

Okanagan Master Gardeners Report to AGM - September 2017

When the Okanagan Master Gardeners were established in 2004, the abbreviation for this organization in the bylaws appeared as OMG. Who knew that this would result in confusion about whether we meant "Oh My God" or Okanagan Master Gardeners.

The debate about changing the abbreviation to OKMG was put to rest when a marketing consultant advised us to capitalize on the OMG abbreviation. The marketing consultant was engaged to review our publicity strategies for events such as Seedy Saturday held in Kelowna, our Basic Training Program, clinic events and projects. On the advice of this consultant, Okanagan Master Gardeners will use a branded message format for disseminating information.

The strategic planning activities of other chapters and the MGABC kick started a strategic planning process within OMG. One of our Master Gardeners with experience in conducting such sessions for healthcare organizations volunteered to provide an orientation to the process as well as to facilitate our first step in this process. Prior to the first session all participants were given reading material - MGABC and OMG bylaws and policies.

The results of the first strategic planning session were reviewed and summarized by a consultant outside of the OMG. The consultant's insights revealed that we had neglected to highlight our strengths. The participants in the Strategic Planning Session are tasked with creating an action plan for two goals. The third goal - review of the organizational structure was tabled pending completion of the action plan for the first two goals. The OMG executive is reviewing how to engage membership in this process.

The SWOT (strength, weakness, opportunities and threats) analysis identified public recognition as a weakness. However, since 2009, OMG projects and individual members have received a total of eight community awards - three of which were for Gardener of the Year. The other five awards were for participation in advice clinics that include "Hands On" gardening activities. In addition, involvement in organizing a Seedy Saturday and participating in other Okanagan Seedy Saturdays has significantly raised the profile of the OMG.

Attrition of members is under review to determine why there is a lower retention rate for some class years than others. The number of administrative hours required to operate the OMG is of concern as members may not be interested in volunteering for executive positions with a large time commitment. If it is possible to streamline administrative processes resulting in reduced administrative hours, succession planning might be less arduous. More volunteer hours could be devoted to our mandate - public education.

Some of the Master Gardeners in Training have presented gardening information at libraries. This is a volunteer opportunity that will be expanded. OMG faces geographic challenges as well - extending from Salmon Arm to Osoyoos. However, having experienced Vancouver traffic our challenges appear manageable.

While communication was identified as an issue, further discussion identified that the real issue is that communication of events has not resulted in increased member participation. Thank you to the Vancouver Master Gardeners for hosting the 2017 MGABC AGM. I am grateful to the Chapter representatives who have shared information and documents.

Submitted by Anne Marie Bell, Okanagan Chapter Representative