

People Problems: Managing Conflict Locally

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1:00 - 3:00pm

Breakout Session 1 (internal scenarios) - half groups focus on internal scenario 1; other groups focus on internal scenario 2, but if they finish their scenario they can discuss the other

Breakout Session 2 (external scenarios) - half groups focus on external scenario 1; other groups focus on external scenario 2, but if they finish their scenario they can discuss the other

SCENARIO 1: Local Unit Hires New Agent (internal)

The local EMG unit has been without an agent for two years. In the absence of an agent, the local EMG association picked up the slack and kept the EMG projects running. The volunteer leadership continued managing the program according to OSUE principles, guidelines, and policies. A new agent has now been hired and will be responsible for managing the EMG program. The new agent is not aware that the association has a training committee who has already scheduled the next training but they did so without involving the new agent in the process. Additionally, as the agent learns how the association is organized and functions, they discover the association has a substantial amount of funding which had been raised under the auspices of the extension master gardener program name. The agent further learns a significant portion of the funds are used to support organizations and projects outside the scope of extension and the local unit's plan of work. The agent begins to suggest the association consider funding extension-specific projects or organizations that more closely aligns with the extension mission locally. How would you handle re-aligning the relationship between the local extension office and the leadership of the local association? What are some first-steps you would recommend? What could you suggest that might prevent this from happening again or how could you mitigate against this pattern in the future?

SCENARIO 2: Volunteer - Agent/Coordinator (internal)

You are mentoring a new coordinator in another locality. With good intentions in mind, the coordinator begins to delegate responsibilities to several of the EMG volunteers. The intent is to create a collaborative environment between the coordinator and the volunteers to more effectively manage the local program and empower volunteers to take the lead within the parameters or expectations provided by the coordinator. The coordinator does a pretty good job of outlining the roles and responsibilities and expectations they have for the volunteers taking on specific tasks within the program. Similarly, the coordinator clearly shares the power with the volunteers taking on leadership roles and the coordinator clearly equips these volunteers with the authority they need to fulfill their jobs. Despite the best of intentions and

clearly defining expectations and adequately sharing power and authority, the coordinator is not accustomed to delegating tasks and begins to focus on how each volunteer is going about accomplishing their assigned tasks. The coordinator focus has shifted from what needs to be done to how the tasks are being performed. The volunteers perceive the agent as being too controlling and they view the coordinator as a micromanager. This begins to create discord and tension between the volunteers and coordinator. The coordinator begins to second guess his/her decision to delegate the work. Volunteers begin to second guess their decision to take on a leadership role. What advice would you give the coordinator who you are mentoring?

SCENARIO 3: Volunteer - Community Partner (external)

A local community partner approaches your local EMG group to collaborate with them on a project which clearly fits within the local extension office's and EMG group's plans of work. All parties involved are very enthusiastic about the project and jumps right into doing the work. Before too long, the EMG volunteer serving as the project leader and primary point of contact for the community partner is confronted by the community partner that they are not fulfilling their commitment relative to the project. The community partner feels like the local EMG group has over promised what they would do and take responsibility for and is under delivering on what they are actually doing. Additionally, the community partner was expecting the local EMG program to carry the financial burden for the project. The EMG volunteer serving as the project leader realizes time was not spent outlining exactly who was going to be responsible for specific aspects of the project. What recommendations would you have for the EMG volunteer to address the community partner's expectations and how they can move forward in a positive manner? If you were to create a "Lessons Learned" from this as the EMG volunteer coordinator, what recommendations would you make for potential future collaborations with community partners? (NOTE TO FACILITATOR -- if the participants do not come up with these suggestions, you can point out the following options:

- Clearly define the roles and responsibilities of both parties; be specific
 - mutually agreed upon
 - Do not lose sight of the details
 - Who will be financially responsible?
- Role/Value of MOUs or MOAs (if appropriate)
- Techniques to manage the enthusiasm
- Mitigate unrealistic expectations or commitments
- Review for potential conflicts of interest
 - Do any of the EMG volunteers have vested interest in the community partner?
 - Do any of the EMG volunteers stand to gain personally from the partnership?

SCENARIO 4: Volunteer - Client (external)

A local client contacts the local EMG help desk asking for help with multiple issues in their landscape including insects, diseases, and weeds and they need help with some gardening work. The client expects the local EMG volunteers to be available to assist with all of their needs. The local extension office has a policy that EMG volunteers are not available for individual client site visits and this policy has been in place for a long time. The EMG volunteer responding to the client understands the policy and explains to the client that if they wish to send in samples or photos the EMG Help Desk will do their best to advise the client on what courses of action they should take to resolve the problems. The client is offended by the volunteer's refusal to come to their home. The client aggressively asserts that the extension office and the EMG program are public entities and supported by tax dollars. They further demand the local extension office to provide them with the services they are expecting. The client threatens to contact the city council or county board of supervisors or their state delegate or their federal representative if their expectations are not met. As the local coordinator, how would you deal with this situation and advise the volunteer who received the call? How do you prepare volunteers to handle this in the future? What are the lessons learned and key talking points you can provide to local EMG volunteers in anticipation of this happening to them personally?

- How do you respond?
- How do you de-escalate the client and the situation as you gently assert you cannot meet their request?
- How can you turn this into a teachable moment to explain who we are and what we actually do?
- How can you tactfully say "That is not my job" without actually saying it that way?
 - We are not able to do site visits
 - We do not have the bandwidth or capacity to conduct site visits
 - We do not have sufficient resources (similar to above, just a different way of saying it)
 - Site visits are outside the scope of what offer the community