

Membership in Master Gardener Organizations

May 2004

Informal comments from the Office of the WSU Attorney General

As a Washington State entity, WSU cannot compel someone to join a Foundation or any other organization because freedom of association is a constitutional right. There is no provision in the MOAs for such a practice. Thus, WSU has not given any organizations authority to automatically put WSU volunteers on their membership lists and to do so would violate the constitutional rights of those volunteers.

I recommend that WSU Extension make it clear to every volunteer that their position as a volunteer with WSU does not depend on their joining or not joining any other organization. While we value our partnership with these support organizations, it should be explained to the outside organizations that Extension is not authorizing any automatic or compulsory membership and further clarifying that participation in WSU activities must not be dependent on joining the outside organization.

Organizations affiliated with WSU Extension in any county should examine their by-laws or operating procedures to be sure they do not practice or include provision for defacto membership. A simple letter of invitation could be presented to volunteers inviting them to join one of these affiliate organizations.