227	\$ 291	\$ 353	\$ 432
Expenses:							
State Program (current)		\$ 110	\$ 110	\$ 110	\$ 110	\$ 110	\$ 110
Regional Manager(s)	Add positions over time	\$ -	\$ 42	\$ 83	\$ 125	\$ 167	\$ 250
Training/Misc. Expenses		\$ -	\$ 5	\$ 15	\$ 30	\$ 35	\$ 40
Total Expense		\$ 110	\$ 157	\$ 208	\$ 265	\$ 312	\$ 400
Net Surplus (Deficit):		\$ (11)	\$ 9	\$ 19	\$ 26	\$ 42	\$ 32
Local/County:							
Revenue:							
County Funding		\$ 415	\$ 400	\$ 386	\$ 372	\$ 359	\$ 347
Local Revenue Earned	Grow 15% per year	\$ 60	\$ 69	\$ 79	\$ 91	\$ 105	\$ 121
Total Revenue		\$ 475	\$ 469	\$ 465	\$ 463	\$ 464	\$ 468
Expenses:							
County MG Coordinators	Assume 5% decrease/yr	\$ 250	\$ 238	\$ 226	\$ 214	\$ 204	\$ 193
County Ext. Educators	Assume constant	\$ 115	\$ 115	\$ 115	\$ 115	\$ 115	\$ 115
County Support Staff	Assume 5% decrease/yr	\$ 50	\$ 48	\$ 45	\$ 43	\$ 41	\$ 39
Local Expenses	Grow 10% per year	\$ 30	\$ 33	\$ 36	\$ 40	\$ 44	\$ 48
Local Group Fees Paid to State Office		\$ -	\$ 20	\$ 35	\$ 40	\$ 45	\$ 50
Total Expense		\$ 445	\$ 453	\$ 457	\$ 452	\$ 448	\$ 445
Net Surplus (Deficit):		\$ 30	\$ 16	\$ 8	\$ 11	\$ 16	\$ 22
Total Program:		Current	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
(Dollar)							
State/Region Resources		\$ 110	\$ 157	\$ 208	\$ 265	\$ 312	\$ 400
County Resources		\$ 415	\$ 400	\$ 386	\$ 372	\$ 359	\$ 347
Local Resources		\$ 60	\$ 69	\$ 79	\$ 91	\$ 105	\$ 121
		\$ 585	\$ 626	\$ 674	\$ 729	\$ 776	\$ 868
(Percentage)							
State/Region Resources		19%	25%	31%	36%	40%	46%
County Resources		71%	64%	57%	51%	46%	40%
Local Resources		10%	11%	12%	13%	14%	14%
		100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Appendix B: Market Research Data

Host	What type of course	Cost	Web address
Water District of Southern California	Tutorials: 15 min, 60 min, and professional level	Free	http://www.bewaterwise.com/training01.html
Cornell University	Variety of online classes including botanical illustration, garden design, and organic gardening	\$350-\$500	http://www.cals.cornell.edu/cals/hort/teaching/distance-learning/index.cfm
Universal Class	Online CEU courses	\$50-70/class	http://www.universalclass.com/i/subjects/home-garden/gardening.htm
Doug's Gardening Center	Ask an expert	Free	http://www.douggreengarden.com/online-gardening-courses.html
Utah State Extension	Plant Disease and Chemicals lecture	Free	http://ocw.usu.edu/University_Extension/plant-diseases-chemicals/
University of Maryland	PDF Resources on Hort Topics	Free	http://www.hgic.umd.edu/content/onlinepublications.cfm
University of Connecticut	Online class in Pest Management	Free	http://www.hgic.umd.edu/content/onlinepublications.cfm
BYU	Planning and Preparing your Garden and Growing Vegetables, Fruits, and Nuts online classes	Free	http://is.byu.edu/courses/pe/999053071002/public/start.htm

Appendix C: Focus Group Script, Questions, and Invitation

Focus Group Script and Questions

Brief welcome to the participants:

Hello, my name is Andrew and this is Michelle. We will be moderating the focus group tonight. Thank you for taking time to join us to talk about your previous experience in the Master Gardener Core Course. The information we gather tonight will help with the development of a new, online, topic-based gardening course.

Some guidelines for the discussion:

Discussion is encouraged from everyone and there are no right answers or wrong answers. The hope is that there will be differing points of view on the topic at hand, so while you may disagree with what is being said, please allow others to share their views. Everyone is on a first name basis tonight. Although we asked you to sign in, your names will not be used in any reports or documents. We ask that only one person speak at a time because, as you may have noticed, we are taping this discussion. This will make it easier to transcribe comments. Please make sure your cell phone ringer is off and if you do need to take a call to please step out of the room and keep the call brief. Does anyone have any questions? If not, we will begin by having you introduce yourselves and a little bit about you.

Questions:

Information gathered on sign-in sheet

- Name
- When did you take the Master Gardener Core Course?
- Did you take the course online or in person?

Opening/Introduction:

- Please introduce yourself and tell us why you took the Master Gardener Core Course?

Introductory Questions:

- When did you take the Master Gardener Core Course?
- Did you take the course online or in person?

Transition Questions:

- Think back to when you were taking the Core Course. What about the course stands out as being particularly valuable or appealing? What components were not as important to you?
- How important was the affiliation with the University of Minnesota to you?

Brief description of class, distribute list of the modules or proposed topics.

Key Questions:

- As a learner, what topics would you be most interested in seeing offered in the new course?
- As a learner, what do you anticipate may be challenging or beneficial in taking an online, gardening course?
- If you were to take this course, how many topics would you estimate taking per year?

- How much would you be willing to pay per topic for a course such as this? What might influence this amount?

Ending questions:

- Is there anything you have not yet shared about the proposed online course that you would like to share?

Ending:

Thank you again for participating. Your feedback is an essential part of the successful development and implementation of this course. We appreciate your time this evening. Please feel free to take some food with you.

Focus Group Invitation

Dear Master Gardener Core Course Participant,

The Master Gardener program, in conjunction with the President's Emerging Leaders program, is exploring the development of a 24/7/365 online gardening course that would be open to gardeners with all levels of experience. Participants would be able to choose modules that most interest them or register for an entire series. This course would allow gardeners from across the state the chance to learn from the experts in the Master Gardener program.

As a previous participant in the Master Gardener Core Course, we are interested in your feedback on this potential program. We know how much you value gardening and the enjoyment it brings to thousands across the state. We would like to invite you to participate in a focus group on Thursday, April 19th, 2012 from 6:00 p.m. – 7:30 p.m. The focus group will be held on the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities campus. We will update those who are able to attend with the location once it is finalized. Light refreshments will be served.

We hope that you will be able to join us! Your thoughts and suggestions will be critical in the development of this program. If you are able to attend, please contact Michelle Overtoom at overt012@umn.edu by Friday, March 30th.

Thank you in advance for your time.

Sincerely,

Michelle Overtoom, Andrew Allen, Cory Goracke-Postle, Daniel Jones-White, Amber Schulz
President's Emerging Leaders Program

For more information on the President's Emerging Leaders Program, please visit the PEL website at: <http://www1.umn.edu/ohr/pel/about/index.html>

Appendix D: Focus Group Transcript

Master Gardener Focus Group Discussion Transcript

Facilitators: Andrew Allen, Michelle Overtoom

Participants: Six former students of HORT 1003

There are 5 members of our team, Andrew, Michelle, Cory, Daniel, and Amber, we are thankful and excited that you have joined us tonight.....

ANDREW: Ground Rules and Guidelines before we begin our discussion, there are no right or wrong answers. Discussion is encouraged from everyone; we just want to get the conversation flowing a little. Please allow everyone to speak and have their time. We all have nametags and will be on a first name basis. Your names will not be used in the file report. Since we are recording this and have someone listening to take notes please try to speak one person at a time to avoid muffled sounds and make it easier to transcribe later. Please also turn cell phone ringers off. Questions before we start?

MICHELLE: Tell us why you took the Master Gardener Core Course and when you did?

FG: Well I took the course because I love gardening and I enjoy volunteering so I get a little bit of everything from this. I grew up gardening, I was probably gardening when I was 2, and I know I was in soil and worms when I was very very young all the time. It's just interesting, there is always something to learn and people to meet and it's just a really great group.

FG: I was interested in the program also, relatively new to gardening but I like it and wow a great opportunity to get acquainted with stuff I don't know.

FG: I worked at a retail store and to better help my customers I thought I should know more, because I knew nothing when I started. I ended up finding a passion I never knew I had and to expand my knowledge to help the customer on the retail side.

FG: My name is _____ and I had the opportunity to change industries in 2008 and looked at the PEL at the U and was overwhelmed, saw a handsome three-ring booklet and was told I would end up with this in a year. Interesting... Organizational Management degree from Concordia and through that I started gardening at our food co-op for all natural foods and started experimenting with the terrace, was unemployed and pursuing other options so I took on the gardening at the food co-op and thought it would be good to do the Master Gardener course for the core knowledge and then they ended up hiring me in a community relations role and now I manage the community gardens. Interaction with people around plants and been with them for....just have started the core program and then there was a huge ramp up in the....I was interested because it was part of my job.

FG: I had actually always dabbled in gardening and had designed some gardens for people and left and I was sales rep and real estate sales for 17 years and then I decided that I did not like real estate and someone whose garden I had designed said 'hey would you take care of my garden'. And I thought in the winter and then I had 10 fulltime gardens just by word of mouth and then I went to Hort and got that done and it is nice to have for my work. I have a little company and I do home residential gardens and I do design and install and maintenance.

FG: Mine is for work as well because I am the program coordinator for Hennepin County Master Gardner program and thought I should take the same course as the volunteers and I actually thought it was kinda cool because I like gardening anyway and it was nice to see how much I really didn't know.

FG: I noticed on the questionnaire....I took the course online and

FG: Did anyone take the course online or in person?

FG: I did both- I did it online but went in person too.

FG: I did one class online because Julie was out ill and said everyone could do it online.

FG: But this winter I was out of work for a couple of months and went to the online course and freshen up all my old knowledge –read my old papers and notes, I tried to organize, it's fun to go back and there is always something new.

ANDREW: The course they are thinking of is web based and we are trying to get a feel of whether people took it online or in person.

FG: I was not certain we still had access to the web site.

FG: I did not know either.

FG: It's nice to know that.

FG: I just went back to the link and Julie sent the link and the link and the password were still the same.

FG: So you still like having access to the information online?

FG: Do you remember what the password is?

FG: I don't but if you give me your email I can send it to you.

FG: What is a password or was it your x500 and password?

FG: No it was some generic password.

MICHELLE: When you think back to when you taking the core course what stands out as being the most valuable part of the course or what did you enjoy the most within the core course?

FG: Well for me it just the plant knowledge for me and I really did enjoy the online portion of it because in the classroom setting when they put a slide up on a projector you don't see as well as when its online- it's a better visual and you do it at your own pace and I could see it better. I love that part.

FG: I agree with the quality of the images. They are using slides as in carousel slides when I did it and that was not that long ago and they are faded and blurry. They show a disease and they all look the same to me.

FG: I think they like the video portion. I did mine online and I have kids at home so if an interruption comes I can stop and come back and rewind. I have notebooks full of notes like I would have taken in the classroom except now I can go back and replace something if it does not make sense, Stuff I did not grasp the first time.

FG: I was not certain how often they update stuff; it would be good to know, because you always want to be working with the latest information.

FG: In our class they was some really outdated information. For instance, they said that we did not have the emerald ash borer and that had been so long ago and they were still teaching it in 2010. This is the same material/handout he has been using for fifteen years- that's ridiculous.

FG: In 2011 it was pretty updated, but online- snappy handsome and the emerald ash borer information was up to date.

FG: In the class we had a booklet and it had a small booklet of each thing we were going through and some of the stuff was outdated but they would tell us the updated information to write in class. That was interesting to me because you got it firsthand from the guy who talks on TV all the time. Jeff... getting the updated information was important to me and Julie indicated if there was information in there that you felt wrong let her know and she would correct some things. I

think it probably; I mean she is very focused on the online stuff because she has degree in that as well, an IT degree. The freedom of it is nice though, like I did it on my lunch hour at work watched some it, but it's nice when you have the class....you miss things from other people in the class

MICHELLE: What components of the class or aspects of the class were not important to you?

FG: Turf. (lots of laughing) I have a lawn guy; grass is overrated. I only need a little grass.

FG: Turf is the last thing I was interested in, but I did find it fascinating with the instructor. He just made it come alive. I did not realize how complicated it was; it was fascinating.

FG: Materials that I had. There were some on raspberries, 10 slides, and then other berries but it was hard to stay with them when there was 12 slides that was supposed to take 90 minutes. There was too much; it was overwhelming from that point of view. I am not young. I could only handle about 30-45 minutes and then need a break. It would have been nice to see more continuity between the presentations and book – I can't remember exactly what about the books...(hard to understand) St, cloud...talked and talked and very different from the book. This lecture would have been nice with some documentation. I thought they were going to send a disk of actual presentations but never got one...the material presented is copyrighted by the authors, extension bought some rights but not enough to send the slides?

FG: I did like having the guests come in.

FG: The pace of the program was too fast.

FG: A lot of information in a short period of time.

FG: It would have been nice to do some hands on when it came to the pathology.

FG: Absolutely.

FG: This is what this looks like when it has this fungus, actually have ...it nice to look at it on screen but it would really nice to have hands on too but that is why I liked the internet because you get a better photograph and you really know what a leaf spot looks like. As opposed to a black and white handout.

FG: I really want the stuff to be more up to date. For what I want the most current everything. That is why I thought the online course would be updated constantly as opposed to be stuck to a published book, right? ... When I Google stuff I am getting information from everywhere so if I have a question on something it would be great to have this one online tool that is really up to date.

FG: How does that work though if the book is published in Arkansas and we are in MN?

FG: All information is good to know – for instance the impatiens situation we had last year, the problem came with the seeds....good to know and that it is something that will transfer to impatiens again this year so plant something different in that space. That is great to know for me for work.

ANDREW: Just to expand a little bit upon what this online course might entail, we don't have all the details but some of the talk has been offering each one of the modules from the class as an individual class on line. You could certain ones or a pack of three for a certain price. Knowing that, are there certain topics that you would be more interested in?

MICHELLE: Topics could be botany and general horticulture, general composting, trees shrubs and vines, perennials and annuals, lawn care, weed management, insect and disease

management, etymology, plant pathology, indoor plants, vegetables, fruits and living with wildlife.

pass around list of potential topics

FG: I think a large focus should be on vegetables especially with everyone growing their own now.

FG: They should also offer an organic gardening section. What are our non-chemical options because we are all trying so hard to do that and they never touched on it.

FG: We got a little bit of that in our course and they gave us a If we wanted more information.

FG: That is good they have updated it then.

FG: We only had a little bit.

FG: I have taken a few I have gone to few events at Mother Earth and the room was packed and it was about fruit and I went to another about vegetables. People are really into it and I think a big focus is on the food part and the different ways to you can grow them you can grow something in containers if you live in a townhouse....*(lots of cross talk)*

FG: So you are looking at breaking this down into different sections at what point would someone say I have my Master Gardner?

MICHELLE: Well it wouldn't be this course. If you still wanted to be a Master Gardner you would still have to take the Master Gardner core course. This is something they envisioned would be more like a class that anyone could take, home gardeners, not going through the master Gardner course, you could have like a shopping cart and you pick just three sections and you would have access to the materials for one year – you could go at your pace and go in whenever you want you have access to journal articles but the content would be similar to the material in the Master Gardener course.

FG: It's not a bad idea to have the ...structure of the whole thing you have to have etymology and pathology before you think about anything else... broader list or more narrow list ...more definedpeople want to know a lot about one thing if you complete these over time you could complete your Master Gardner. You could put your volunteer hours in...for people that could do it over the course of 4 years they could still complete it.

ANDREW: There has been some talk, the course the still being offered at the U, they have talked about some certificates for completing certain parts.

FG: Breaking down into packages, growing food, vegetables would one, berries another...and then something else etymology? Then there is *(some laughing)* then maybe there is a yard one for trees shrubs and soil.

FG: I actually had my soil tested because I wanted to learn more about it. I understand it more than I did just by looking at it. I wanted to do the hands on.

FG: I always think people are looking for that topical thing about you said about out of date piece....big deal about invasive species there always needs to be updates on invasives.

FG: Oh, I would love specific segment on weeds or a weeds section, weeds we can identify. I don't know when I look at a weed in a garden, I don't know what it is. I just know it's a weed. I would love a segment on weeds that I could identify it with a picture. That would be a big thing, because there are noxious weeds out there like garlic mustard that people don't identify as a weed and it's a noxious weed on our invasive list and people don't remove it.

FG: And it's pretty.

FG: (laughing) People can eat it and now I am battling it.

FG: You could have an updated page in each module- when you go to finish the module you could include an updated page at the end of each (*lots of laughing*) Japanese beetles....slugs...

FG: (Inaudible comment on Japanese beetles) pest management are we killing them all? We need to know more about pest management.

FG: _____ is specific it targets that larvae because there are some that infect honeybees that you don't want to use and it's a really bad thing because it disorients the honeybees and screws up their crop and so that's the information we need. That is the stuff we all need to have knowledge of if we are master gardeners to be on the tip of our tongue, what we would not use, what we would recommend.

FG: Another thing I think is interesting after going through this thing for 6 weeks being defined as a Master Gardener. Here I am really new the program just kind of getting familiar with some of this stuff, not knowing any of the lab terms and then at the end of 6 weeks I am Master Gardener. There are such extremes in the group. Some are truly Master Gardeners and then I got frustrated because some of the material was new to me and somebody else would very familiar with it andso it did not mean anything to me because I did not know what it was about. I don't remember the section on indoor plants.

FG: We did do a section on it, but I was not interested in it. I think that would not be critical to the program.

FG: I think the extension service with this idea of Master Gardener in MN we can only grow crops for 6 months in MN so then people got to go indoors so by and large we need to talk about a broad base of what people want from the Master Gardener from across the state, then indoor plants must be part of territory the way that I took the course was the Pro-Hort series and I did not have report back to anybody.

FG: That was the same way I did it.

FG: That's what I did to.

FG: That's one of the presentations that may have been a lengthy one but three or four parts may have been more appropriate.

FG: But if they are talking specifically about how to grow plants for gardening like get a seedling started and all that with, or living in small spaces like apartments or dorm rooms, (*some inaudible parts*).....container gardening specifically what materials do you need, what kind of lighting if you want to do an indoor hydroponic garden or whatever it is you are doing

FG: (More inaudible) ...wall gardens that just pockets you buy. Kind of neat. I am going to try this year just for the fun of it.

MICHELLE: If you were taking the course in a way that you could pick and choose what you wanted what do you think would be challenging in the online course or what did you think was challenging about the online course and what was beneficial about the online aspects (you've already touched on this a little in terms of the pictures and the timeline)?

FG: I think just the discussion and having some interaction with the presenter or others in the group you miss out on that.

FG: I like being able to quiz myself so that

FG: But that could be part of the course or segment as you are going through have a quick q and a after certain segments I think they actually do that on some of the sections online.

FG: I was going to say I thought they did that on the online class.

FG: Or was that for people that were taking it for credit that had to certain things?

FG: There was a live chat every other Wednesday for 2 hours I think that could be improved. It was very unorganized with people coming and going which the flexibility was nice with having kids and having stuff going on but having people coming in and out and having them in a conversation-

FG: Could they do a question and answer board at the end of each segment? If you have any questions just send them in and they respond to them and just go in and read them?

FG: We did the quiz and then you had to write answers out, but that live chat needs to be a little bit more organized so people are more inclined to take it seriously. It was cool because we were talking to some people from up north and some from Iowa so the difference was cool but it would get pretty off topic...it would stay pretty focused but you ask the instructor a question specific to that week and then you have someone in zone 3 and someone in zone 5 talking about how they handled it, interesting but it was a mumble jumble way to do it and there was feeling that you did not need to be there.

FG: One good thing online does is it takes away from the one student that you always get in a class that always thinks this is all about them...In a chat room you are still going to get that.

FG: But it was nice because sometimes it was just the students in the chat room. You kind of need some guidance for the full two hours whether it's exciting or not; sometimes there just wasn't.

FG: The other thing would be there were some in the group that met with others in their county for an hour before or after to coordinate things and you would lose sight of some of that .

FG: It's really geared towards more what we were doing with the Hort than what we were doing with the Master Gardener program which is what ...the course they took was segueing into the Master Gardener program but since they are not part of the Master Gardener program ...it was school for us so it was different.

FG: We could have done volunteer work.

FG: How did you have it set up? Cause I did pro-hort, but if I would have volunteered my hours by the end of the calendar year I would have a Master Gardener.

FG: I was not part of county, I just did it for credit for the knowledge for myself professionally, (*tornado warning conversation*).

FG: I would have loved to volunteered but it's in the summer. There is no way I could volunteer and work. I wish there was something I could do in the winter

FG: We had a little issue with our Master Gardener program with our coordinator that was not there just in the transition.

FG: And our was set this is how you do and you have till the end of the month (inaudible)

ANDREW: So if we think about this potential course in a set of topics that we are offering, so if this were offered online can you estimate how many topics would you take per year if these were available?

FG: I would say I would take at least $\frac{3}{4}$ of them

FG: AS LONG AS ITS UPDATED- you know

FG: As long as it's a good source of information and updated ...

FG: I would skip the turf and the animals/wildlife. I do deal with it but I don't deal with it like some people do. I do read up on it.

FG: I am into the container gardening, the veggies and everything in containers.

FG: Maybe 2-4 topics per semester – harder to keep up on it yourself if you go at your own pace.

FG: I look at it like, okay I could knit a sweater or I could do an online course, having it accessible in the winter time when we have a little bit of down time.

FG: I did my from January to April because I work at a Garden Center and we are closed in the winter- so it was perfect.

FG: So timing is an individual preference it would be different if you have kids or you are retired. It's all situational.

FG: That's another great reason to have it online.

MICHELLE: Do you think it would be easier to sign up for them if they were grouped into the categories you guys have already mentioned? A Food Series with three segments and you purchased them all at the same time

FG: It has to be so you can do it on your own time. You can't be limited to a short time frame. That would eliminate the desire for the online course which is the freedom of doing it whenever you have time.

FG: How I see it is they give us two years to get that Master Gardener certificate if we choose to do that, but if you stretch it more than that things change, things change so quickly must set a timeframe to keep updated on the newest stuff, cause to stretch it over four or five years would not put out.

FG: But if I could sign up for it, I would like to say these are the classes that are available to me on this date, you can do any 5 of these that you choose within the next year, you don't have to pick now but its whatever, you just log in and say what class do I want to take today, I think I want plant pathology today, but seriously you can just going to pick fruits and vegetables and this is your segment, I would rather have more available to me and pick.

FG: (*inaudible*)

FG: Part of the concept there might be a little bit rigorous or challenging in scope – you must write a paragraph or complete a quiz so that when- you are certified x with these courses and have a great base of knowledge I can use wherever I go. Part of the process as an adult learner is the idea of an Associate degree from a two year is that the course is now transferrable to anywhere else in the system and that would be a handsomer to build that out- if you want take your associate's degree a certain way and target more agricultural courses.... Perceived as value concept, everybody trusts the extension to provide valuable information....maybe too robust....value is ...(*inaudible*)

FG: This class did have credit, some of the people enrolled were doing this class for credit I think they work pretty hard at it.

FG: Didn't you say there would still be a Master Gardener course so this would be a supplement to the Master Gardener course?

ANDREW: The idea behind this course is for the casual gardener that is not interested in becoming a Master Gardener or for the Master Gardener that wants to refresh. So these classes in the initial phase are thinking about the base for some of the modules.

FG: So would these be transferrable if someone learned about vegetables and fruit and said wow I think I want to go for my Master Gardener course.

MICHELLE AND ANDREW: That is a good question.

FG: It sounds like it would not be.

FG: That would be something to prepare for.

FG: It is kind of your value added statement. Its going to be a robust course and you are going to learn a lot but it's not going to be a killer, like you be like a doctorate at the end of the day but you will have the opportunity to learn and if you so choose (*inaudible*)...

FG: Or if you took them and then time changes maybe they would say you could get your certificate if you volunteer and take a couple of refresher courses.

FG: I like the idea too of having this available to the community at large so that if some adult learner wants to go in just to be informed they can do it they have to be part of the ...(*inaudible*) just in the form of adult ed.

FG: You never know you might get someplace like Menards or Home Depot that send their people to take the classes.

ANDREW: That has been discussed

FG: So that brings it back to what you like to see- it just dawned on me what if there were sites around (*inaudible*)...What does this plant look, feel, taste, and smell like? What does this disease (*inaudible*) You almost have to have something ...(*inaudible*) if you could go to a center or have a couple places around the city set up and ..(*this person was commenting on the possibility of having a physical location where you could go and view examples of what was being discussed in class*)

FG: Oh I think you can film it and describe it pretty darn well in a well done thing: this is what it feels like, this is what it smells like. The trouble is that we don't want to be diagnosticians and we don't want the public to be either cause they are going to buy a chemical that is inappropriate so you have to be a little cautious about how far you take it.

FG: I agree completely.

FG: Then it could be dangerous, it was just a thought.

FG: Video streaming would be an avenue....

FG: I think it would be interesting, I don't see that on here, I think it would be interesting to have one whole course on weed control- like organic against something else and then talk about the disadvantages of some of the chemicals that get used and how it lands in our water.

FG: Yeah, Yeah.

FG: (*Inaudible*) – they talked a little about some of that but to have it out there where you would get it greater detail.

FG: Maybe it's just a (*inaudible- from people all talking at once*)

FG: I live in the country and there are lots of farms around us- there should be an interest in the chemicals that are being applied.

FG: And the methane that is going into our rivers (*lots of talking over*) ponds green maybe because of chemicalsthere might be different focus groups geographically with different interests.

FG: Well, and seeds would be interesting if you get into Monsanto and some of what they are doing now.

FG: That can be pretty damaging...yeah.

FG: Umm, I just push the idea of video again, you take this, what is that, five days later it's this and how did it get there, maybe the video could show this germinating and then.

FG: Exactly that is the beauty of it, and plants that have a biennial kind of formation so one year they look this and the next year they look like a completely different plant but it's the same plant.

FG: That is very... They go to flower one year and the other year they don't. I'd love to have that available and to have the public be able to identify it.

FG: I think especially in MN we owe to the public to have a noxious weed site. Identify your noxious weeds and get them out, pull them because it's really a problem. You know it started with the purple loosestrife and people at least got on the board with that – although I still see people digging it up and putting it in their gardens. It's unbelievable! It's pretty but positively identifying this stuff so you can attack it, I think there is a lot of stuff we could do that the public would be all over. And like you said fruit and vegetable gardening and container fruit and vegetable gardening people are so into it.

FG: Buying foods local, I think that whole other thing with interest in community gardens.

FG: Yes.

FG: Yes, it's an interesting proposition to say the least I think- I don't live in Minneapolis and kind of like to see the _____ in Minneapolis duplicated in our area but the idea of urban agriculture is completely different than community gardens, and its completely different than someone owning 50 acres it just an ...it would be beneficial to the U and to extension to talk specifically about organics and this sort of thing and then it would almost have to pushed or list references or go to your cities website and find out what they want to do because Minneapolis doesn't want a (inaudible) but some other township might have a different rule.

FG: More people are having chickens and bees yeah and if you do that you have an petition signed by x number of people.

FG: And then you get a next door neighbor with a bee allergy, seriously there are so many things to consider if you are going to be doing that you need beit's just like pet ownership you need be responsible chicken owner.

MICHELLE: So how much do you think if you were to be taking these classes in this topic kind of way, how much would you be willing to pay for a course like that?

FG: How much was the Hort course?

FG: Online was \$550

FG: Yeah I think I paid \$500

FG: But you did classroom right?

FG: It's the same we could take it online or do it in the classroom.

FG: Oh, see ours was different.

FG: I don't think I paid that much.... *(lots of talking at the same time...debate between cost difference for ProHort and Master Gardener)*

MICHELLE: I think the MG program was thinking was like \$60.

FG: I was going to say if you compare it to what Community Ed charges I think that comparable to what they charge.

FG: I think you have to say just break it down by how many courses are being offered and this is what it would cost to do the whole ProHort course.

FG: Well and you might have like a senior rate too for people who are not interested in going after a Master Gardener certificate but just interested if they get a reduced rate.

FG: And then they have to make that what they are offering is something that you can't get that is unique to the Minnesota gardener and something they can't just get on YouTube.

FG: Yeah.

FG: Needs some sense of authority behind whatever gets said- because it's part of the University of Minnesota extension service and you know it's....

ANDREW: Does the University of Minnesota label affect what you would pay for a course like this?

FG: Yes.

FG: Yes.

FG: It depends on if there is a value in the course, just the label alone isn't going to carry it.

FG: If it was between the U of M and a community ed course, hands down U of M.

FG: Yeah

FG: It is critical need.

FG: Well and geographically where I live we don't have that face I am willing to pay for...I am out on the other side of Minnetonka, Watertown, I am city girl but I am living out there, don't know why.

FG: It's beautiful.

FG: But Hands down the U of M vs. community ed.

FG: In the long if you could take every one of these classes and essentially have the Hort course done or become part of a Master Gardener program and it's the same dollar figure I think that is only fair.

FG: I would think you could set it up on two tracks where if you are going after a certificate or something like that you are willing to pay more whereas if you are coming on just to get some basic info for whatever plants you are growing and then maybe all you are interested in an hour or so of presentation and would not want to pay the full fare.

FG: And would it be something ongoing that you could go back and refer to?

FG: Yeah the way it's proposed is you would have access to it for a year.

FG: I don't know about the updates.

FG: Well and then another way to earn money off of this is to say ok you have access to it for a year but then if you want to go beyond that you have pay another \$50 bucks or \$100 bucks some sort of tuition that keeps you going so you are always brought back to this site.

FG: As long as they keep it updated.

FG: Updated info is key.

FG: It would almost like an annual subscription.

FG: Oh yeah.

FG: Good idea.

ANDREW: After all this discussion about this proposed online course is there anything you would like to share that we have not touched on yet?

FG: It is a lot more work than I thought it was going to be.

ANDREW: Just thinking about this, they have not said anything, but I would doubt that people taking this would be able to become a Master Gardener through taking these online courses, I think it's going to be more geared towards the casual gardener but having the idea of having references to the Master Gardener program if you find this interesting would not be a bad idea

FG: Sell it.

FG: Couple of different tracks.

FG: Video power point for 120 minutes is probably worth \$40-50 its difficult to compare the \$550 for the ProHort and the \$250 for the Master Gardener, I mean you sign up...the Master Gardener program wants you to bring the information back into the community so they give a discount on the education which is a fair deal, they should have ...had I signed up as a Master

Gardener and was unable to complete my hours I think you ought to release my name to the county saying here is a gentleman that was interested in being a Master Gardener but... go get him.

FG: Yeah, that is sort of like Alumni do helping you find a job afterward yep.

FG: That way you know that you could get in on the bargain program for a great education really follow through with...

FG: It would be good to think about young kids and gardening and handicapped gardening when you set this up.

FG: That is a great idea.

FG: For like moms or elderly ... anyone who needs container gardening because they can't get to the ground anymore.

FG: Wheelchair people whatever.

FG: They should have a whole segment.

FG: Thinking about our aging society, our friends.

FG: (Laughter)

FG: I'll be there but I'll be standing up.

FG: I think they could do their Master Gardener program through this too if in fact people do sign up for this and take their test and do their papers and commit to x number of hours either in the garden or maybe some in class time

FG: Yeah, there is a junior Master Gardener program, I want to get my daughter into it.

FG: That's great.

FG: Her idea was to get along or couple hour deal, but if you are a parent you would have a section on educating children on productivity in the garden.

FG: You could even do it in a classroom. You can have a class sign on to help the teacher developing a lesson plan and or asking questions or something of that sort.

FG: If those things are not available or just don't have look at them.

FG: Especially now with urban gardening a lot of classrooms are taking on projects like that, that would be great.

FG: I've put on the consumer horticulture glasses and take away the Master Gardener in terms of thinking about who might be interested in this and keep coming back to something new, fresh...I want to use the word sexy.

FG: Depends on the who the instructors are.

FG: (Laughter)

FG: Instructors can have a pull. People recognize Jeff Hahn from being on TV that might be a draw.

FG: It needs to be imaginative, creative.

FG: Something you can't get on YouTube, which was said it needs to be driven.

FG: It needs to be done with some sophistication, not just a homemade job that looks like it's just been pieced together and not very much to look at.

FG: The extension the classes are done at a college level and they are a prestigious education provider so we are not need to maintain the idea of professionalism.

FG: I am thinking in terms of power points and stuff. I don't know... Power points aren't the thing these days, but the class needs to use the latest technology and do it in a creative way to keep people interested.

FG: I think if I just a home gardener and I would want to learn online it would be about my plants. I've got this _____ and I want it to be really robust what do I do? And I

could find an online course with the University of Minnesota that tells me about vines and growing vines and climbing vines and what do I do and it does touch on different types of vines, I think the gardener would be all over that specific stuff.

FG: Right.

FG: I think of I was taking the core course and we had a snow storm that split our arbor... in half so we had this new space, or what if a tornado goes through and you are used to shade but now you have sun. Where do you go for that information and this course would be perfect for that. How do deal with gardening tragedy?

FG: Turning tragedy into treasure.

FG: Squirrels! How to shoot a squirrel.

FG: (*Inaudible*)

FG: They bit off all the buds on all of my tulips so they never opened and they bit off all the buds off my magnolia plant so it never flowered the leaves are opening. They cleaned the whole thing.

FG: They stripped the bark off my honeysuckle.

FG: They are doing that to my tree.

FG: And someone told that it's because it was a dry winter and they need water. They did not have enough water. The bark is moist inside.

FG: Something like that happened to my rose bushes this year but it was a rabbit.

FG: Yeah, it just stripped but I knew was not a rabbit because it was way up high.

FG: Rabbits ate all of our _____ the winter before so I had pull out a bunch of them but this year we had a nice fox that moved in.

FG: Lucky you.

FG: Next year I think I am going to cover my magnolia bush with a cloth.

FG: And spray it with hot pepper sauce.

FG: That would be like salad dressing for the squirrels.

FG: They don't care what you put on it.

FG: Get a dog.

FG: We have a fence around the yard and the deer are outside the fence. The squirrels come in but the only damage they do is to the turf, but I don't care. That's my husband's territory. Acorns they go after them ...yep.

FG: That would make a great segment... all about Urban pests.

FG: Get a fox, or a bee bee gun....

FG: I have a duck family in my yard...continued chatting... (*but recording ends*)

Appendix E: Survey Questions and Invitation

Gardening Education in Minnesota (Minnesota Landscape Arboretum)

There are 24 questions in this survey

Core Survey

In this section you will be asked to answer a series of questions related to your interest in gardening and your gardening habits.

1 Which of the following best describes you?

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- I am an occasional gardener.
- I am an avid gardener.
- I am a professional gardener/ horticulturist.
- I am a subsistence gardener (or grow food to feed myself and my family).
- I am a University of Minnesota Extension Master Gardener in my county/ community.
- I do not garden.

2 On average, I spend _____ hours per week engaged in gardening or garden related activities during the typical gardening season (spring to fall).

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- 0
- 1-5
- 6-10
- 11-15
- 16-20
- 21-30
- 31 or more

3 Please select the option that best describes your garden.

Please choose **all** that apply:

- I care for indoor plants.
- I care for container plants.
- I care for a small garden.
- I care for a large garden.
- I care for a school garden.
- I care for a community garden.
- I care for a commercial garden or landscape.
- I care for a boulevard garden.
- I care for a rain garden.
- Other.

4 Please indicate the types of gardening activities you have participated in during the last year.

Please choose **all** that apply:

- Vegetable gardening.
- Greenhouse gardening.
- Growing annual flowers.
- Growing perennial flowers.
- Landscaping.
- Lawn care.
- Container gardening.
- Growing berries.
- Growing fruit trees.
- Seed starting.
- Growing bulbs.

5 Please indicate your level of interest in gardening:

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- Very Low
- Low
- Moderate
- High
- Very High

6 Please indicate your current knowledge and understanding of gardening.

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- Very Low
- Low
- Moderate
- High
- Very High

7 Please indicate how frequently you use the following resources as references for garden-related questions.

Please choose the appropriate response for each item:

	More than once a week	About once a week	Two or three times a month	About once a month	Two to three times a semester	About once a semester	Never
Books	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
University Extension Office	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
University Arboretum	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Friends/ Neighbors	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Internet	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Magazines/ Newsletters	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Master Gardener	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Nursery/ Garden Centers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Retail Stores (e.g. Home Depot, Lowe's, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Parents/ Relatives	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Professional Gardeners	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Radio or Television	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
University Specialists	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

8 When seeking information about gardening, how do you prefer to interact with other gardeners?

Please choose the appropriate response for each item:

	Yes	Uncertain	No
I don't feel any need to interact with other gardeners.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Twitter, Facebook, message boards, etc.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Gardening blogs or other gardening websites.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Face-to-face.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I create or view gardening podcast/vidcast.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A gardening club or organization.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
By Email	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
By Phone	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
At public gardens.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Through the U of M Extension Master Gardener program.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Through classes.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

9 Please estimate the amount of money you spend on gardening each year.

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- Less than \$50.
- Between \$50 and \$99.
- Between \$100 and \$249.
- Between \$250 and \$500
- More than \$500.

10 Please estimate the percentage of your total gardening spending that goes to educational resources related to gardening such as books, magazines and classes.

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- I currently don't spend any money on gardening education.
- Between 1 and 10%
- Between 10% and 25%
- Between 25% and 50%
- More than 50%

Current Internet Use

In this section you will be asked to answer a series of questions related to your current use of the internet.

11 What forms of online media do you currently use or participate in? (Please select all that apply).

Please choose **all** that apply:

- Blogging
- Email
- Facebook
- Other Social Networking (LinkedIn, MySpace, Foursquare, etc).
- Online Banking
- Online Shopping
- Twitter

12 How many hours do you spend online every week?

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- 1-5 hours.
- 6-10 hours.
- 10-25 hours.
- 25-40 hours.
- More than 40 hours.

13 How many websites do you currently subscribe to that require a fee-based membership (e.g. Netflix, Match.com, ESPN Insider, Weight Watchers, etc.)?

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 or more.

Proposed Online Gardening Education Series

The University of Minnesota Extension Master Gardener Program, in collaboration with the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum, is considering developing a new online gardening education series designed for home gardeners.

This proposed education series is comprised of learning modules based on the horticulture content taught in the Master Gardener core course with the Arboretum as the virtual classroom. However, participants do not have a volunteer obligation to Extension or the Arboretum nor do they carry the title of "Master Gardener" upon completion of the education series.

Learning modules in this education series focus on topics such as herbaceous plants, trees and shrubs, indoor plants, soils and composting, lawn care, and vegetable gardening. Individuals may customize their learning experience by selecting modules of interest in any order, and will have access to the content online for up to one year. This is a self-directed class series and modules can be completed at one's own pace. Individuals will be able to print out a certificate, verifying their completion on the module.

14 Please indicate your interest in a module-based online gardening education series.

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- very Low
- Low
- Moderate
- High
- Very High

15 When thinking about taking a gardening class, please indicate the features that are most important and appealing to you.

Please choose the appropriate response for each item:

	Not Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
Opportunities for interaction with professors.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ability to learn at your own pace.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Tailor the experience to your personal needs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Online access to additional gardening references.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Certification to demonstrate training	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Extended access to materials beyond a single semester.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Course to provide broad introduction to issues related to gardening and landscaping.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

16 Please indicate your preferences for the following topics to potentially be covered by the new course offering.

Please choose the appropriate response for each item:

	Not Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
Botany & General Horticulture	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Soils & Composting	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Trees, Shrubs & Vines	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Perennials and Annuals	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lawn Care	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Weed Management	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Insect and Disease Management	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Entomology (Study of Insects)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Plant Pathology (Study of Plant Diseases)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Indoor Plants	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Vegetables	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Fruits	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Living with Wildlife	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

17 Are there any other issues or areas related to gardening and horticulture you would wish to see covered by the proposed education series?

Please choose **only one** of the following:

Yes

No

Make a comment on your choice here:

Demographic Information

In this last section you will be asked to answer a series of demographic questions. Participation is voluntary.

18 Gender:

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- Female
- Male

19 Current Employment Status:

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- Employed Full-Time
- Employed Part-Time
- Unemployed
- Student Full-Time
- Student Part-Time
- Retired

20 Do you currently live in Minnesota?

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- Yes
- No

21 Please identify your County of Residence:

[Only answer this question if you answered 'Yes' to question 'residence]

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- Aitkin
- Anoka
- Becker
- Beltrami
- Benton

- Big Stone
- Blue Earth
- Brown
- Carlton
- Carver
- Cass
- Chippewa
- Chisago
- Clay
- Clearwater
- Cook
- Cottonwood
- Crow Wing
- Dakota
- Dodge
- Douglas
- Faribault
- Fillmore
- Freeborn
- Goodhue
- Grant
- Hennepin
- Houston
- Hubbard
- Isanti
- Itasca
- Jackson
- Kanabec
- Kandiyohi
- Kittson
- Koochiching
- Lac qui Parle
- Lake
- Lake of the Woods
- Le Sueur
- Lincoln

- Lyon
- McLeod
- Mahnomen
- Marshall
- Martin
- Meeker
- Mille Lacs
- Morrison
- Mower
- Murray
- Nicollet
- Nobles
- Norman
- Olmstead
- Otter Tail
- Pennington
- Pine
- Pipestone
- Polk
- Pope
- Ramsey
- Red Lake
- Redwood
- Renville
- Rice
- Rock
- Roseau
- Scott
- Sherburne
- Sibley
- St. Louis
- Stearns
- Steele
- Stevens
- Swift
- Todd

- Traverse
- Wabasha
- Wadena
- Waseca
- Washington
- Watonwan
- Wilkin
- Winona
- Wright
- Yellow Medicine

22 Please select state and county of residence:

[Only answer this question if you answered 'No' to question 'residence]

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- Iowa: Please list county of residence:
- North Dakota: Please list county of residence:
- South Dakota: Please list county of residence:
- Wisconsin: Please list county of residence:
- Please List State of Residence:

Make a comment on your choice here:

23 Which of the following best describes your racial/ethnic background?

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- American Indian or Alaskan Native
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Hawaiian Native or Pacific Islander
- Hispanic
- White

24 Which category best describes your annual household income before taxes?

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- Under \$19,999
- \$20,000 to \$39,999
- \$40,000 to \$59,999
- \$60,000 to \$79,999
- \$80,000 to \$99,999
- \$100,000 to \$149,999
- \$150,000 to \$199,999
- More than \$200,000

Please submit by 2013-02-10

Submit your survey.

Thank you for completing this survey.

We need your help. The University of Minnesota Extension Master Gardener Program is exploring the marketability of a new online gardening education series, and we would like your opinion about it. The survey will take you less than 10 minutes. The proposed education series aims to provide home gardeners with a self-directed, online class that provides basic, foundation education about best practices in gardening. As a volunteer at the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum, we are interested in your thoughts on this series. Whether you garden regularly, not at all, or somewhere in between we hope that you will take a moment to complete the short survey at the link below. The survey will ask questions related to your experience and interest in gardening, your opinions about the new course offering, and basic demographic information. Your answers are anonymous and your participation in the survey will help with the development and marketing of this education series. If you have any questions about the survey please contact Daniel Jones-White at djwhite@umn.edu.

<https://umsurvey.umn.edu/index.php?sid=14143&lang=um>
