

# **MASTER GARDENERS OF CUYAHOGA COUNTY ADVISORY COUNCIL GUIDELINES**

## **SECTION 1. ROLE**

The Master Gardener Volunteers (MGVs) of Cuyahoga County are a volunteer arm of The Ohio State University Extension. The Master Gardener Advisory Council (AC) is the elected body that represents the entire county Master Gardener Volunteer membership. The AC provides opportunities, as needed, for non-AC MGVs to present information, concerns, and ideas to the AC.

## **SECTION 2. PURPOSE**

- A. To promote the growth and continuity of the Master Gardener Volunteer Program and the quality and diversity of the horticultural education received by its members.
- B. To organize and direct the resources of the Master Gardeners of Cuyahoga County, Inc. (MGCCI) in providing horticultural information and education to the residents and organizations of Cuyahoga County.
- C. To assist the Agricultural and Natural Resources Educator, (ANR), and The Ohio State University Extension staff wherever appropriate.

## **SECTION 3. MEMBERSHIP**

### **A. NUMBER**

- 1. The AC shall consist of at least 12 but no more than 15 members, including the members of the Executive Committee.
- 2. Each elected member shall have one vote on matters brought before the Council. Members acting in an ex-officio capacity shall have no vote.

### **B. REGULAR MEMBERS TERM OF OFFICE**

- 1. Regular members (AC members who are not officers) shall serve for a three (3) year term.
- 2. A member may serve consecutive terms, provided the member is considered as a nominee simultaneously with all other Master Gardener AC nominees.
- 3. Terms are completed in accordance with the calendar year.
- 4. Terms which will be expiring shall be filled by nomination and subsequent election.
- 5. To promote continuity within the Council membership, terms may be adjusted by majority vote of the AC to ensure no more than 50% expiration of member terms in any given year.

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## C. MEMBERSHIP RESTRICTIONS

1. AC representatives employed by The Ohio State University or other related organizations shall only serve in an ex-officio capacity.
2. Master Gardener interns may not serve on the AC

## D. REMOVAL/LEAVE OF ABSENCE

1. A member who has not attended three consecutive regular meetings of the AC shall be automatically removed from the Council.
2. The Chair is authorized to excuse a member's absence in advance of a meeting.
3. The Chair is authorized to grant a member a Leave of Absence (LOA) of no greater than 6 months in duration. The Chair shall advise the AC of the member's LOA status.
4. The returning member shall complete the unfinished term extended by the period of the LOA.

## SECTION 4. OFFICER TERMS

- A. The Elected Officers of MCGG Inc. shall be Chair, Vice Chair (optional position to be filled at the discretion of the AC), Secretary, and Treasurer.
- B. Officer terms shall be for 2 years and shall correspond to the fiscal year.
- C. Officers may run for consecutive terms along with any other Master Gardeners nominated for the same position. Unless otherwise authorized by a majority vote of the AC, no officer may serve more than two consecutive terms in the same office, except the Treasurer may serve for a maximum of three consecutive terms.
- D. The incumbent Treasurer will serve as an "emeritus" Executive Committee member for one year following the last active term to provide support for the incoming Treasurer and Executive Committee, as needed. This will be an ex-officio position.
- E. An individual may be elected as an AC member and an officer at the same meeting.
- F. The AC shall fill the vacancy of any officer position by holding an election. Officers will be elected by a majority vote of the AC.
- G. Terms shall be staggered to ensure no more than 50% turnover of Executive Committee (EC) membership in any given year.

## SECTION 5. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (EC)

- A. The MGCC, Inc. Code of Regulations outlines the minimum Executive Committee (EC) membership. Currently these are the Chair, Secretary, and Treasurer.
- B. The Fundraising Chair and the Committee Chairs Liaison shall also be voting members of the Executive Committee.

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- C. The County Extension Executive Director and the ANR Educator shall be ex-officio members of the Executive Committee.
- D. The EC may act on behalf of the AC between meetings of the AC. Any action taken shall be reported to the AC within 72 hours by email.
- E. The EC shall meet as needed with previous notice provided by telephone or email at least 72 hours in advance. Meetings shall be conducted at least four times per calendar year.
- F. An EC meeting at which action is to be taken may be called by the Chair by email or telephone, at least 72 hours in advance to all Executive Council members setting forth the time, date, meeting location, and the subject matter to be considered.
- G. A minimum of three (3) voting members shall constitute a quorum at Executive Committee meetings provided that one of them is the Chair or Secretary
- H. The Executive Committee may meet by electronic means.
- I. The Executive Committee may vote by telephone or email, provided that each member has been notified of the issue to be voted upon and the date for voting.
- J. Only the Chair or Treasurer may sign contracts on behalf of MGCC, Inc.
- K. EC meetings are closed meetings; not open to the general membership.
- L. EC meeting minutes are confidential and are not available to the general membership or the public.

### **SECTION 6. VACANCIES**

- A. The AC shall fill vacancies on the AC by a majority vote.
- B. The Chair shall appoint a committee of current AC members to announce and seek nominees for the vacancy.
- C. Vacancies shall be filled as soon as possible after the vacancy occurs.
- D. A member elected to fill a vacancy who serves more than half a term is considered to have served a full term.
- E. A Leave of Absence from the AC shall not constitute a vacancy.

### **SECTION 7. ELECTION OF MEMBERS AND OFFICERS**

- A. The current AC shall elect new members and officers at the last regular meeting of each year.
- B. A majority of those present and voting shall elect the new members by written ballot.
- C. Contested elections shall be resolved by a recount of the written ballots.
- D. Candidates for officer positions will preferably have served on the AC for at least one year.

### **SECTION 8. ADVISORY COUNCIL RESPONSIBILITIES**

- A. Evaluate each current program at least once every 3 years. These reviews will be on a staggered schedule where one third of the programs are reviewed at least annually. The

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intent of these reviews is to ensure the program continues to fulfill the mission of Master Gardener Volunteers, funding is available, and there are sufficient volunteers to staff it.

- B. Adopt, implement, and monitor the yearly budget.
- C. Form standing and special committees as needed.
- D. Develop and support horticultural related fundraising endeavors.
- E. Promote the recognition and support of the Master Gardener Volunteer Program in Cuyahoga County.
- F. Recognize the contributions of individual Master Gardener Volunteers, including the granting of Emeritus and Emeritus with Honors status.
- G. Nominate Cuyahoga County MGVs, programs and community supporters for state and national recognitions and awards.
- H. Attend major MGV events such as the annual meeting, graduation ceremony, fundraising and social events.

### **SECTION 9. DUTIES OF EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

- A. The Chair shall
  - 1. Prepare an agenda for each official meeting of the AC and provide it to members by email at least one week prior to any meeting of the Council.
  - 2. Conduct the meeting under the current edition of *Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised* –utilizing Robert's Rules for Small Boards.
  - 3. Provide opportunities for AC and non-AC members in attendance to express their views and concerns on specific agenda items.
  - 4. Be the official spokesperson for the AC.
  - 5. Report any actions taken by the Executive Committee on behalf of the AC at the next meeting of the AC after the action is taken.
  - 6. Ensure an annual review of the AC Guidelines
  - 7. Assure leadership is in place for all programs and activities with the assistance of the Volunteer Coordinator.
  - 8. Communicate to MGVs, as necessary, via *News You Can Use*, the MGV management system, MGV website, or other MGV communication tools.
  - 9. Train new incoming AC Members in accordance with the schedule set forth by the Secretary.
  - 10. Create/maintain a computer file of sample forms and basic instructions for use by the subsequent Chair.

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### **B. The Secretary shall**

1. Assume the role of the Chair if the Chair is unable to attend a meeting.
2. Record the minutes and attendance of each Advisory and Executive Committee meeting.
3. Distribute Advisory Council draft meeting minutes to the AC and Executive members no later than two weeks after the meeting of the Council.
  - a. These minutes have not yet been approved and will not be shared or placed on the MGCC Website until approved.
  - b. Minutes approval may be done
    - i. at a regular AC meeting.
    - ii. electronically, as a response to an email; or
    - iii. during an electronic meeting held for that specific purpose.
4. Adopted minutes shall be the official record of the Advisory Council and Executive Committee meetings.
5. Forward the adopted minutes to the Webmaster after their approval.
6. Maintain the records of AC membership, including term expiration, number of terms served, offices held, years served as an officer and make these records available to the Nominating Committee as requested.
7. Be responsible for official correspondence as assigned, including condolences and appreciation.
8. Inform the Chair when an AC member has missed two consecutive AC meetings.
9. Notify newly elected members of their election; schedule a Chair-conducted training session; and provide them with the MGCC Code of Regulations, the AC Guidelines, and other important information prior to the first regular AC meeting in January.
10. Maintain and be the guardian of the records of the AC.
11. Create/maintain a computer file of sample forms and basic instructions for use by the subsequent Secretary.

### **C. The Treasurer shall**

1. Keep the financial records of the Master Gardeners of Cuyahoga County program and report on their status at each AC meeting.
2. Purchase liability insurance for the corporation each year.
3. In November and December, with input from the MGCC Committee Chairs' Liaison, prepare a budget for the following year.
4. Submit for approval an annual fiscal year budget to the AC at its first meeting of the fiscal year. The proposed budget shall be sent to the AC members at least two weeks prior to the meeting.
5. Mentor the Incoming Treasurer in the duties of the office of treasurer during a 6-months period prior to the end of their office term. This training will include the preparation of

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end-of-year financial reports as well as the schedule of periodic financial reporting and disbursements, and orientation to related organizational contacts.

6. Schedule an independent, qualified third party to perform an annual review and reconciliation of MGCC accounts and financial records.
7. Create/maintain a computer file of sample forms and basic instructions for use by the Incoming Treasurer.

### D. Incoming Treasurer shall

1. Be elected and assume office no later than the sixth month of the final year of the then current Treasurer's term
2. Learn the responsibilities of the office of Treasurer.
3. Attend meetings of the AC and the Executive Committee as an ex-officio member.

### E. Fundraising Chair shall

1. Recruit, orient, and support the work of Fundraising Committee members
2. Establish, implement, and manage an annual strategic MGCC fundraising plan and budget, working in conjunction with the Treasurer and Fundraising Committee.
3. Ensure effective leadership and provide support as needed for MGCC fundraising committees and activities (i.e., annual plant sale, annual MGCC fundraising campaign, etc.)
4. Identify and receive AC support to obtain educational and other fundraising resources needed to successfully implement an MGCC fundraising strategy (e.g., attending local grant writing seminars).
5. Complete an annual year-end evaluation form and submit a proposed budget for the following year.
6. Create/maintain a computer file of sample forms and basic instructions for use by the subsequent Fundraising Chair.

### F. Committee Chairs Liaison shall

1. Meet with all Committee Chairs/co-chairs on a semi-annual basis and invite the Treasurer and In-coming Treasurer to participate in such meetings.
2. Communicate MG committee concerns and resource needs to the Council or Chair, as needed. Provide updates and accomplishments to the Council.
3. Obtain annual budgetary revenue and expense projections from the committee chairs no later than October 31<sup>st</sup>. Provide the same to the Treasurer no later than November 15<sup>th</sup>.
4. Create/maintain a computer file of sample forms and basic instructions for use by the subsequent Chairs Liaison.

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## SECTION 10. ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETINGS/QUORUM

- A. The AC shall meet at least six times annually on a bi-monthly basis, and at other times as needed to conduct the business of the Advisory Council.
1. Meetings may be held electronically provided that all members can see and/or hear the other members, can participate in discussion, and can vote.
  2. Links to electronic meetings and an agenda shall be provided to all AC members one week prior to a meeting.
  3. The AC members can vote by email, if the information to be voted on has been disseminated to the members at least three days before the vote.
- B. The Chair shall determine the annual AC meeting schedule.
- C. AC meetings are open to all active Master Gardener Volunteers of Cuyahoga County in good standing.
- D. A quorum at any meeting of the AC shall be a majority of the currently serving AC regular members, provided there are at least two officers present, one of whom is the Chair or the Secretary.
- E. The dates of all regular AC meetings for the year shall be announced at the first meeting of the calendar year.
- F. Notice about regular meetings shall be emailed to all AC members at least one week prior to the meeting and will include the agenda.
- G. Special Meetings may be called by the Chair as needed.
- H. Notice for special meetings shall be emailed one week prior to the special meeting. Such notice will include the date, time, location of the special meeting and the subject matter(s) to be considered.

## SECTION 11. NOMINATING COMMITTEE/NOMINATIONS

- A. The Chair shall appoint a Nominating Committee (NC) consisting of all AC members whose term is expiring and other AC members as needed. The appointment shall be made at the third to last AC meeting of the year.
1. The NC shall elect a Committee Chair from among its members.
  2. The NC Chair shall advise the MGV membership of the responsibilities for the positions which are to be filled for the coming year.
    - a. The NC shall solicit nominees for Officer and Advisory Council members by providing an electronic notice to the general membership prior to August 31; inviting the entire membership to submit member names in good standing (their own or others) for consideration by the NC.

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- b. Nominations from the general membership shall be in writing, emailed or hand delivered to the NC Chair and shall be received no later than September 30
  - c. The NC Chair shall provide an acknowledgement of receipt of the nominee to the nominator.
  - d. The NC Chair shall contact each nominee to ascertain the nominee's willingness to serve if elected and to request the candidate's biographical information to be received and distributed to all AC members prior to the election.
- B. The NC shall have the right to make other nominations in addition to those received from the general membership.
- C. The NC shall consider the following regarding AC composition:
- 1. Representation from Master Gardener Volunteers who work in each major activity of the Master Gardener Programs is critical and is the primary criteria for AC composition.
  - 2. Nominees must be in good standing as Master Gardener Volunteers. Beyond having a desire to serve and being committed to Master Gardener programs, all candidates must have a willingness to contribute to MGCC programs and are expected to contribute at AC meetings.
  - 3. Although representation from each yearly training class and geographic area of the county is desirable in selecting nominees, it is not a requirement.
- D. The NC shall prepare and present a slate for the Officers and AC Members to all AC members two weeks prior to the last regular meeting of the year. The NC shall present a slate of all qualified nominees who have volunteered to serve on the AC.
- E. The current AC Chair and Secretary shall present nominees for Treasurer. Nominations for Incoming Treasurer will be made every eighteen months.
- F. Nominations for AC membership and for its Officers may be made from the floor, provided that written consent from each nominee has been obtained prior to the election.
- G. Elections will be held by paper ballot at the final AC meeting of the calendar year.
- H. Election results shall be shared with Cuyahoga County MGVs in *News You Can Use* and other regular communication tools.

### **SECTION 12. FISCAL YEAR**

The fiscal year shall be January 1 to December 31.

### **SECTION 13. PROGRAM COMMITTEES**

- A. Events and Programs are created to support the Master Gardener Volunteer goals and objectives.

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- B. While programs are on-going activities, an event is considered an annual or periodic occurrence (e.g., Plants in the Park is an annual fundraising **event**; the Ask a Master Gardener Hotline and the Ben Franklin Demonstration Gardens are **programs**.) “Programs” will include “events” for the Guidelines.
- C. Approval of new Programs will be as described in Section 14, “Approval of Additional Master Gardener Activities”.
- D. The evaluation regarding a program’s continuation and recommendation for termination will be in accordance with the criteria described in Section 7A of “Advisory Council Responsibilities”. In the event the program’s periodic evaluation results in deficiencies, the AC shall advise the Committee Chairs Liaison and the respective Program Chair of the concerns. The AC will subsequently evaluate the Program Chair’s response to the concerns and vote on the necessity of terminating the Program at the next scheduled meeting.
- E. Program Committees are composed of Master Gardener Volunteers in good standing and shall have a Chair and a Co-Chair, whenever possible. Chair shall serve for one year commencing in January.
- F. There is no limitation on the number of times the Committee Chair and a Co-Chair may serve in those positions.
- G. Each Chair shall submit to the AC Committee Chairs Liaison a written annual committee report by December 31.
- H. Each Chair shall submit a committee budget for the next year to the Committee Chairs Liaison by Oct. 31st.

### SECTION 14. APPROVAL OF ADDITIONAL MASTER GARDENER VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS

Any Master Gardener Volunteer may request that an activity be approved for volunteer hours by:

- A. Submitting a written proposal to the current Chair of the AC and the ANR educator; submitting the proposal no later than two (2) weeks before the next scheduled meeting of the AC, for inclusion on the meeting agenda, discussion, and a vote.
- B. The proposal must include a description of the activity, anticipated costs/revenues, the goals and expected outcomes of the activity, the educational component of the activity, and the activity’s compliance with the mission statement of the Master Gardener Volunteer Program.
- C. Addressing the level of anticipated MGV interest. Specifically, will this program be readily and sufficiently supported by a committee or will it depend on the participation of one or two Master Gardeners?
- D. Volunteer hours for activities approved through this required process shall be accepted retroactively when recorded.

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## SECTION 15 MASTER GARDENER VOLUNTEER-INACTIVE/EMERITUS STATUS

- A. Inactive Status: The AC may grant inactive status to any Master Gardener Volunteer of Cuyahoga County in good standing but who is unable to continue to meet annual recertification requirements of volunteer service and continuing education (CE) due to health or family issues. A temporary, inactive status shall be limited to a maximum of 24 months.
- B. Emeritus Status: The request to be considered for Emeritus status must be made in writing to the Chair of the AC stating the reasons for applying, the total volunteer hours served, and a list of significant contributions made to the Master Gardener Volunteer Program in Cuyahoga County. The request will be approved at the AC's sole discretion by at least a two thirds majority of the AC at their next scheduled meeting.
1. Emeritus Status is granted to Master Gardener Volunteers with a minimum service of 10 years and 500 volunteer hours.
  2. Emeritus Master Gardener Volunteers of Cuyahoga County may participate in all Cuyahoga County continuing education and social events by registering and paying the respective continuing education or social event fees. They will receive *News You Can Use* and all other general MG communications.
  3. Emeritus status may be granted to non-Master Gardener Volunteers who have made significant contributions to the Master Gardeners of Cuyahoga County organization by a two thirds vote of the AC.
- C. Emeritus Status with Honors: This is an honorary emeritus status conferred by the AC to recognize only the most active and long-tenured Master Gardener Volunteers of Cuyahoga County for their leadership and breadth of contributions. Qualifications are:
1. Minimum tenure of 10 years, leadership roles to include participation on Advisory Council, and volunteer service which must exceed 1000 hours.
  2. This status will be granted at the sole discretion of the AC by at least a two thirds majority of the AC.
  3. Every Emeritus with Honors grantee will receive the same privileges and be subject to the same requirements as any other Emeritus member.
- D. Semi-Active Emeritus status may be granted to an Emeritus Master Gardener who wishes to volunteer but is unable to fulfill the volunteer hours and CE requirements. Qualifications are:
1. This status will be granted at the sole discretion of the AC by at least a two thirds majority of the AC,
  2. The applicant must annually review and acknowledge OSU policies and pay the OSU liability insurance fee, and

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3. The applicant must submit and pay for a background check if this follows 3 years of inactive (emeritus) status.

## SECTION 16. GUIDELINE AMENDMENTS/REVISIONS

These Master Gardener AC Guidelines may be amended by a two-thirds (2/3) vote of the AC, provided the proposed amendment(s) was(were) submitted electronically or in print to each AC member at least two weeks before taking a voted.

## SECTION 17. SUSPENSION OF THE GUIDELINES

In an emergency, or when compliance with these Master Gardener AC Guidelines is not practical, these Master Gardener AC Guidelines may be suspended by a three-quarter (3/4) vote of the AC members, and the matter may be addressed regardless of the limitations and requirements of these Master Gardener AC Guidelines.

## SECTION 18. PARLIAMENTARY AUTHORITY

The rules contained in the current edition of *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised*—utilizing Robert's Rules for Small Boards shall govern the AC in all cases to which they are applicable and in which they are consistent with these Guidelines and any special rules which the AC may adopt.

**Revision Adopted, March 30, 2009**

**Revision Adopted, September 14, 2021**

**Revision Adopted, February 26, 2025**

**Revision Adopted, November 17, 2025**

**Revision Adopted, December 10, 2025**

### Summary of Changes (Rev 2/26/25):

**Sect 3, A-1:** Reduces the AC from 21 members to 12-15 members.

**Sect 3, B-2:** AC members may serve consecutive terms, provided the member is considered as a nominee along with all other nominees. Term limits are eliminated.

**Sect 3, B-5:** Member terms may be extended to prevent more than a 50% turnover each year by a majority vote of the AC.

**Sect 3, D-4:** Requires an AC member taking a Leave of Absence to make up the time upon returning.

**Sect 4, A:** Vice Chair established as an optional position.

**Sect 4, C:** Unless otherwise authorized by the AC, officers shall only serve in the same position for 2 consecutive terms, except the Treasurer may serve for 3 consecutive terms.

**Sec 4, G:** Officer terms may be adjusted to prevent more than 50% turnover each year by a majority vote of the AC.

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**Sect 5, A&B:** Chair, Secretary, Treasurer, Fundraising Chair, and the Committee Chairs Liaison are the EC members.

**Sect 8, A:** Added review of all programs at least every three years, doing 1/3 each year.

**Sect 9, B-1:** Secretary shall serve as the Chair in the Chair's absence

**Sect 9, B-4:** Meeting minutes will be distributed to AC members no later than 3 weeks after the AC meeting.

**Sect 9, B-10:** Secretary is now actively involved in scheduling the training of newly elected AC members and distributing the training documents.

**Sect 9, C&D:** Description of responsibilities of Treasurer and Incoming Treasurer. 'Asst Treasurer' now replaced by 'Incoming Treasurer'. See complete description in Guidelines. Required 3<sup>rd</sup> party annual reconciliation of financials added to allow extending the term of the Treasurer.

**Sect 10, A:** Changes quarterly meetings to bi-monthly.

**Sect 13, D:** Describes process for termination of a program.

**Sect 15, A:** Limits Inactive status to 18 months.

**Sect 15, B&C:** Defines criteria for Emeritus and Emeritus with Honors status.

**Sect 15, D:** Defines Semi-Active Emeritus status

**Summary of Changes (Rev 11/17/25):** As a result of the request by the Advisory Council at its meeting of September 15, 2025, the interim review of the Secretary's draft AC Minutes by the Chair prior to release to the AC has been eliminated. This change is to expedite the review process of minutes well before the subsequent AC meeting. As a result of this change, the Secretary will now release the draft AC Minutes to all AC Members and the Chair within 2 weeks of the AC meeting date. The AC Guidelines are revised as follows:

**Sect 9, A-9 is deleted.** Remaining subparagraphs A-10 and A-11 are renumbered accordingly.

**Sect 9, B-3 is deleted.** The remaining subparagraphs B-4 through 12 are renumbered accordingly.

**Sect 9, B-4 is changed to B-3 and reads as follows:** "Distribute Advisory Council draft meeting minutes to all AC and Executive members no later than two weeks after the meeting of the Council."

**Summary of Changes (Rev 12/10/25):** An inactive person cannot be reinstated mid-year, as such the maximum inactive status defined in Section 15A was modified.

**Section 15A, changed to read as follows:** "A temporary, inactive status shall be limited to a maximum of 24 months."