

Volunteer Resource Management: reference checking

MINUTES

OCT 16,2008

8:30 TO 9:30

CONFERENCE CALL

TYPE OF MEETING	Sharing approaches related to volunteer resource management
NOTE TAKER	Lori Bushway
ATTENDEES	Patti Battley pap11 (Seneca), Colleen Cavagna cc74 (Allegany/Cattaraugus), Donna Cooke dmc72 (Rockland), Dona Crawford dm282 (Ulster) Vicki Hamilton Jancef vjh3 (Orleans), Julie Nathanson jmn86 (Warren), Susan Pezzolla sep37 (Albany), Holly Wise hlw2 (Oneida)

Approaches to checking Master Gardener Volunteer's reference

DISCUSSION		
<p>Attendees shared approaches and challenges to collecting and checking references as well as interviewing potential volunteers for the MGV program.</p> <p>Areas of particular concerns was the time consuming nature of calling all the references and the fact that most people write do friends as references because can select anyone so it is not likely that the reference is going to have anything bad to say.</p>		
CONCLUSIONS		
<p>No single approach to checking references is used by all counties but it seems counties do ask for at least two references on their volunteer application and do their best to see that the references are checked. We can't really not do it because Cornell's Volunteer Improvement Policy (VIP) requires a minimum of two references and they must be check (see http://staff.cce.cornell.edu/vip/ click on THE POLICY & IMPLEMENTATION link and see page 3 of the word document and the section that says "Procedure for Screening and Selection of Enrolled Volunteers.").</p> <p>Cornell does not however detail a specific procedure counties must follow when checking reference. Though the VIP manual (http://staff.cce.cornell.edu/vip/) offers guidance with a sample cover letter and questionnaire for the reference.</p> <p>Here are the three reference check approaches mentioned by MGV educators attending the call:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If another Master Gardener Volunteer is listed as a reference on the application the educators will talk with that reference volunteer about the applicant. • References listed on the application will be contacted by phone. (if you scroll down to page 4 you can see an example of a sheet used by Clinton county to check references via phone.) • References listed on the application will be mailed the reference questionnaire from the VIP manual (http://staff.cce.cornell.edu/vip/). If the reference does not return the questionnaire the county does follow up with a phone call to get the reference to mail the questionnaire back to the CCE office. <p>Of course it is best if reference checks are completed prior to any participation in the MGV core training or regular meetings in case the applicant does not pass the screening and you must let them go.</p>		
ACTION ITEMS	PERSON RESPONSIBLE	DEADLINE
Send other approaches to checking reference to Lori: bushway@cornell.edu	County educators	ASAP

Approaches to Interviewing Master Gardener Volunteer Applicants

DISCUSSION		
Though not the objective of our conference call we did touch on counties approach interviewing candidates for the MGV program.		
CONCLUSIONS		
Cornell does not detail a specific procedure counties must follow interviewing. Though the VIP manual (http://staff.cce.cornell.edu/vip/) offers guidance see the interviewing volunteer applicant section (especially the link at the end to the questions you can not ask).		
Here are the interview approaches mentioned by MGV educators attending the call:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When a person inquires about participating in the MGV program a phone an informal phone interview is conducted to determine if this might be a good match and the person should even consider submitting an application to become a MGV. • Complete a specific Master Gardener Volunteer application the applicant is asked to write a letter detailing why they want to become involved with the Master Gardener Volunteer program. (If you scroll down to page 5 you can see an example of application used by Oneida county.) • Use the same application for 4-H and MGV volunteers. • After the written application is submitted some applicants are selected for a face to face interview. • During the core Master Gardener Volunteer training educator continues to get to know applicants through informal or formal conversations in order to best match volunteer with specific efforts. • Individual attend the Master Gardener training first then are invited to apply to become a volunteer with the program and go through the screening process. (Lori's soap box: If this approach is employed I strongly encourage the county association to not call this pre screening training Master Gardener training but use some other name such as gardening school, horticulture training... Cover the exact same topics, use the publically available MGV manual and let it serve as a prerequisite to becoming an active MGV but please call don't call it MG training. I feel this risks the integrity of our programs and make the battle to be recognized as a invaluable train the trainer program tougher by having well meaning individuals not actively volunteering with CCE or possibly holding up our mission calling themselves Master Gardeners.) 		
ACTION ITEMS	PERSON RESPONSIBLE	DEADLINE
Compile and sharing interview questions used and redistribute. If you haven't do so already and wish to send your questions to bushway@cornell.edu	Lori	Dec 17

Approaches to Conducting Background Checks of MGV applicants

DISCUSSION		
Though also not the objective of our conference call we did touch on counties approach background checks for MGV candidates. As well as sex offenders and DMV checks.		
CONCLUSIONS		
Cornell VIP states: "The criminal background check is required only for individuals applying for enrolled volunteer positions that have potential for working in ongoing unsupervised settings with minors, individuals over 65, and individuals with disabilities." However... county associations can be stricter. It is necessary to check locally.		

Educators with experience working to retroactively check the backgrounds of long standing volunteers suggest that if your volunteers might ever be engage in unsupervised activities with any audience it may be wise to simple screen everyone during the application process so you don't have to keep track of who can work unsupervised with whom.

One barrier to conducting background checks is applicants and current volunteer's reluctance to provide their social security number. Though several noted that their providers did not require SS#.

Here are two background check companies mentioned by MGV educators attending the call:

- Backgroundchecks.com charges \$13.95 per check which requires a birth date and but **no** SS#.
- [ChoicePoint VolunteerSelect PLUS](#)

DMV checks are often done on just a select number of MGV who volunteer to assist with the driving of vans or association vehicles and agree to have their DMV records checked.

Cornell administration policy state "The **DMV check is required only for** individuals applying for enrolled volunteer positions which requires driving as part of scheduled program activity or driving association owned, leased, or rented vehicles. The individual must have completed the appropriate volunteer application and a Motor Vehicle Record Request Permission Form found in the Attachment Section of FORM code 1501
http://staff.cce.cornell.edu/cce_library/manuals/form/Code%201501_files/Code%201501.htm. "

ACTION ITEMS	PERSON RESPONSIBLE	DEADLINE
What checks do you do, when do you do them and what company/agency does them for you? Please send this information to bushway@cornell.edu so we can compile a list to share.	County educators	Nov 30th
Compiling and sharing responses	Lori	Dec 17th

Next conference call will be about:

Best practices to rewarding and recognition. How is your program thanking and showing appreciation for your Master Gardener Volunteers?

Date: to be determined soon please share preference for regular calls by visiting:

<http://surveys.cit.cornell.edu/Survey.aspx?s=e7200afee6894a60a6a8a99e3ae66cb3>

Master Gardener Volunteer Application

There are many ways you can contribute to the Master Gardener Volunteer Program. The information you provide on this form will help us find the most satisfying and appropriate volunteer opportunity for you. Your cooperation in completing this form is appreciated.

Name _____

Address _____

Telephone (home) _____ (other) _____

Best time to contact _____

What are you hoping to get out of the experience of training and volunteering in the Master Gardener Program?

What is your favorite type of gardening?

In which type of gardening do you feel you have the least experience?

When are you available to volunteer? Please circle the days you are available and write the time you are available next to the day.

Mon _____ Tues _____ Wed _____ Thurs _____ Fri _____ Sat _____

How do you plan to meet the 50 hrs for this program? (Please see the enclosed copy of the bylaw criteria for the Master Gardener Program)

Interests (Please mark each item according to your level of interest.)

What I like to do	All the time	Most of the time	A little	Not at all
Take responsibility				
Speak to groups				
Speak to other gardeners				
Meet people				
Look up Information				
Write letters/instructions				
Draw and sketch				
Surf the internet				
Talk on the telephone				
Guide children				
Help the elderly				
Assist with the disabled				
Lead discussion groups				
Take notes				
Attend lectures				
Do gardening				
Talk about gardening				
Make decisions				
Follow instructions				
Teach				
Work independently				
Work with one or two others				
Improving your community				
Improving you own garden				
Conduct telephone interviews/surveys				