

Rutgers Master Gardener Program Survey Compares Volunteer, Staff and Faculty Program Perceptions

Ruth Carll, Rutgers State Leader, Consumer Horticulture (ruth.carll@rutgers.edu)
Belinda Chester, Program Coordinator II (belinda.chester@rutgers.edu)
Leslie Ortega, Intern, (lmo83@scarletmail.rutgers.edu)



Research Hypothesis

The Rutgers Master Gardener volunteers and Rutgers Cooperative Extension staff and faculty have differing perceptions of the program’s structure and participant motivations, skills and qualifications causing strain in the volunteer / employee relationship.

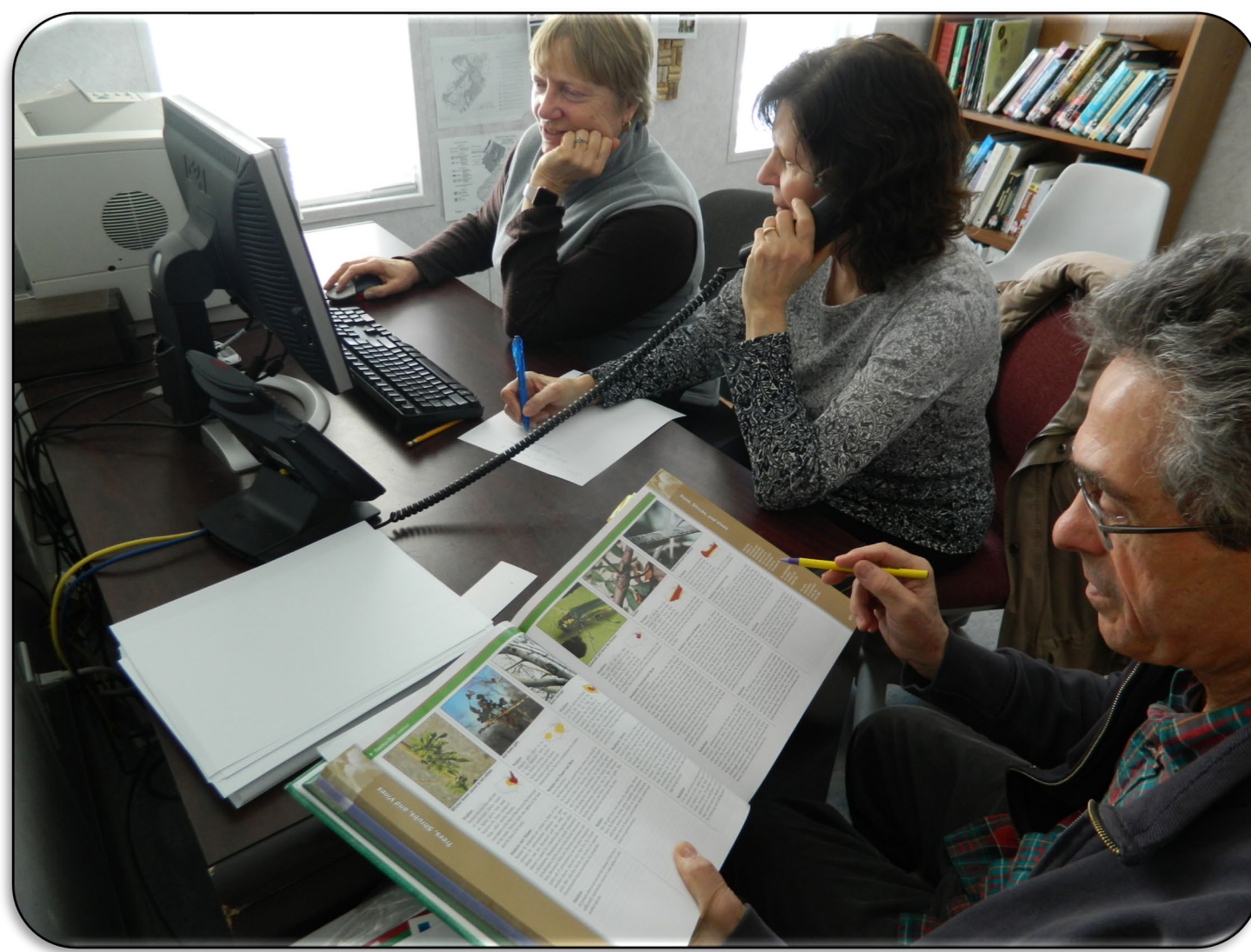
Methodology

Surveys were sent to all active volunteers and all staff and faculty within the Rutgers Master Garden program. Surveys were anonymous and consisted of true/false, multiple choice, rank order, sliding scale, matrix tables, agree/disagree and free answer questions. Responses were collected and analyzed in Qualtrics.

SURVEY	Respondents	Responses	Pool	%
Rutgers Master Gardeners	Active Volunteers	988	2250	44%
Rutgers Staff/ Faculty	RMG Program Faculty/Staff	40	42	95%

The Association of Leaders in Volunteer Engagement (ALIVE) provides the first standard of volunteer-based organization best practice for success is “Ensuring readiness and strategy.”

You’ve achieved this standard when volunteer engagement and management of volunteers are integrated into your organizational culture through mission and vision statements, program assessment, strategic plan, organizational structure, risk assessment for volunteers and community, and policies and procedures.



Volunteers and staff work together to provide outstanding service to community members through the Helpline.

VOLUNTEER KNOWLEDGE OF PROGRAM STRUCTURE

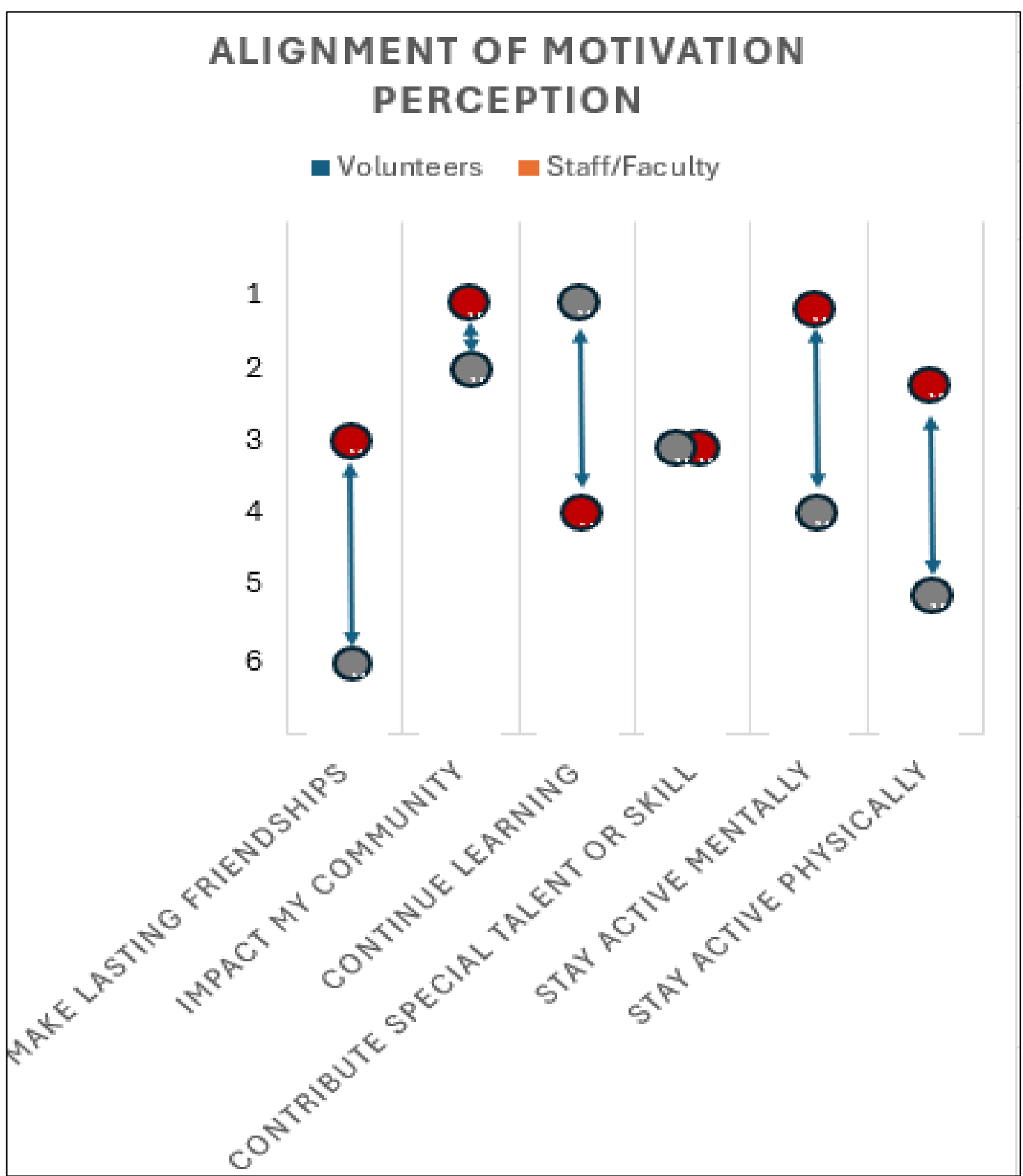
When asked to identify the organization which leads the Rutgers Master Gardener program, 48% of volunteers correctly identified the Extension, however, 53% incorrectly identified a variety of other potential leaders including themselves, the county commissioners and “I don’t know who administers this program”.

Organization	Percentage
Rutgers Cooperative Extension	48%
A separate, non-profit group (501c(3))	22%
My county's Master Gardener Executive Board	20%
My county's elected leadership	4%
State Master Gardener Advisory Board	3%
I don't know how the leadership of the program is structured	3%

MISALIGNMENT OF PERCEPTIONS OF MOTIVATION

Volunteers were asked for motivations for joining and remaining in the Rutgers Master Gardener program and this was compared to staff/faculty predictions of the volunteers’ responses. Results show a misalignment in staff/faculty understanding of volunteers.

RANK	STAFF/FACULTY PERCEPTION OF VOLUNTEERS	VOLUNTEERS’ TOP 3 MOTIVATIONS
1	Socializing with like-minded people	Support environmental sustainability
2	Recognition for being an RMG	Access to science-based continuing education
3	Access to science-based continuing education	Socializing with like-minded people



When asked about barriers volunteers may experience toward volunteering in the Rutgers Master Gardener program, volunteers and staff/faculty were aligned. Both groups identified “training is not offered at a convenient time” and “volunteer opportunities are not available when I can volunteer”.

PERCEPTION OF VOLUNTEER COMPETENCY

The volunteers and Rutgers staff/faculty are not aligned in their perceptions of the volunteers’ knowledge level after certification as a Master Gardener. A national survey of staff/faculty from programs in other states matched that of Rutgers. Volunteers believe that the training is appropriate for delivering mastery-level knowledge yet approximately half believe they can pass the final if taken now.

Upon becoming certified Master Gardeners, the volunteers are truly 'masters' of gardening?

Group	Yes	No
NATIONAL	6%	94%
RUTGERS	4%	96%
VOLUNTEERS	48%	52%

VOLUNTEER: TRAINING PROVIDES THE RIGHT LEVEL OF CONTENT FOR GRADUATES TO BE CONSIDERED HAVING MASTERY-LEVEL KNOWLEDGE

Response	Percentage
Agree	81%
Disagree	19%

VOLUNTEER: IF I TOOK THE TRAINING FINAL EXAM TODAY, I WOULD PASS IT WITHOUT HAVING TO STUDY

Response	Percentage
Agree	47%
Disagree	53%

STAFF/FACULTY ENJOYMENT OF WORKING WITH VOLUNTEERS

When staff/faculty were asked if they like working with volunteers, 44% indicated a neutral response, 41% positive response and 15% negative response. The Rutgers Master Gardener program is key to the Extension achieving its goals and yet 59% of staff report neutral or negative enjoyment in working with them.

How Do Your Opinions Align With Rutgers Employees & Volunteers?

Be part of our ongoing study! Use this QR code to answer 10 questions about volunteer management best practices and Extension. The survey will take approximately 5 minutes to complete. Your participation is greatly appreciated!