Community Garden Managers Group Procedures

**Purpose:** The purpose of the Community Gardens Managers Group is to provide input on program visioning and objectives. The Group provides feedback and makes decisions/recommendations on amendments to Program rules and forms, budget priority setting and assistance with conflict resolution and member grievances. All issues require simple majority vote by those Group members present at the Meeting.

**Participants:** The Managers Group will consist of all current and alternate Volunteer Garden Managers.

**Term:** Two years. No term limits apply.

**Meetings:** The Managers Group convenes semi-annually in October and March. Special meetings will be scheduled as needed with a minimum of one-week advance notice. Manager Group Meetings will be held in accordance with Florida’s Open Meetings law (Section 286.011, Florida Statutes). Requirements include public noticing through Sarasota County’s weekly calendar, taking and retention of minutes, and meetings being held in a facility that can accommodate the public.

**Nomination and Selection:**

1. **July** - Any Member who wants to serve as a Garden Manager and hold a position on the Managers Group may indicate their interest during the annual renewal cycle. Garden Managers serve a two-year term, one year as an alternate followed by one year as a primary Garden Manager. The number of garden managers is based upon the number of plots in a garden, with one Garden Manager and one alternate for every 20 plots.

2. **September** - When there are more nominees than vacancies at a given garden, a simple majority vote will be held to select the Garden Managers. Garden Managers will be selected by the members of the specific garden in which the manager will serve. One vote per plot will be allowed. Only active, paid members will be allowed to vote. Voting will be open for a minimum of 15 days. Late ballots will not be counted.

3. **October** - Any newly elected positions will become effective on October 1 of each year, with previous officers relinquishing their responsibilities at that time.

**Rules:** The Community Gardens Program is based on procedural guidelines and rules defined in the Membership Agreement (attached hereto), which all Members and Managers are required to follow. Day-to-day management, including issues such as pesticide usage, hours, and prohibited activities, is governed by this Agreement. Upon plot assignment, Members sign a written Agreement acknowledging these program requirements. The Managers Group shall use existing program rules as a basis for all decisions made. Nothing herein is intended to bypass or negate signed written agreements between individual Members and Sarasota County. Refer to the current Membership Agreement language for details.

**Amendments to Garden Rules:** From time to time, membership rules may need to be amended to allow for improvement of program efficiency and expansion. In those cases, the Managers Group shall have the authority to
formally propose rule changes, subject to Extension approval. Rule changes will become effective during the following Renewal cycle.
Conflict Resolution and Grievance Procedure

As with any organization, challenges will arise, and our Community Garden program is not immune. However, when there are clear guidelines for handling those concerns, the result can be a more positive outcome. On occasion, conflicts and complaints cannot be resolved informally. For these situations, a formal process has been established.

Steps for Resolving Conflict in Community Gardens

Step 1
In the true sense of a “community” garden, disagreements should be handled informally through discussion with the parties involved to the greatest extent practical. When a member has a grievance, the first step is self resolution. Members should first attempt to directly work out issues with the other party.
- All involved should listen carefully and with respect.
- Collect facts including dates, time, place and nature of incidents and how you attempted to resolve the situation.

Step 2
If members are unable to resolve concerns themselves, the next step is to ask the Garden Manager for help. Many gardens include more than one Manager. If the grievance is with a Manager, the issue should be addressed with another Manager or alternate when feasible.

Step 3
If the members are unable to resolve issues together and the Garden Manager is not able to help, the parties involved should inform the Program Coordinator of the facts through the attached Grievance Form. The Program Coordinator will refer the issue to the Community Gardens Program Managers Group for consideration at the next meeting. When necessary, a special meeting will be called. Conflicts involving a Garden Manager will require that the Manager in question recuse themselves from discussing or voting on the matter. Garden members should be aware that the Group's decisions will stand, even if the Program Coordinator does not agree with the decision. Resolution may include Membership Termination and/or relinquishment of Manager duties. In such cases, the Program Coordinator will notify the affected parties in writing of the Group's decision and the effective date of termination.

Step 4
If members want to appeal the Managers Group’s decision, Members can request reconsideration of the decision by the County Extension Director (CED) within two weeks of the decision. At his/her discretion, the CED may include others in the complaint review process, including but not limited to, the Director of Parks and Recreation. The CED will review written documents and make a decision within two weeks of the request. Management reserves the right to redirect the process back to the previous steps. The decision made by the CED is final and cannot be appealed.

This procedure will be provided to all current and future Members upon request.
Community Gardens Program Governance Background

During the development of the processes described herein, staff conducted nationwide research of successful community garden programs. Additionally, University of Florida experts provided feedback on governance structure and conflict resolution. Similar guidelines have proven successful in many experienced volunteer organizations. The following sources are representative of the research conducted prior to establishment of procedures:

Sources:

UF/IFAS EDIS Publication: Engaging Volunteers through ISOTURES: Sustaining Volunteer Programs
UF/IFAS EDIS Publication FCS9245/FY832: Working with Nonprofit Organizations in Community Settings: Governance, Florida Statutes and Legislation
Atlanta's Park Pride Program http://www.parkpride.org/get-involved/community-programs/community-gardens
Seattle Department of Neighborhoods P-Patch Program (www.seattle.gov/neighborhoods)
South Orange Community Garden Group (http://southorange.org/communitygarden/files/GardenRulesRegs2013.pdf)
Warren St. Marks Community Garden (http://wsgarden.org/wp-content/docs/Bylaws_rev030313.pdf)
Washington Community Garden Association (http://washingtongarden.wordpress.com/by-laws/)