

**Polk County Master Gardener
Leadership Structure Recommendations 2022**

Polk County Master Gardeners (PCMG) is a program of the Polk County Agricultural Extension District and is administered in partnership with the Iowa Master Gardener Program, a program of Iowa State University Extension and Outreach. The PCMG program established a Steering Committee several years ago. The Polk County Agricultural Extension District has asked that the PCMG and Extension staff review the current organizational structure of PCMG and recommend changes to align with the organizational structure of Polk County Agricultural Extension District and its policies and procedures, to improve effectiveness, as well as position PCMG for long term success in recruiting, training, engaging and retaining volunteers.

A small group of PCMG volunteers have worked with Kalsa Parker Browning, Extension Council, and staff leaders to review key trends in the external and internal environment and recommend changes as needed to fulfill the request of the Polk County Agricultural Extension District. The following is a draft report of this body of work which addresses PCMG leadership structure in relation to its governing organization along with a decision-making model, leadership recruitment and job descriptions.

PCMG Mission Statement

The mission of the Master Gardener Program is to provide current, research-based, home horticulture information and education to the residents of Iowa through ISU Extension programs and projects. Through their participation in educational activities, Master Gardeners also increase their own personal knowledge in horticulture.

Background

Key trends:

- Total membership 2021 = 256
- Participation has decreased since 2012
 - Trends for 3-year averages have been falling since 2017
- Total volunteer hours have decreased since 2015
 - Hours/volunteer trends for 3-year averages have been dropping since 2017
- Decrease in PCMG volunteer hours in 2020 related to pandemic, slight increase in 2021 but not up to previous numbers pre-pandemic. Research has found the pandemic resulted in a 90% decrease in volunteering for many organizations which has yet to return to pre-pandemic levels.
- Changing demographics: more younger members coming into the program
- Unknown impact of climate change on PCMG operations such as plants, resources covered by partners (city water), storms/damage. Currently no plan for navigating this.

Key Considerations for Working with Volunteers:

- Studies consistently demonstrate that anticipated value gain is a key motivator of volunteering behavior. Positive feelings that come from helping others, or personal development through experience are key motivators. Successful organizations align volunteer tasks with individual skill sets or create opportunities to gain new skills.
- Extension volunteers found the greatest benefit from their volunteer time when they had an increase in learning and skill development (Cleveland, L. V., & Thompson, J. R. (2007). Extension education and volunteer service: Assessing motivation and action. *Journal of Extension*, 45(1). <https://www.joe.org/joe/2007february/rb1.php>).
- Gen Z, in particular, has a passion for volunteerism and involvement has grown significantly in the past few years. Younger generations are more technologically inclined, requiring greater focus on media campaigns and content that appeals to a younger audience.

- Volunteers are also demanding more short-term projects and flexibility, a trend that has been heightened by the pandemic. Simplified volunteer roles encourage participation.
- Successful organizations are building multi-age volunteer communities that foster spaces for a mix of all generations to volunteer collectively.
- Training is critical to support volunteers in developing new skills and finding success in volunteer roles.

PCMG Governance and Operational Management

Polk County Master Gardeners is a program of the Polk County Agricultural Extension District (Polk County Extension) and is administered in partnership with the Iowa Master Gardener Program – a program of Iowa State University Extension and Outreach.

The Polk County Agricultural Extension District Council (Extension Council) oversees all Polk County Extension programming, including the Polk County Master Gardener Program. The Polk County Master Gardener Program operates in compliance with the overall mission, goals of Extension, and Extension Policies.

Descriptions of various entities and their respective roles and responsibilities follows:

Extension Council – The Polk County Agricultural Extension District Council is made up of nine members elected at large from the county. The Extension Council governs Iowa State University (ISU) Extension and Outreach in Polk County. The council assumes responsibility for Extension programs in the county, which includes establishing a budget, levying a tax, authorizing payment of expenses, and employing the ISU Extension and Outreach Polk County staff. Fiduciary oversight of all Extension programs including PCMG is the responsibility of the Council. The Council and designated staff maintain the rights to make policy and capital expenditure decisions.

Regional Director – The Regional Director serves as a liaison between the Extension Council and all Polk County Extension programs and staff.

Natural Resources Program Coordinator (Program Coordinator) oversees the Polk County Master Gardener Program and works with volunteers to carry out county-sponsored events and activities. The Program Coordinator is the Extension office representative and point of contact for the Polk County Master Gardener Program.

Advisory Council – Promotes coordination and collaboration among PCMG projects and members. Serves as an additional connection between PCMG projects, MG members, and Extension office. Advises Extension office on PCMG strategic goals, advancement, and evaluation and streamlining of current processes. The Steering Committee is currently comprised of 32 individuals, and 19 projects/officers who have voting rights. The programs of PCMG raise funds and are expected to operate within their assigned budgets as determined by Extension leadership. PCMG members do not have signatory authority to commit PCMG contractually. The current Steering Committee does not currently have a strategic plan to guide and focus the work of PCMG. The current Steering Committee meets every other month. Much of the agenda is focused on reports from the various gardens, Program Coordinator, and programs sponsored by PCMG.

Project chairs – coordinate the implementation of county-sponsored events and activities.

Proposed Advisory Council Structure

The proposed structure of the Advisory Council is designed to streamline work while maintaining the scope of the current Steering Committee: *Promotes coordination and collaboration among PCMG projects and members. Serves as an additional connection between PCMG projects, MG members, and Extension office. Advises Extension office on PCMG strategic goals, advancement, and evaluation and streamlining of current processes.* Accordingly, the Advisory Council would be reduced to six positions as

outlined below. These roles are intended to represent the following facets of PCMG at the Advisory Council. They would serve as voting members for any Advisory Council activity requiring formal action.

Garden Representative – Liaison between gardens and Extension office, and connects activities and initiatives among three gardens:

- Demonstration Garden in Urbandale
- Discovery Garden on the Iowa State Fairgrounds in Des Moines
- Enabling Garden in Altoona

Education Representative – Internal educational opportunities for members, evaluates educational aspects of our projects, advocate for increased or optimized educational opportunities and impact.

- Bus trips
- Program committee
- Master Gardener training

Community Outreach Representative – External educational opportunities and connections with community (general public and community organizations).

- Ambassadors
- Farmers Market

Fundraising Representative – Meets yearly fundraising goals, plans for overall financial health of PCMG

- Art in the Garden
- Plant Sales
- Garden Tour

Volunteer Engagement Representative – Looks at trends in volunteer hours, surveys newer MGs for reasons for leaving, number of ours served, etc. and use info to make improvements.

- MG internship
- Other member retention activities (awards/recognition)
- Mentor program
- Leadership recruitment and development

Operations Representative – Evaluates current and proposed infrastructure. Grounding force for organization in evaluating the realities of various projects.

- Infrastructure – gardens, potential greenhouse
- Assessment of project feasibility
- Sustainability of infrastructure, projects, or future projects

In addition, the Advisory Council will have an assigned chairperson and secretary. These roles would be filled by one of the six Advisory Council members outlined above. Key responsibility of these roles follows:

- Chair – Facilitates Advisory Council meetings, collaborates with ISU Extension Representative on special projects/issues as needed.
- Secretary – Takes minutes at Advisory Council meetings.

Decision Making Authority

Consistent with other programs sponsored by the Polk County Agricultural Extension Council, the Advisory Council has the responsibility to make recommendations, give opinions, offer assistance to projects, and make connections. In addition, the Advisory Council has the authority to develop and

recommend procedures and guidance for PCMG, in compliance with Extension Policy. The work of the Advisory Council is intended to comply with overall mission, goals of Extension, and Extension Policies.

Domains of decision making that reside with the Extension Council or leadership include: legal decisions, entering contracts or legally binding arrangements, all personnel issues and budgeting decisions. A detailed matrix of decision-making authority follows:

	Establish Policy	Develop Procedures and Guidance (in accordance with Policy)	Enter Legally Binding Agreements	Handle Personnel Issues	Determine Project Spending	Determine General and Reserve Fund Spending	Input on Procedures and Guidance
Extension Council	✓	☑	✓	☑	☑	☑	i
Regional Director		✓		✓	☑	☑	i
Program Coordinator		✓		✓	☑	✓	i
Advisory Council		R				R	i
Project Leaders					✓		i
Broader PCMG							i

✓ Indicates group/individual has decision rights for this item

☑ Indicates group/individual has monitoring/oversight role and delegates decision making to other entity

R Makes recommendations

i Provide opportunities for feedback (input)

In Advisory Council deliberations, recommendations will be made using a consensus model. Decisions on procedures and guidance for PCMG are made by the Extension office, including the Program Coordinator and Regional Director. Consensus means that the group will support the decision, even though individuals may have a difference of opinion.

Escalation Procedures

Decisions on procedures and guidance for the PCMG program are made by the Extension office, including the Program Coordinator and Regional Director (and Extension Council if necessary). The Extension office relies on input from various stakeholders within the Master Gardener Program (Advisory Council, Project Leaders, broader Master Gardener membership) for input, and will seek consensus on decisions from the Advisory Council. If consensus is not reached by the Advisory Council on a given issue, then the decision will be made by the Extension office.

PCMG Advisory Council Meetings

The Advisory Council will meet a minimum of ten (10) times per year. Regular meetings will be led by the chair or a designee in the chair's absence. The Advisory Council model assumes the liaisons are in regular contact with the leaders within their respective areas of responsibility. In addition, the liaisons will convene cross-functional meetings with their respective stakeholders to facilitate connection, collaboration, and cross-promotion of various PCMG activities.

The recommended schedule for these meetings follows:

- Twice a year and more often as needed, the Gardens, Fundraising, and Operations representatives will meet to plan, collaborate, and coordinate their respective functions.
- Twice yearly meeting expectation: Education and Outreach representatives. Other regular contact with subgroups.
- Volunteer Engagement representative – attends one quarterly meeting per year for each of the other areas, and other stakeholders as needed.

PCMG Advisory Council Membership Eligibility and Selection

Any Polk County Master Gardener in good standing is eligible to serve for an Advisory Council leadership role. They should have some experience, professional and/or volunteer that aligns with the leadership position. Advisory Council members and candidates are expected to have the greater good of the entire PCMG organization in mind, and not just an individual project perspective.

Interested Polk County Master Gardeners will be asked to complete a Leadership Profile which includes information on skills and experience, interest in available position(s), and other relevant information. The leadership profile will be posted online for ease of completion.

Following submission of the leadership profile, prospective leaders will discuss the opportunity with the Program Coordinator or other representative about their relevant skills, interests, and experience to determine if the position is a good match.

Advisory Council leadership positions will be elected from the PCMG membership body at the annual Harvest Festival, by all members present. The term of office will be three years. Positions will be staggered so that two positions are filled each year. This will provide for continuity while allowing for new perspectives and voices within PCMG leadership. An Advisory Council member can serve two consecutive three-year terms. They can be considered for leadership again once they have been out of a Council leadership role for one term (3 years). These term limits also apply if an individual serves two terms in differing roles. The term limits apply to anyone who has served on PCMG Steering Committee in the past six years.

The exception to this is the first slate of officers which will be filled in one, two or three-year terms to facilitate staggered roles.

The first slate will be as follows:

- One year term: Community Outreach and Education Representatives. These roles will be eligible for one time only, two three-year consecutive terms
- Two-year term: Gardens and Fundraising Representatives. Following completion of the first two-year term, these individuals will be eligible for an additional three-year term
- Three-year term: Volunteer Engagement and Operations Representatives. These individuals will be eligible for one consecutive three-year term.

Advisory Council members are expected to fulfil their full terms. However, if an Advisory Council member vacates their position before the end of their term, a new council member may be appointed by the Program Coordinator to serve the remainder of the term for the open position. If that Advisory Council

member wishes to run for an additional term after the partial term is complete, they may run for an additional two consecutive full terms (as outlined above).

Please note that project chairs will be selected by the Program Coordinator, associated Advisory Council position, and/or current project chairs, from available application pool. The new Advisory Council structure does not replace any functions of the current project chairs/leadership teams. Nor does the Advisory Council oversee or supervise project teams or groups. The intent of the Advisory Council is to facilitate connections and collaboration across the Polk County Master Gardener program.

Leadership Recruitment

A variety of strategies will be utilized to seek interested candidates including:

- Direct asks to volunteers. MG directory can be used to find members who may have skills and interests relevant to available positions. Will request completion of a leadership profile and opportunity discussion process (see Selection section below)
- Call for volunteers in Green Thumb and similar communications
- Volunteer role listings on PCMG website – volunteer job descriptions listed here, as well as information on general leadership profile process
- Ongoing recruitment – general leadership profile and opportunity discussion process for volunteers who may be interested in leadership positions in general
- Build in enough lead time for asks for upcoming opportunities (ongoing recruitment)
 - Ensures a more effective search for qualified volunteers
- Increase visibility of Advisory Council to promote interest

Training requirement for leaders

Initial training for will be provided for all incoming leaders to include:

- Overview of organizational structure, current policies of Extension
- Overview of strategic plan, organizational goals and mission
- Receive MG volunteer manual

Advisory Council and project chairs are required to complete additional training on an annual basis to support leaders in leadership skill development. Areas may include:

- Servant leadership
- Volunteer management

ADDENDUM Part 1: Mini SWOT Analysis (Strengths and Opportunities)

Strengths:

- Tenure – very experienced and committed leaders
- Community and mission-oriented work
- Newsletter has improved – differentiating projects, how to get involved with opportunities, more information than before
- Self-directed and independent leaders, high quality projects
- Lots of variety of projects – can attract people with a variety of interests
- Good connections to other resources, inside and outside of Polk (ISU, Community organizations, other Master Gardeners in different counties) – good resources for other educational opportunities, great partnership opportunities (& potential leadership trainings)
- Some leaders – very welcoming, want volunteers to succeed

Challenges:

- Creating space and opportunities for newer, younger leaders – right now there are no term limits (recycling leaders), scheduling opportunities for younger, working volunteers, or with young families
- Large commitment expected in projects – responsibility falls on a few
 - Or large perceived commitment can intimidate new leaders/prevent people stepping up
- Need to do better soliciting new leaders, making opportunities known through a variety of methods
- Knowledge and info resides in a few people – can lead to burnout, if they can't do it anymore, huge gap to fill
- Leaders who want to step back don't feel supported in the transition process, feel they can't step away
- No succession plan- especially an issue in projects with infrastructure
- Need more robust mentorship program
- Lack of formal processes for leadership selection (and other processes in general)
- Communication – how to get people info they need?
- Too many people on the steering committee, often not able to have effective discussions – steering structure
- No strategic plan, or unifying goals or direction for PCMG
- Leadership climate/atmosphere is often contentious
 - may make it difficult to recruit new leaders if not a positive atmosphere
- Some leaders – don't create best impression of organization
- Lack of understanding of various roles, clarification needed on responsibility and decision rights of each body (steering, project leaders, coordinator, extension office, Extension Council).

ADDENDUM Part 2: 2022 Timeline for Implementation

September

- September 26 – Extension Council approves Leadership Structure and PCMG Finance Policy and Guidelines, fully in place December 1, 2022.
- September 27 – Special Edition of Green Thumb used to announce the launch of *Reimagining the Future of Polk County Master Gardener Program* and the transition process. Begin recruitment of Advisory Council members.

October

- Continue recruitment of Advisory Council members
- October 6, 3:30 to 4:30 p.m. – Reimagining Session #1 (in person) – vision of effort to be shared followed by Q & A
- October 11 – Annual Harvest Festival
- October 18, 9:30 to 10:30 a.m. – Reimagining Session #2 (in person) – vision of effort to be shared followed by Q & A
- October 19, 6 to 7 p.m. – Reimagining Session #3 (virtual) – vision of effort to be shared followed by Q & A
- October 20, 6 to 7:30 p.m. Polk County MG Steering Committee – regularly scheduled meeting
- October 25 – Polk County MG Trainee Volunteer Fair

November

- Share all candidate profiles with PCMG
- Hold the election – as part of social event for all PCMG
- Current Steering Committee holds its final meeting on November 17

December

- New advisory group assumes responsibilities

Proposed Timeline for Advisory Council Plan of Work

(what will they be working on, and when do they plan to do it (timeline TBD))

- Include strategic planning/organizational goal setting for PCMG – In-line with Extension Strategic Plan
- Build robust network of volunteers and volunteer leaders
- Towards end: monitoring stage, evaluate how things are going and make changes if necessary. Timeline: approximately 6 months after new proposal goes into effect.

Addendum – Part 3

Polk County Master Gardeners Finance Policy and Guidance

Final 10.27.21 – Updated and Approved by Polk County Extension Council on 09/26/2022

Fundraising

Policy and guidance:

The Polk County Master Gardener (PCMG) Program will establish a Fundraising Committee responsible for raising funds to meet the budgetary needs of PCMG. The roles of the Fundraising Committee include researching fundraising opportunities and ideas, recruiting volunteers to support fundraising endeavors, and implementing fundraising events and activities.

1. The Fundraising Committee will have representation on the Advisory Council. The current Plant Sale Committee, Garden Tour Committee, and Art in the Garden Committee will be subcommittees of the Fundraising Committee. The Fundraising Committee will serve in a support capacity for the subcommittees.
2. The Advisory Council will establish fundraising goals for the upcoming calendar year 6 months prior to the new budget year.
3. PCMG projects are encouraged to conduct fundraising events to contribute to the PCMG General Fund. If any of the three gardens are responsible for fundraisers, they will contribute 25% of net proceeds to the PCMG General Fund. Expenses for events shall be tracked by the projects responsible for events and will be covered with event proceeds before contributing to the PCMG General Fund.
4. Sales or fundraisers hosted by other projects will contribute net proceeds to the PCMG General fund.
5. Fundraising events will be disclosed to the Program Coordinator as soon as reasonably possible in advance of the event to allow for transparency across the organization as well as provide opportunity for collective efforts to include marketing. It is the responsibility of the Program Coordinator to share that information with the Advisory Council and the broader PCMG community.
6. The full amount of monetary donations to PCMG projects will go to the account/project specified by the donor.

Budgets and Accounts

Policy and Guidance:

The Polk County Master Gardeners will follow the same fiscal calendar year, July 1 to June 30, of the Iowa State University Extension and Outreach Polk County.

The Advisory Council will make annual operating expense allocation recommendations to PCMG projects based on the prior year's fundraising results for Program Coordinator to review and approve on behalf of the Polk County Extension Council.

Definitions:

- Operating expenses – Seasonal expenses
- Capital Improvement expenses – permanent or long-term additions, improvements, or restorations to infrastructure. May also be used for additional expenses not covered in operating allocation.

- Grant accounts– funds received from grant applications and used only for the intended purpose outlined in the grant.

Oversight of accounts:

PCMG Accounts- Program Coordinator and other Extension office staff

- PCMG General Fund and PCMG Reserve account – Advisory Council
- Project accounts (operating, capital improvement, grant) – project chairs

Budget framework:

1. The Program Coordinator will track and report the fundraising amounts for the prior year. When county-wide fundraising goals are met, the operating expenses, as recommended by the Advisory Council and reviewed and approved by the Program Coordinator, of these projects will be covered.
 - Farmers' Markets
 - Art in the Garden (seed money)
 - Garden Tour (seed money)
 - Bus Trips (seed money)
 - Fundraising Committee (seed money)
 - Program Committee

The gardens will receive a minimum \$3000, with additional funds as recommended by the Advisory Council and reviewed and approved by the Program Coordinator, if available.

2. If fundraising does not cover all project allocations, all allocation recommendations will be re-evaluated by the Advisory Council.
3. If fundraising goals are exceeded, additional funds raised will remain in the PCMG General Fund or moved into the PCMG Reserve account at the discretion of the Advisory Council.
 - The Extension financial reports for PCMG will be shared annually with Advisory Council members to disclose account activity for all PCMG projects.
4. If expenses arise in excess of a project's operating allocation, additional funds may be requested from the PCMG General Fund with approval of Program Coordinator in consultation with the Advisory Council.

Grants

Policy and Guidance:

The Program Coordinator/Extension office is the central repository of all information relating to grants and prospective grants. Before pursuing any grant opportunities, approval must be granted by the Program Coordinator. Information about the grant seeking process must be documented and a copy sent to the Program Coordinator.

1. Grant accounts contain only those funds received from the grantor and are separated by grant. Grant funds will only be used for the intended purpose outlined in the grant application approved by the grantor. Leftover funds (if applicable) will be used based on the instructions of the grantor.
2. Information relating to grants will be made available to Advisory Council members.
3. PCMG will define a PCMG grant consultant group who will function as a designated group of PCMG volunteers with interest and experience in writing grants. This group will work on an as needed basis to review grant applications and assist with writing as needed. This group may also research potential grant opportunities for PCMG, and/or facilitate connections among projects to maximize the ability for PCMG to utilize grant opportunities.
4. Writing and submission of grants can be managed on a local project level if the requested amount is less than \$2,500. Grants requesting amounts of \$2,500 or more will receive input from a

PCMG grant consultant(s). Smaller grants (less than \$2,500) may seek assistance from the PCMG grant consultants if desired.

5. Routine/ongoing grants are up to the discretion of the Program Coordinator as to whether input from PCMG grant consultants is needed (ex. SNAP)
6. Grant applications requiring matching funds from the PCMG General Fund or PCMG Reserve account must be reviewed by the Advisory Council and approved by the Program Coordinator. When evaluating opportunities, long-term financial health of PCMG should be top priority. If a local project has funds available (in operating or capital improvement account) to match funds for the grant they are applying for, approval is not necessary, but the application is subject to the process outlined previously.
7. At the discretion of the Program Coordinator/Extension office, grant accounts may not be required for smaller grants requiring up-front spending and reimbursement. Proper tracking and reporting must occur.