

Chartering County Master Gardener Associations

Texas Master Gardener Program

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service

County Master Gardener Associations provide tremendous support to County Master Gardener Programs of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. In today's world, accountability and transparency are critical for every state agency, as well as the volunteer organizations that support them. Chartering of County Master Gardener Associations provides an accountability mechanism. In addition, it provides a continuity of service and programming for both AgriLife Extension and the County Master Gardener Association. Chartering defines the relationship, roles, and responsibilities of the organizations, including fiscal management guidelines and expectations.

Chartering is processed at the local County Extension office level through the County Extension Agent/Master Gardener Coordinator. The CEA/MG Coordinator is responsible for all aspects of the county program including Extension Master Gardener support groups. The State Master Gardener Office maintains an online record of chartered County associations, pursues, and secures annual chartering of the Texas Master Gardener Association, and provides guidance and support to both County Extension Agents and Extension Master Gardener leaders.

Chartering is done annually on a calendar year basis. The Charter Agreement Form (attached) and required information is due to the County Extension Office by January 31st each year.

The completed and approved Charter Agreement Form and required information should be retained on file in the County Extension Office and copies returned to the association president. An acknowledgement of documentation is required by completing the Charter Agreement online and must be done by both the CEA and the Association President. New Master Gardener associations must be chartered as part of the organizational process. This would be done through the County Extension office.

A benefit of chartering a Master Gardener Association is to formally authorize the use of the AgriLife Extension trademarked term, Texas Master Gardener, and associated logos. This effort is critical to long-term maintenance and integrity of the trademark for exclusive use by AgriLife Extension and associated groups.

A Master Gardener Association wishing to become chartered will adhere to the following:

- Acknowledge a staff member of the local county Extension office to serve as Advisor to the Association leadership
- Membership in an Association should include Certified Extension Master Gardeners, Extension Master Gardener Interns, and may also include individuals designated as 'Auxiliary members' as established by the local Association.
- Provide a list of members and contact information
- Provide a list of elected officers, group name, and year group began
- Provide a copy of By-laws, Articles of Incorporation, 501(C)(3) documentation, EIN number. Included in the By-laws should be the following statement: Upon the dissolution of the organization, assets shall be distributed for one or more tax exempt purposes within the meaning of Section 501(c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code, or corresponding section of any future federal tax code, or shall be distributed to the Federal Government, or to a state or local government, for a public purpose. Any such

asset not disposed of shall be disposed of by the Court of Common Pleas of the county in which the principal office of the organization is then located, exclusively for such purpose or to such organization or organizations, as said Court shall determine, which are organized and operated exclusively for such purposes.

- Texas Department of Agriculture nursery/floral certificate documentation (if the association is so designated)
- Provide a copy of the filed IRS form 990 or 990-N
- Provide a financial statement for the previous year and budget for the coming year, as well as access to current financial statement/information upon request
- Show proof that an annual Financial Review was conducted by an audit committee in accordance with Extension's best management practice procedures.

Roles of the County Extension Agent, Master Gardener Volunteers and County Master Gardener Associations

A. Role of a County Extension Agent

The Extension Master Gardener program is administered by the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service through a designated local County Extension Agent. Responsibilities of AgriLife Extension include:

- recruiting and selecting participants in the Extension Master Gardener Program
- coordinating, conducting, and funding training for Extension Master Gardener volunteers
- certifying and recertifying Extension Master Gardeners using State Master Gardener Guidelines
- identifying, developing, and determining volunteer activities and projects for Extension Master Gardeners that support Extension's educational mission
- approving, recording, and reporting volunteer service of the Extension Master Gardeners

- recognizing Extension Master Gardeners for volunteer service and leadership
- facilitating communications between Extension personnel and Extension Master Gardeners
- coordinating the chartering of County Master Gardener Association
- interpreting and implementing Extension Master Gardener policies and procedures
- ensuring that a quality Extension Master Gardener educational program is conducted in the county
- administering dismissal of Extension Master Gardener Volunteers and/or dissolution of an Association
- adhering to the AgriLife Extension's financial resource management guidelines for external support groups.

These responsibilities are often shared with individual Extension Master Gardeners and/or the leadership of a Master Gardener Association; however, the ultimate accountability for these actions lies with the local County Extension Agent/Master Gardener Coordinator.

The Master Gardener Coordinator may in fact recruit Extension Master Gardeners to assist in coordinating projects and activities. For example, Extension Master Gardeners often serve as coordinators for speaker's bureaus, school garden programs, demonstration, and beautification gardens, and more. This staff of volunteers may meet regularly with the Master Gardener Coordinator to oversee the County Master Gardener Program.

Role of a County Master Gardener Association and Extension Master Gardener Volunteers

- to expand the capabilities of AgriLife Extension to disseminate horticultural information to individuals and groups in the community

- to support and enhance the development of AgriLife Extension educational projects related to horticulture, including response to inquiries, educational programs and events, presentations, and demonstration gardens
- to develop an Extension Master Gardener network to assist AgriLife Extension administration of the local Master Gardener Program under the supervision of the Master Gardener Coordinator.

Another significant role a Master Gardener Association can fulfill is financial support of a County Master Gardener Program. A Master Gardener Program does not need a large amount to be effective. Generally, AgriLife Extension is able to fund basic program needs, such as office space, telephone and copying. However, AgriLife Extension may not have the available funds to support some Extension Master Gardener activities.

Associations have more freedom to raise money needed through several means. Some examples might include conducting plant sales, donating unsolicited money received from speaking engagements; or soliciting grant funds or sponsorships for projects. Funds generated or received by Master Gardener Associations provide support for educational projects, computer, and office equipment for Extension Master Gardeners and/or agents, horticultural libraries and resources, college scholarships, recognition, and educational activities for the Extension Master Gardeners.

Revoking an Association's Charter

County Extension Agents may request to revoke a charter of an association. Revoking a charter is equivalent to dissolving the association. Final approval for revoking a charter resides in the State Master Gardener Office.

Association actions or activities which may result in revoking a charter include, but are not limited to:

- A. Discriminatory practices which do not adhere to the following statement: educational programs of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service are open to all people without regard to socioeconomic level, race, color, sex, disability, religion, age, or national origin.
- B. Not providing county requested paperwork including association membership records, financial reports, incorporation documents, and not-for-profit documents.
- C. Practices that are not related to the objectives of the Master Gardener Program.
- D. Lack of cooperation with County Extension Agent or Master Gardener Program Coordinator and/or AgriLife Extension employees.

To pursue revoking an association charter, a County Extension Agent should take steps to meet with the association officers, board members, outline the concerns, and follow up in writing.

The agent should define a set period of time to remedy the situation. If it becomes necessary to move forward with revoking the charter, the process is:

- A. Gather facts including:
 - 1. Create a timeline with dates that meetings were held with association leadership to discuss concerns.
 - 2. Assembled all written correspondence sent to the association leadership regarding expectations and defined times to remedy the concerns.
 - 3. Outline a plan to support the existing Master Gardener Program.
- B. Contact immediate supervisor and the Texas Master Gardener State Coordinator
- C. In coordination with the Texas Master Gardener State Coordinator and AgriLife Extension administration, notify the association officers, board, and members that the charter has been revoked.
- D. Follow up with letter to the association and membership indicating the association has been dissolved. Letters to the membership should include a summary of other opportunities in the county for volunteering in the County Master Gardener Program.