W1377

The Role of an Extension Agent in Extension Master Gardener Intern Training and Volunteer Onboarding

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Cooperative Extension is known for providing research-based information on a variety of topics, and it is imperative that as Extension educators we also utilize research-based methods for teaching this information. It is our role to guide our learners through the content, providing context and relevance along the way. In the Extension Master Gardener (EMG) program, we are also cultivating a spirit of volunteerism and building community alongside our primary educational objectives.

The Dual Role of the Agent Coordinator-Educator and Volunteer Manager

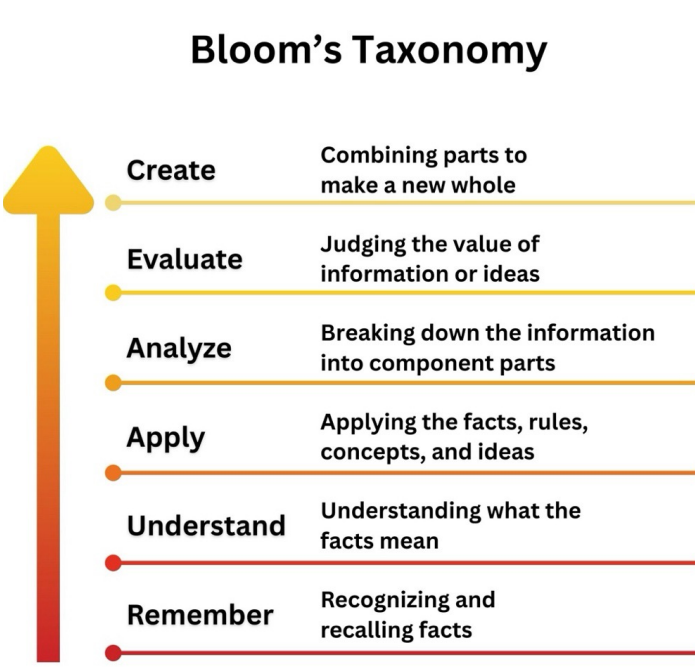


Figure 1: *(Shabatura, 2022)*

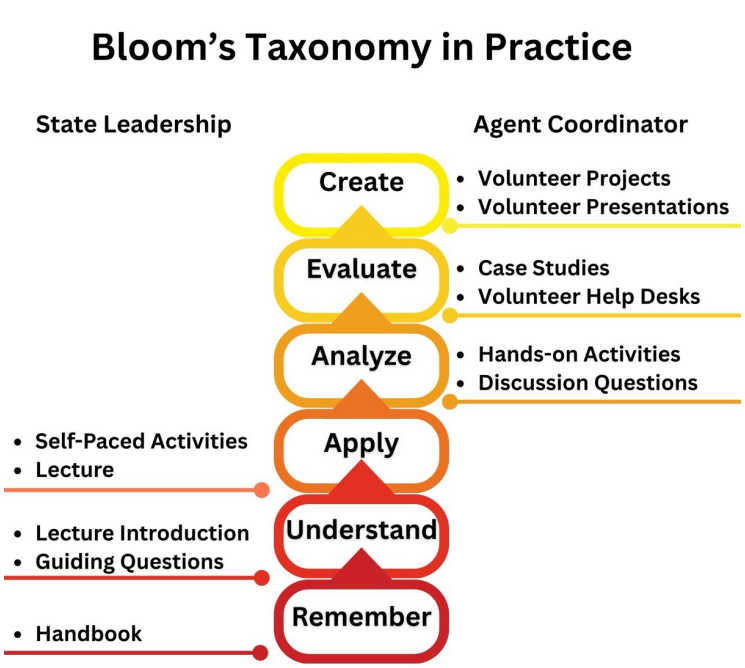


Figure 2: *How Bloom's Taxonomy is utilized in our curriculum and the responsibilities of both state and local leadership for its implementation*

The Tennessee Extension Master Gardener Coordinator role is unique within our Extension system as it layers volunteer engagement responsibilities on top of the base Extension educator role. Thus, the coordinator title embodies two primary roles: educator and volunteer manager. These two objectives, education and engagement, are tightly intertwined but are distinct in their purpose and require unique skillsets to be successful.

As an educator, it is your objective to facilitate the learning process for your learners and their journey through Bloom's Taxonomy (Figure 1), using the formal curriculum. It is not enough to simply expose your learners to the information. You must foster engagement with the material through exploration, relevance, connection and context. This engagement enables learners to truly learn and apply the content as described in the upper levels of Bloom's Taxonomy and therefore function as volunteer educators capable of fulfilling the EMG Mission (Figure 2).

Tennessee Extension Master Gardener Mission

"Improve the lives of Tennesseans through horticulture education delivered by a dedicated and skilled volunteer network."

The hidden curriculum, defined by The Glossary of Education Reform (2013) as, "the unspoken or implicit academic, social, and cultural messages that are communicated to students", must also be addressed. In this case, we aim for the hidden curriculum to be centered around volunteerism and service. While this objective is mentioned in the formal curriculum of intern training, its implementation takes place in the interactions interns have with their local leadership. This is when the volunteer manager role takes center stage.

As the volunteer manager, you serve as the volunteers' guide along Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Figures 3 and 4) rather than Bloom's Taxonomy, though the two are connected. In this role, your objectives are to create a welcoming environment by demonstrating cultural norms and expectations and to encourage and empower volunteers to serve their communities as defined by the Tennessee Extension Master Gardener program mission. It is also your responsibility to praise and recognize volunteer engagement and ensure local compliance with all Tennessee EMG volunteer operations and processes as defined in the TEMG Volunteer and Coordinator Handbooks.

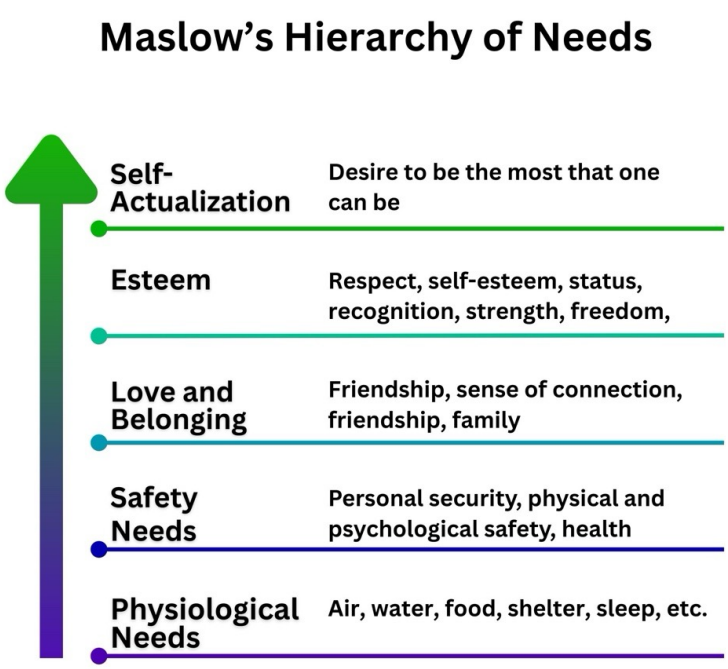


Figure 3: *(Kurt, 2020)*



Figure 4: *How Maslow's Hierarchy is utilized in our curriculum and local leadership's responsibilities for its implementation*

Take a Seat

Effective teaching begins long before the first class and involves more than just lecturing. It begins with an engaged, hands-on facilitator who utilizes best practices to meet the foundational needs of the learners and invites them to explore and engage with the content in a meaningful way. Best practices in science-based education can be summarized by the acronym SEAT: Set up the classroom, Encourage belonging, Acknowledge unique needs and ideas and Teach (Duncan, 2019).

Table 1. SEAT- Best Practices for Science-Based Adult Education (Duncan, 2019)

SEAT	Description	How This Concept is Used in Our Curriculum	Levels of Bloom's Taxonomy (B)/ Maslow's Hierarchy (M)
Set up the Classroom	• The structure of the classroom includes everything from the physical arrangement of the room to expectations and class schedule. • Take future activities, student needs and safety concerns into consideration.	• Intentional arrangement of content • Accessible meeting location • User-friendly training website • Promote engagement and volunteerism.	• M- Safety Needs
Encourage Belonging	• Science-based topics can be intimidating to many learners, but the right learning environment can help. • Provide students with opportunities to make decisions about their learning experiences when appropriate, encourage independent thought and facilitate productive discussions.	• Local relationship building • Accessibility compliance • Self-paced activities • Discussion questions • Encourage camaraderie and association membership	• M- Safety Needs, Love and Belonging
Acknowledge Unique Needs and Ideas	• When planning lessons, accommodate as many learning modalities as possible. • Factor in learners' possible misconceptions and biases. • Consider what enabling information or scaffolding strategies may be needed. • Look for ways to connect the material to the learners' unique life experiences.	• Self-paced activities • Guiding questions • Discussion questions • Hands-on activities that utilize different skills • Create opportunities for application of the material and unique volunteer work.	• M- Love and Belonging • B- Remember, Understand, and Analyze
Teach	• More appropriately, facilitate. In science topics, students are best served by educators who invite them to inquire about a topic, challenge them to tackle new problems and equip them with the tools to make their own discoveries. • Utilize research-based instructional methodologies.	• All independent learning, reading, activities and lecture introductions • Lecture • Facilitated, hands-on activities • Case studies • Train competent and engaged volunteers.	• M- Love and Belonging, Esteem, and Self-Actualization • B- Understand, Analyze, Apply, and Evaluate

Our Curriculum

The Tennessee Extension Master Gardener intern training curriculum utilizes best practices for science-based instruction and an established curriculum model to provide the most effective and efficient training possible while leaving room for local flair and educator creativity. This curriculum utilizes the 5E Model of Instruction, a highly engaging and experiential model that is well-suited for the broad adult audiences we engage with in the Extension Master Gardener program. Each element of our curriculum is carefully designed to fulfill one or more of the 5 Es, and completion of each one is necessary to achieve the required 40 hours of instruction.

Rodger Bybee says, "The 5E Model of Instruction includes five phases: Engage, Explore, Explain, Elaborate, and Evaluate. It provides a carefully planned sequence of instruction that places students at the center of learning. It encourages all students to explore, construct understanding of scientific concepts, and relate those understandings to phenomena or engineering problems" (San Diego County Office of Education, 2022).

Table 2. SEAT- 5E model of instruction (San Diego County Office of Education, 2022)

The 5 E's	Description	How we utilize this in our curriculum
Engage	First, a question or scenario is presented to spark interest in the topic. This phase activates the students' prior knowledge of the subject and prepares them to meaningfully engage with the content.	• Guiding Questions
Explore	In this phase, learners are given the opportunity to explore the material and complete an activity. This phase begins to provide relevance and context for the given topic.	• Handbook Reading • Self-Paced Activity
Explain	This phase is completed in two parts. First, the instructor asks students to share about their experience, takeaways, etc. Then, the instructor provides additional information to fill any knowledge gaps or to clear up any misconceptions.	• Lecture Introduction • Agent-led Discussions in class about the reading and self-paced activity • Lecture
Elaborate	In this phase, the instructor facilitates the application of the new information that was just learned. This may include a hands-on activity or discussion about how the topics covered relate to other concepts or to their own gardens.	• Hands-on Activities • Discussion Questions • Note: each hands-on activity lesson plan utilizes all 5 E's.
Evaluate	This phase may be occurring simultaneously with the other phases if the instructor is utilizing a formative assessment approach. However, it may include a formal, summative assessment. Either way, this phase should be used to assess learner progress and adjust or improve future instruction.	• Hands-on Activities • Discussions • Volunteer Opportunities

The Agent Coordinator

The curriculum is the house, but the agent makes it a home.

The frameworks described in this document provide the foundation of the Tennessee Extension Master Gardener program, but you, the agent coordinator, bring it to life. The intern training curriculum has been carefully crafted to meet the educational goals of the program while creating space for agent creativity and talent to shine. Each component plays a part in developing competent and engaged volunteers, but the work of volunteer development does not end with intern training. Our training model aims to reduce the demand on agents' time and resources so that they can more meaningfully engage with their volunteers, both new and experienced. This lessened demand allows agents to utilize their gifts and local talent to further develop their associations and provide meaningful experiences and learning opportunities for all volunteers, not just interns.

Altogether, this training model enhances the partnership and collaboration between state leadership (specialists and workgroup members) and local agents in which we are continually building a robust and engaging volunteer program that equips volunteers to serve and educate their communities on our behalf.

For more information about the collaboration between local coordinators and state leadership refer to Appendix 1 or speak with the state coordinator.

References

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UT Extension Publication W099 Tennessee Extension Master Gardener Program Volunteer Handbook: **https://utia.tennessee.edu/publications/wp-content/uploads/sites/269/2023/10/W099.pdf**

Appendix 1.Tennessee Extension Master Gardener Program Structure

Together, the state and local Tennessee Extension Master Gardener programs endeavor to: 1. Develop and promote educational opportunities and programs that support the educational mission of Tennessee Extension in local communities. 2. Provide high-quality, consistent intern and ongoing training to support knowledge, retention, and impact both locally and statewide. 3. Provide opportunities for learning, service, leadership and recognition for volunteers. 4. Provide leadership to support local groups, volunteers, and agents in aligning with statewide EMG program goals, resources, and guidelines. 5. Support EMG volunteers as partners in planning, implementing and evaluating the Tennessee EMG program in their counties, cities, and communities.		Tennessee Extension Master Gardener Program **overall structure and policies**	**Intern training** and foundational **Leadership and Applied Research Training**	**Local educational programming** to equip and engage EMGs	**Local outreach** and educational service projects to educate stakeholders
	State Extension Master Gardener Program and EMG Workgroup	Develop program structure and guidelines using agent coordinator and volunteer feedback and in consultation with UT Extension leadership.	Develop and build curriculum and consistent training models for intern training and formal continuing education on leadership (201) and applied research (301).	Provide research-based resources that support local education and training.	Provide the framework for educational and outreach areas to support local impact and realistic expectations.
	County Agent EMG Coordinator	Attend yearly coordinator in-service and provide feedback on programs and guidelines to the TEMG program leadership and EMG workgroup.	Teach crucial interactive intern training components to build engagement and facilitate the application of content in a way that supports your local outreach.	Work with local group to plan CEU events that meet local needs and be the communication link between your group and Extension colleagues to ensure win-win collaborations.	Lead and oversee local horticulture outreach conducted by volunteers and provide feedback, as well as collaborative support to EMG program state leadership/workgroup for needed resources and training.
	Local EMG volunteers as a part of local group/ association	Work with agents to implement guidelines and provide feedback to EMG state program leadership and MG workgroup.	Support intern training by engaging with local agent coordinator on interactive and service focused elements of the consistent training model.	Work with local agent coordinator to develop and conduct CEU events that meet local needs.	Plan and conduct impactful community outreach in collaboration with the local agent coordinator to support the positive image of the TN Extension system and the Tennessee EMG program.



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