



## Wisconsin Master Gardeners Association (WIMGA)

Serving its members since 1992

### Responses to WIMGA Related Questions Resulting from Master Gardener Program Office Changes

(1/5/2022)

- **What is the current relationship of WIMGA to the Local Associations?**
- **What will it be after the upcoming changes in the Program Office take place?**
- **What are the WIMGA member's voting privileges?**

WIMGA is the collective voice for the state's Local Master Gardener Associations and individual members who do not belong to a Local Association. WIMGA will continue to play that role going forward and is developing new opportunities that will provide support to Local Associations. Each Local Association designates a local WIMGA representative. The Local Representatives for each District elect their District's WIMGA Board members.

All individuals who are members of WIMGA affiliated Local Associations or are Individual Members (if they are not members of a Local Association) and qualify for the membership categories listed below may become members of WIMGA upon receipt by WIMGA of their annual dues.

#### **WIMGA By-laws Article III Membership, Section 2:**

Voting members of WIMGA include:

- **Certified Master Gardener Volunteers** – those persons certified by Extension who have met annual continuing education, service, and any other requirements set by Extension for maintenance of certification as a Master Gardener Volunteer (MGV).
- **Intern Master Gardener Volunteers** – those persons who are in the process of completing Extension requirements for certification as an MGV.
- **Honored Master Garden Volunteers** – those persons certified by Extension who have accrued one thousand (1000) volunteer hours or ten (10) years of service, have demonstrated significant contributions to the MGV program, and been approved by Extension for this permanent status.
- **Exempt Master Gardener Volunteers** – those persons who have been Certified MGVs who have been unable to complete minimum service and continuing education hours and who have requested exempt status from Extension.

WIMGA's bylaws were amended in 2020 to reflect the then current Master Gardener Participation Levels as defined by the Program Office. The Participation Levels were recently revised again by the Program Office. This will require a further revision of the WIMGA bylaws in 2022. **WIMGA requests Local Associations hold on revising their bylaws until WIMGA has completed its review of the new Participation Levels and can provide recommended bylaw language to our Local Associations. This is expected to happen early in 2022.**

Local Associations only pay "dues" to WIMGA, not to Extension. Dues help to support the cost of the annual meeting, conferences, monthly newsletters, grants to Local Associations and more. Dues for members of Local Associations are collected by and paid to WIMGA by the respective Local Association. If the WIMGA member does not belong to a Local Association, they can pay their annual dues directly to the WIMGA Treasurer at the following address:

WIMGA  
c/o Byron Hacker, Treasurer  
N4511 Hwy 57  
Chilton, WI 53014

- **Why do we need Local Associations anymore?**

With nearly 3,000 Certified Master Gardener Volunteers located throughout the state, in large and small communities, Local Associations play a key role in providing educational, volunteer, networking and many other relationship building opportunities among the Master Gardeners in your area. Local Associations also provide a consistent, direct line to the Program Office and WIMGA. Without these critical groups, Master Gardeners would be without the friends, mentors, and partners they meet by participating in a Local Association.

- **Will each county need to become an Association on its own?**
- **Does WIMGA membership cover this requirement, if necessary?**
- **Are we an Association even if we aren't WIMGA members? If so, can we choose to use our funds on projects of our choosing?**

Being a member of WIMGA does not cover the “legal entity” requirement for the Local Associations. Each Association needs to do so individually. Whether you are an Association is a legal question based on how your Local Association was originally formed with the State of Wisconsin. Wisconsin law provides a definition as to what an Association is: <https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/statutes/statutes/184> Consult with your local accountant and/or attorney to obtain the most current legal and accounting advice regarding the type of “legal entity” that is best for your group’s needs. Each county does not have to form its own “legal entity”. Counties can continue to group together where it works best for them to form a Local Association.

- **There is some concern that our Association may require our own insurance coverage. Any guidance or suggestions on the type of insurance?**

Effective January 1, 2022, the University of Wisconsin will no longer provide liability coverage on any activities where it is not the participating partner with a Local Association. WIMGA recommends that Associations individually determine what type of insurance coverage they need based on the activities that they do and the partners they work with on their activities (schools, community gardens, etc.). Some may need property/casualty coverage as well as liability. Your local insurance agent is the best person to help you determine what the coverages should be. Three insurance companies that currently provide insurance coverage to some of our Local Associations are Auto Owners Insurance (headquartered in Lansing, MI), Secura Insurance (headquartered in Fox Crossing, WI) and West Bend Insurance (headquartered in West Bend, WI). One or more of these companies may have an independent agent located in your area who can assist you in determining the best insurance coverage for your needs.

- **Will Local Associations be allowed to organize fundraisers and use the earnings for projects?**

WIMGA does not dictate what a Local Association’s funds are used for; nor what activities a Local Association undertakes. However, Extension has continued to state that the activities need to be within the spirit of the program in order to be volunteer hours that can be counted toward certification. WIMGA also does not stipulate what a Local Association can do for its fundraisers.

- **In the section dealing with Association Autonomy, the statement is made that Associations can choose how to manage their own membership. Does this mean that the Associations no longer need to mimic the by-laws of WIMGA as we were told to do before the end of 2021? If the Association wants to have a category, for example, of Friends to the Association, which would be non-voting but dues paying membership, the Association could now do so even though that is not a WIMGA category?**

WIMGA requested the bylaw revisions in order to be following Extension's definitions, as were then required by Extension. We have since requested that everyone hold on any current bylaw revisions until the dust settles on the recently announced Program changes. Additional changes to bylaws for both WIMGA and the Associations will be required in 2022. WIMGA's initial view is that Local Association categories such as "Friends to the Association" could still be included as non-voting members, however they would not be eligible for WIMGA membership at this time. WIMGA will provide more guidance in the near future.

- **Are we able to maintain being a Wisconsin Master Gardener without belonging to a county group?**

Yes, however, if you are in an area where a Local Association exists it can help connect you to volunteer projects and educational opportunities. You do not need to be a member of a Local Association to belong to WIMGA.

- **If clubs will be autonomous, it will be difficult to explain our relationship with Extension.**

Look forward to seeing a succinct but thorough explanation on the website including expectations/purpose. Historically, Local Associations have operated autonomously but with the support of Extension. Extension provides the training and educational opportunities and determines the requirements for certification. Local Associations will continue to support local Master Gardener Volunteers and will assist in furthering the mission of the Extension Master Gardener Program. More information will be forthcoming on this in 2022.

- **If MG groups are autonomous and some MGVs are working without any supervision whatsoever in counties without UW Horticultural educators, how are they held accountable? For instance, clubs need funds to operate and support projects. As treasurer of our county's Association and being cautious, I insist on annual audits to protect the Association and myself - as well as the university. I hope the pattern continues in our Association after my term ends. I'm sure some other established clubs do the same but what of others?**

Best practices for any organization would be to include oversight over any funds that belong to the Association. We read about groups who have faced serious consequences when a trusted person, without proper oversight, has unexpectedly taken funds for use outside of the Association. Oversight helps to avoid this type of situation.

- **If Associations are independent, how does this effect WIMGA?**
- **Is WIMGA still a governing body of the Associations such that Associations have to follow their criteria to continue to belong to WIMGA?**

Local Associations being autonomous is nothing new to WIMGA. As with any organization, there are some rules of membership that will be required, however, there is no expectation that significant changes will occur from how WIMGA and the Local Associations partnered prior to the changes that occurred in the past two years. From WIMGA's perspective, this is a return to "business as usual" where Local Associations are independent but work in partnership with WIMGA.

- **Will the co-chair requirement of a garden still be in force with these new changes? Does this mean that the Associations will not need to have Project Leads for the UW projects, or any other project that a Master Gardener participates in?**

WIMGA is not aware of any co-chair or Project Lead requirement. This may be a Local Association or County office requirement and can still be utilized if that position is helpful to that particular Association's structure.

- **If a local organization wants the help of Master Gardeners, who will they contact?**

If this is referencing a local group, like a school, approaching a Local Association to help on a project, the group would need to contact the Association's leadership. In some Associations, that might be through their website or by calling the local Extension office or a Master Gardener they know.

- **Will individual volunteers need to organize themselves to create programs for schools, county fairs, and educational seminars as the Associations currently do? If so, how what kind of network will exist to connect MGs?**

This is the strength of Local Associations, and there should be no change in this role from what it was historically.