Inclusive Volunteer Selection:
Strategies for UC Master Gardener Program Personnel
2021

National data indicates that Master Gardener volunteers across the country are predominately white, college-educated, affluent, retired and female-identified. There is no data specific to the UC Master Gardener Program. However, incomplete data from 2015 indicates that California's volunteer population is in line with the national trend and does not reflect the diversity of California's residents and gardeners.

Improving Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in Cooperative Extension has been and will continue to be a goal for the UC Master Gardener Program. To truly achieve our mission, we must improve our outreach to communities historically underinvested by Cooperative Extension, including Californians who are Black, Latino, Native American, LGBTQ+, or have a disability. We must uplift the voices of current program leaders who hold identities underrepresented in our program and increase our collective (staff and volunteer) cultural competency and equity awareness.

Each stage in the volunteer lifecycle (*identification, selection, orientation, training, utilization, recognition, and evaluation*)[1] presents many opportunities for DEI-related interventions. This document focuses on recommendations supporting best practices at the *selection stage*.

It is important to note that all stages in the volunteer lifecycle impact and influence one another. Some of the recommendations below will invite readers to consider how interventions might improve volunteer selection in other program areas. No one step ensures a bias-free, fully equitable volunteer selection process or program. These strategies, used in combination with one another, may advance the UC Master Gardener Program mission to serve all current and future gardeners across California.

STRATEGIES:

- **Utilize updated UC Master Gardener Program volunteer selection materials**. Just as biases and assumptions are embedded in our volunteer selection processes, they also show up in the documents we use to guide these processes. In late 2019 the UC Master Gardener Program began updating volunteer selection materials (including our application, volunteer position description, and interview questions) using best practices in bias mitigation and inclusion. UC Master Gardener Program staff, volunteers, and UC ANR DEI Alliance members vetted and approved

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[1] See Dr. Marina Denny's 'ISOTURE: A Model for Effective Volunteer Management,' linked on pg. 7 of this document, for more background on the ISOTURE model and its applications.

final documents. These documents de-emphasize the need for prior gardening experience (which is not required for acceptance into the UC Master Gardener Program); highlight the importance of community education and cultural competencies; and underscore an organizational commitment to program access (through online and innovative program delivery).

- o [UC Master Gardener Program Coordinator website Volunteer Appointment page](#)

- **Promote implicit bias training for all volunteers.** Implicit bias training is strongly recommended for all volunteers, most especially those involved in selecting new volunteers. While implicit bias training alone is not sufficient to ensure that a selection committee will recognize and guard against the influence of bias, it is a meaningful step. UC system resources related to identifying, selecting, and engaging diverse talent are listed here below.
    - o **Implicit bias documents:**
        - ▪ [UCOP - Unconscious Bias Outlines and Resources](#) [2 min]
        - ▪ [UC Davis Office of DEI - Potential Diversity Interview Questions](#) [5 min]
        - ▪ [UC Davis Office of DEI - Common but Unfair Evaluation Tendencies (RAC - E-mail TEMPLATE)](#) [5 min]
        - ▪ [NCWIT (via Berkeley IDEA Lab) - Reducing Unconscious Bias in Job Descriptions](#) [5 min]
    - o **Implicit bias videos:**
        - ▪ [UCLA Office of EDI - Implicit Bias YouTube Series (links to blog post with access instructions)](#) [30 min]
        - ▪ [UCOP - Managing Implicit Bias Training (links to blog post with access instructions)](#) [2hr]

- **Personally invest in UC professional development and training opportunities around cultural competency and DEI**. Research indicates that the attitudes and behaviors of staff (and those of fellow volunteers) are critical to forming a sense of belonging for new volunteers. UC staff can demonstrate DEI leadership through pursuing training and enrichment offered by UC and our Cooperative Extension partners.
    - o **UC Davis Learning and Development Training**: UC Davis Learning and Development Training is open to UC ANR personnel. For a complete course catalog, visit the [UC Davis Human Resources website](#). Registration is required and course delivery format (i.e. online, in-person) varies.
        - ▪ **Effective training:**
            - • [Conducting Culturally Inclusive Trainings](#) [3.5 hr]
        - ▪ **Interpersonal communication**:
            - • [Avoiding bias in the Hiring Process](#) [n.t.]
            - • [Conflict Management: Diversity in Conflict Modes](#) [3.5 hr]
            - • [Microaggressions: Toward Greater Awareness and Understanding](#) [3 hr]
        - ▪ **Understanding diversity:**
            - • [LGBTQIA Inclusion in the Workplace](#) [3 hr]
            - • [Understanding Religious Differences in the Workplace](#) [n.t.]
            - • [Unpacking Oppression](#) [n.t.]

- Cross-cultural competence:
  - [Disability Awareness in the Workplace](#) [3.5 hr]
  - [Intercultural Recruitment and Selection](#) [3.5 hr]

- **Recruit trainees from community-based partner organizations**. Collaborations between the UC Master Gardener Program and community-based organizations, in which UC Master Gardener volunteers provide garden-based education for non-UC groups, are common. While valuable and impactful, these partnerships often create student-teacher power dynamics, or inequities. This may make the UC Master Gardener Program feel exclusionary or unwelcoming to members of those community-based organizations. Disrupting the assumption that colleges and universities are the only legitimate knowledge holders requires specific and ongoing efforts to acknowledge university shortcomings and recognize the value of community knowledge and expertise. Consider offering spots in the UC Master Gardener Program training to employees, volunteers and/or board members from community-based organizations. Prioritize organizations whose staff and board members are representative of communities underinvested by Cooperative Extension. You may wish to offer training without the expectation that community partner trainees go on to volunteer with the UC Master Gardener Program. Instead, you may request that these trainees report data back to the UC Master Gardener Program, assume positions on your external advisory board, and/or provide core or continuing education training for UC Master Gardener Program volunteers.

- **Restructure volunteer selection responsibilities**. There is no UC Master Gardener Program policy requiring that UC Master Gardener volunteers must participate in the selection of future volunteers. However, in many counties, due to the limited capacity of UCCE academics and staff, county program culture/tradition/structure, etc., volunteers direct the selection of trainees in consultation with or independent of UCCE personnel. UCCE personnel can reclaim some or all authority to select new UC Master Gardener Program trainees.
  - **Retain trainee spots for UCCE personnel designation**. UCCE personnel may retain trainee spots to be offered to community members at their own discretion. For example, if a trainee class has 40 potential seats, a staff person or academic may choose to reserve five spots to be filled by their invitees. These designated invitees' spots will not participate in the volunteer selection process run by volunteers. Monterey-Santa Cruz has implemented this practice successfully, resulting in increased participation from Hispanic/Latina/o/x community members and persons in the horticulture and landscaping industries.
    - Credit to:
      [Dr. Maria de la Fuente](#) (County Director in Monterey County; Farm & UC Master Gardener Program Advisor in Monterey and Santa Cruz Counties)
  - **Appoint volunteers to participate in the volunteer selection committees**. In many counties, volunteer selection committees are composed of self-appointed volunteers. As such, these volunteer selection committees may not represent the diversity (in terms of race, ethnicity, age, etc.) of the county in question or California at large. UCCE personnel

may specifically recruit volunteers and/or community partners to build a diverse volunteer selection committee.

- o **Join the volunteer selection process**. UCCE personnel have access to training and professional development around DEI and bias that volunteers may not have access to. Personnel may choose to work *with* volunteers to select trainees for the new UC Master Gardener Program class. Of course, UCCE personnel are not inherently more able than volunteers to eliminate their own and others' biases. The presence and participation of UCCE personnel who have undergone DEI training may lead to a process that is more informed by best practices in inclusive volunteer selection.

- **Alter training schedule, delivery method and/or location**. Training class timing, format, and location all impact who can participate in the UC Master Gardener training program and, ultimately, who can become a UC Master Gardener Program volunteer. To improve participation among young people, working people, and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, program coordinators may consider the following alterations.
  - o **Offer weekend and afternoon classes.** While weekend and afternoon classes improve participation amongst those underinvested by Cooperative Extension, some program coordinators report difficulty securing presenters for courses held outside of standard work hours. Program coordinators may wish to explore training models that involve some recording presentations and some live discussions.
  - o **Online courses offered via Zoom** have shown to increase the size of the trainee class. Research shows that online volunteer training is as effective as in-person volunteer training. San Bernardino and Orange counties admitted their largest trainee classes in 2021 after shifting to online training because they were no longer limited by the number of seats available in their traditional classrooms.
    - ▪ **eXtension Platform (Statewide):** The UC Master Gardener Program statewide office hosts a course titled 'UC Master Gardener Program Recording Trainings' on the eXtension platform. Learn more about this and other courses hosted by partners such as UC Integrated Pest Management Statewide Program on the UC Master Gardener Program Statewide blog post '[Broaden Your Gardening Knowledge Using Online Continuing Education](#).'
  - o **Asynchronous class offerings allow participants to complete some coursework at their own pace.** Several external online learning systems may be appropriate for designing these offerings, UC ANR promotes the eXtension platform for these purposes. In 2020 and 2021, Napa County explored asynchronous online training through the eXtension platform.
    - ▪ **Possible source material for online, weekend, evening, and asynchronous classes:**
      - ▪ **eXtension Platform (Statewide):** The UC Master Gardener Program statewide office hosts a course titled 'UC Master Gardener Program Recording Trainings' on the eXtension platform. Learn more about this and other courses, hosted by partners such as the UC Integrated Pest Management Statewide Program, on the UC Master Gardener Program

Statewide blog post '[Broaden Your Gardening Knowledge Using Online Continuing Education](#).'

- **eXtension Platform (Napa County)**: The UC Master Gardener Program in Napa County invites UC Master Gardener Program personnel to review their mini eXtension course.
  - Login to eXtension campus: https//campus.extension.org
    - Don't have an eXtension account? Create one using the instructions on the [UC Master Gardener Program website's Resources page](#).
  - Use the eXtension campus search bar to locate the Napa course titled "Napa County Master Gardener Training, Beta 2021."
  - Click on the course title and self-enroll to access the modules.
  - **Note**: Napa's eXtension course is not fully built. Currently, units such as botany, soil, and water are up on the eXtension platform with additional modules on the way (as of Apr. 2021).
  - **Credit to**:
    - Yvonne Rasmussen (Coordinator, UC Master Gardener Program in Napa County) - ydrasmussen@ucanr.edu
    - Gayle Nelson (Volunteer, UC Master Gardener Program in Napa County)
- **Geographic diversity**: Just as training schedule and delivery method can impact who is able to attend UC Master Gardener Program trainees, so too does the geographic location of in-person training and volunteer sites. Counties such as Contra Costa have intentionally sought to host their training in towns and neighborhoods disproportionately underserved by Cooperative Extension.

- **Challenge and address harassment, discrimination, and bias online and in-person**. Prospective volunteers learn about the UC Master Gardener Program in a variety of ways. Some have a personal relationship with a current volunteer. Others may be regular attendees of UC Master Gardener Program public events. Still others are affiliated with community organizations and partner entities, or may interact with our program on social media or through our helplines. Regardless of how individuals interact with the UC Master Gardener Program, they have a right to be treated fairly and equitably in accordance with our Equal Opportunity, Affirmative Action, and Civil Rights policies. As a statewide program of UC ANR, the UC Master Gardener Program must hold its personnel and volunteers to the highest ethical standards outlined in our principles of community. Swift and thorough redress of harassment, bias, and discrimination is necessary to ensure the safety and belonging of volunteers, prospective volunteers, and the public.
  - **UC Master Gardener Program Policy Documents:**
    - [UC ANR Adult Volunteer Code of Conduct](#)
    - [UCANR Volunteer Conflict Resolution Manual](#)
  - **Sample Language**: Our colleagues in Oregon State University (OSU) Master Gardener Program prepared responses to messaging around their programs' visions for addressing

racism and inequity. This language is helpful to coordinators and lead volunteers as they counter common but inaccurate statements about the mission, responsibility, and scope of the UC Master Gardener Program regarding DEI.

- **Oregon State University (OSU) Master Gardener Program Blog:** [Racial and Social Justice in Oregon's Master Gardener Program: How to Respond to Critical Comments'](#) by Gail Langellotto and LeAnn Locher

- **Identify and assign DEI, anti-racism, and cultural competency-related continuing education training.** UC Master Gardener Program trainees complete a 50-hour training course followed by 50 hours of volunteer activity in their communities. UC Master Gardener volunteers, on the other hand, complete 25 volunteer hours and 12 continuing education hours annually. While training and continuing education hours have historically focused on horticulture and pest management topics, the UC Master Gardener Program mission is fundamentally an extension and education mission. Continuing education around diversity, equity and inclusion; anti-racism; and cultural competency is critical to program and mission delivery. Consider utilizing some of the resources below, conduct your own research, or utilize resources produced by community-based organizations with which you currently collaborate. Take care not to automatically place responsibility for finding and promoting resources solely on individual volunteers or community partners with marginalized identities.
  - **Resource repositories:**
    - [UCANR DEI Alliance Anti-Racism Resources](#)
    - [UCANR Learning and Development](#)
    - [Food Systems New England' 21-Day Racial Equity Habit Building Challenge'](#)
    - [Community Tool Box – Cultural Competence and Spirituality in Community Building, Chapter 2: Working Together for Racial Justice and Inclusion](#)

- **Conduct an equity assessment**. Equity assessments or equity evaluations can be key tools for driving meaningful programmatic change by identifying equity-related priorities and goals as well as impediments and barriers. These assessments or evaluations, which contain questions about program budgets, demographics of program members, program priority setting and more, are often packaged with a larger education toolkit describing the implementation of the evaluation and possible next steps. Some organizations choose to conduct equity assessment early on in their DEI work. Other organizations choose to build support and momentum for DEI-related program change before undergoing an equity assessment.
  - [Race Equity and Justice Initiative (REJI) Organizational Toolkit](#) by Just Lead Washington and the Washington Race Equity Initiative
  - [Protocol for Culturally Responsive Organizations](#) by Ann Curry-Stevens, Marie-Elena Reyes and Coalition of Communities of Color

- **Analyze demographics of current volunteer population.** While equity assessments help to identify different aspects of program management, culture, and norms, demographic analyses focus only on program participants' demographic characteristics. Results of such studies can inform future volunteer recruitment efforts. In June 2020, UCCE personnel in Los Angeles

County convened a group of volunteers and community members to form a DEI task force. Led by Jennifer Kwoon, the UC Master Gardener Program in Los Angeles County DEI task force analyzed 11 years of UC Master Gardener Program volunteer demographic data. Results indicated that the UC Master Gardener Program population underrepresented Hispanic/Latina/o/x and Native American residents and overrepresented white residents. Using this data, the UC Master Gardener Program targeted outreach to underrepresented residents.

- o **Credit to:**
  - Valerie Borel (Coordinator, UC Master Gardener Program in Los Angeles County) - vtborel@ucanr.edu
  - Dr. Rachel Surls (Sustainable Food Systems Advisor in Los Angeles County) - ramabie@ucanr.edu
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  - Dr. Jennifer Kwoon (Volunteer, UC Master Gardener Program in Los Angeles County)

Questions? Suggestions?
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