



Background Check Process For Extension Master Gardener Volunteer Applicants

Conducting a personal background check is a standard best practice of quality volunteer program management, especially when volunteers may work with youth or vulnerable adults. Minnesota Extension Master Gardeners (MG) often have opportunities to conduct such work. As a standard management practice, the Minnesota Master Gardener program requires that background checks be conducted on all new volunteers accepted into the MG program.

A standard process for administering background checks will ensure consistency across the state. During recruitment for 2007 MG interns, several counties have piloted a volunteer background check system that parallels the system used by 4-H. It utilized support staff at the Regional Extension Center for administering the checks. The system worked smoothly.

We are asking all county/multi-county MG programs to begin using this system in 2007 as part of the recruitment and acceptance process for 2008 MG interns. This will require cooperation and partnership with Regional Extension Centers. Exceptions will be made if it is more effective for a county to use an existing background check procedure. However, the background check process outlined here will likely be advantageous in most cases.

The background check process works as follows:

1. The county MG coordinator, or individual overseeing the recruitment/acceptance process, includes a consent form as part of the application materials.
2. Background checks can be administered as the last step of the acceptance process, once initial review of application or interview is complete and you desire to select the applicant for the MG program. This eliminates conducting unnecessary checks.
3. The completed release form is sent to the Regional Center where the support staff assigned to conduct background checks administers the online check from the private company, Orange Tree Employment Screening. (same as 4-H)
4. The release form and results of the background check are held in a locked file at the Regional Center.
5. The county MG coordinator will be notified that the background check is completed. Should there be anything other than a "no report of felony or misdemeanor", the coordinator will be notified and sent a copy of the check results. The coordinator will make a determination about the individual's acceptance into the MG program. This can be done in consultation with RD and/or MG program manager.
6. The file of completed background checks will remain in the Regional Center locked file until such time as the volunteer requests to no longer "authorize" information release or the MG leaves the MG program.
7. Billing for the background checks will be the responsibility of the local MG program. Logistics are worked out locally. The cost of the checks (\$6 per name search) can be paid by the applicant as part of a processing fee, can be covered by the county or county MG program, or other arrangements made locally. The Regional Center sends the bill to the identified entity for payment to the company performing the background checks.

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