Iowa Master Gardener

Volunteer Reporting System

Help and Reference Guide

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Supported & Recommended Devices

The Master Gardener Volunteer Reporting System (VRS) was designed to be used on mainly larger screen devices, like desktops and laptops. While the VRS displays and works well on many sizes and varieties of tablets, it is not recommended for mobile phone devices and their smaller screens. It will work, but it will not be an easy experience and could be a bit frustrating. If you use a mobile device primarily to connect to the internet, you may use it to submit your hours and manage your profile, but trying to run reports and do any kind of analysis will be difficult at best.

We plan, in the next version of the VRS (3.0), to tailor the system more to the mobile experience, especially phones. In the meantime, use your old laptop if you have one, or your newer tablet, or even your desktop but use your phone as a last resort. (Mobile internet connections speeds also play a role in this, as they are slower in many rural areas. See below. *)

Browsers, Operating Systems & Internet Speeds

The VRS is a web-application which means it is accessed using a browser while connected to the internet. You can access it from any browser on any device however, we don't recommend heavy use on a phone.

Whether you have a Windows computer or a Mac, as long as it's Operating System is relatively up to date and you use a modern browser such as Chrome, Edge, Firefox, or Safari, you should experience few problems while using the VRS. We do not recommend older versions of Internet Explorer, in fact, the VRS doesn't support most versions of IE.

The average internet speed in the U.S. is currently 189 Mbps download and 23 Mbps upload. The FCC's minimum definition of broadband is only 25 Mbps download speed and 3 Mbps upload speed, but the FCC recently proposed raising it to 100/20 Mbps. If your connection speeds are close to these averages and recommendations, you should be able to navigate the VRS well. If they are slower than 1Mbps (some DSL providers are in the 300 – 700 Kbps range) you should still be OK but might notice some reports take more than several seconds to load, especially if they are 3 or 4000 rows or more. But for most of you, this will not be an issue. *When mobile connection speeds are 3G or less, the VRS will be very slow.

The VRS is basically a big, dumb database.

The most often requested support has to do with forgotten passwords and failures to login to the VRS. This is mostly because as humans, we see the similarities between the password, "MyPassw0RD" and "myPassword" and feel they should both be acceptable to the login form. But the VRS is like a *literal* mind and will only accept *exact duplicates*. So, if the username or password are not **exactly** what is stored in the database, then the login won't work. A common phrase heard in support is, "the system doesn't like my password" or "the VRS won't let me in." The VRS is a big, dumb database and it has no feelings or concerns about you and your trouble. It just compares what's in the login form to what it has stored and if they aren't **exactly the same in every way**, it says, "Nope, that's not what I have here. Can't accept that."

Where do I login?

To use the VRS, you first need to have an account, which is created for you when you become a student intern in the program. We'll use your email for your username and set a temporary password, after which you will reset it to something you prefer. This username/email and password combination will be your user credentials until you change them for any reason.

You can login from 2 places:

1. You can visit the Home Page of the VRS: https://mastergardenerhours.hort.iastate.edu and click the "Sign In" button.
2. Once you're on the Log In page, submit your username (email address) and your password to access your VRS account and start adding your hours.
3. You can also go directly to the Login form/page.
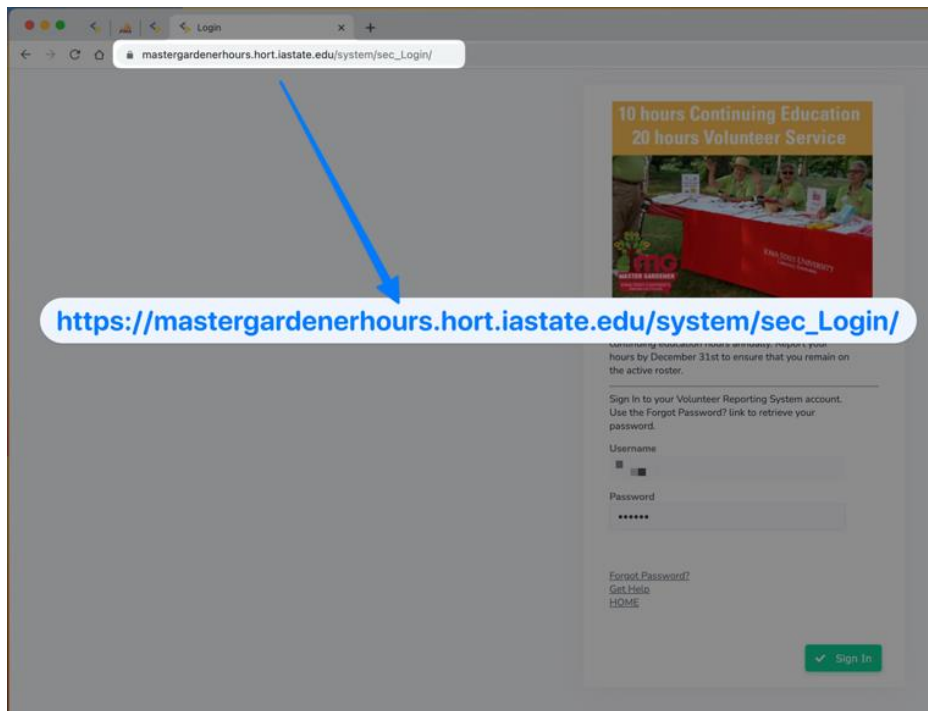
You can navigate directly to the Login form using the link below:
https://mastergardenerhours.hort.iastate.edu/system/sec_Login/

Save the VRS to your Favorites (Bookmark)

If you want to Bookmark the VRS (Save to Favorites), the preferred URL is the direct link to the login form, above. DO NOT BOOKMARK YOUR DASHBOARD/HOME PAGE, WHICH IS ACCESSED *AFTER* A SUCCESSFUL LOGIN. The reason for this is the system must "know" who you are to present the correct information from your account and if you don't login each time, you get error messages.

Forgotten Password

Should you forget your password, use the "Forgot Password?" link under the login form, submit your username (email address) and it will be sent to you. If you continue to have trouble, you can use the "Get Help" link to send a support request. These are generally answered within a day or two.
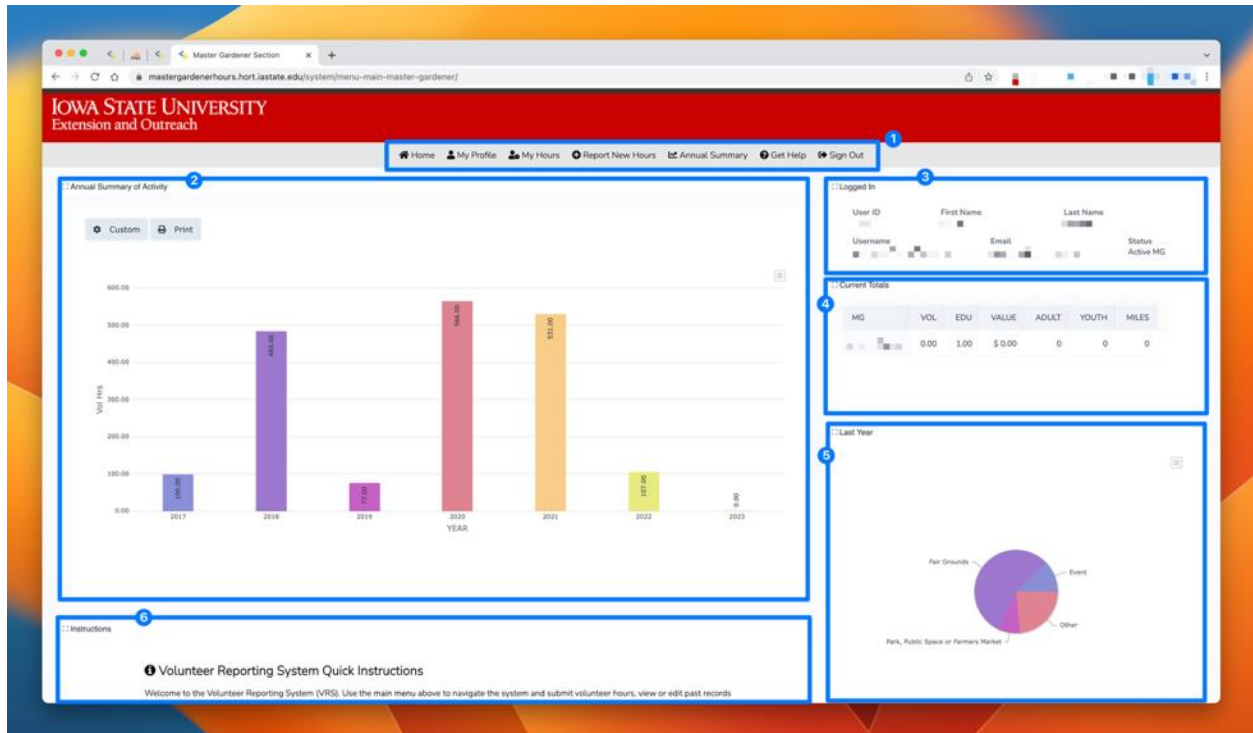
The Dashboard/Home Page

The Home Page

After a successful login, the VRS redirects the user to their Home Page, which displays content pulled from their account. The login is a necessary process to make this happen.

The Home Page is composed of 3 primary sections:

1. The Header, which contains the logo for Iowa State Extension and Outreach,

2. The Main Menu, which contains links to the applications available to the logged in user,
3. And the Dashboard, which contains several sections itself, each of which is called a "Widget."

Above: the Home page containing the Header at the top (logo with red background), the Main Menu (1) just below it and the Dashboard (2 – 6) which takes up the majority of the page.

The Main Menu

The Main Menu (or just "Menu") is the primary way one navigates the VRS, accessing the applications available to report hours, view and edit hours, manage one's profile and see ongoing statistics of one's involvement over a period.
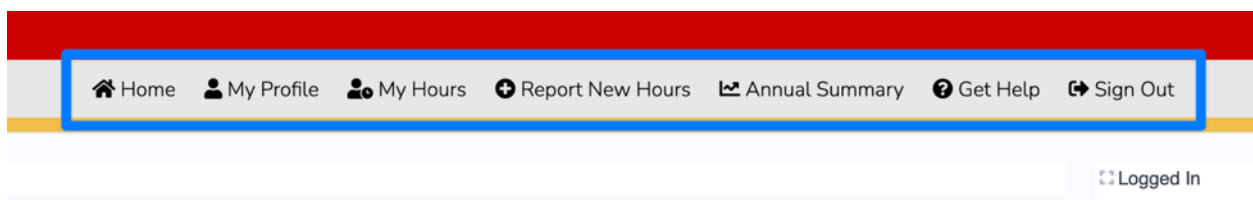
- Home – the landing page of the user's account, contains the menu and the dashboard.
- My Profile – use this form to update your contact information, change your email/username and password and view current progress in the program, such as milestones achieved, background check status and maintain your list of skills and interests.

- My Hours – a report of all the hours you have submitted in your time in the program, which is searchable, filterable, sortable, exportable, and configurable in other ways. **Use this report when you need to find a record to Edit or Delete.**
- Report New Hours – this is the form you fill out with the details of your volunteer work and educational activities in the program.
- Annual Summary – a summary report showing your progress during the time you are active in the program. The report shows annual values for Volunteer and Education hours, Hours $ Value based upon references to IndependentSector.org, and Adult and Youth Contacts you've submitted.
- Get Help – Access the Tech Support request form and this User Guide.
- Sign Out – use this link to log out of your session in the VRS. This is recommended each time work in the VRS.

The Dashboard Widgets

As mentioned earlier, the Dashboard is comprised of 5 "Widgets", or mini applications, each drawing information from the MG's account and displaying it in small boxes, which are re-sizable by clicking the small bracket icon at the top left of each section.

ANNUAL SUMMARY OF ACTIVITY

The Annual Summary of Activity is a chart representing your total Volunteer Hours over the lifetime of your involvement in the Master Gardener Program.

It consists of a Toolbar, The Chart Area, and the Export Options.

- The Toolbar contains the Custom Button, which allows the user to change the metrics displayed on the chart. For example, one can add Continuing Education hours to the Volunteer

Hours represented or show Contacts instead. The Print button opens the Chart in a new window, optimized for printing.

- The Chart Area shows the metrics (hours, contacts, miles, etc.,) as a vertical bar graph.
- The Export Options offer other ways the chart can be published including as photo formats (.jpg, .png) or PDF.

RIGHT SIDEBAR WIDGETS

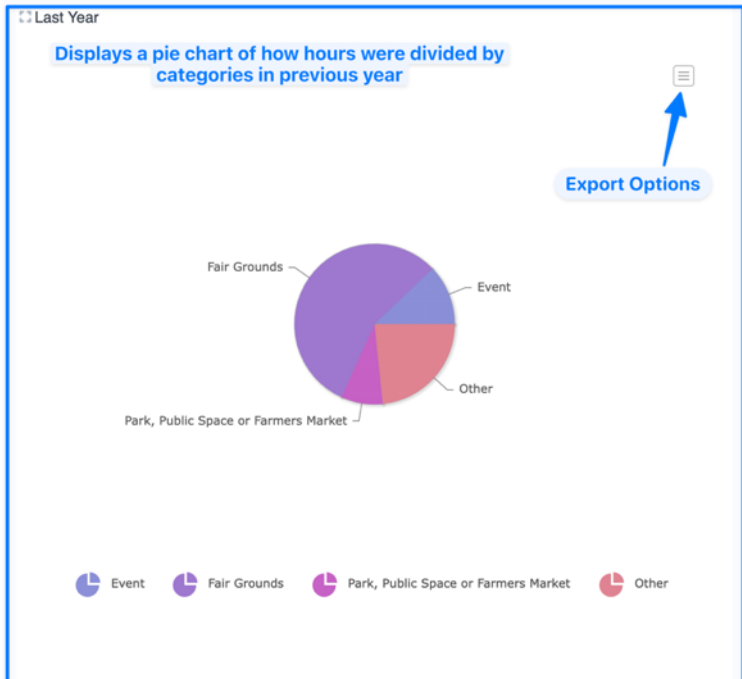The widgets in the right sidebar area include Logged In, Current Totals and Last Year.

- Logged In displays the user's pertinent credentials,
- Current Totals show a running account of hours and other values for the current reporting year and
- Last Year shows a breakdown of volunteer hours by Category for the previous reporting year.

THE INSTRUCTIONS WIDGET

The Instructions Widget gives easy-to-access information regarding the Menu and provides a way to view video tutorials which have been produced about the VRS. It is best viewed at full screen, as displayed below.

Above: The Instructions Widget displayed at full screen but clicking the bracket icon at the top left of the section, when displayed at the bottom of the dashboard.
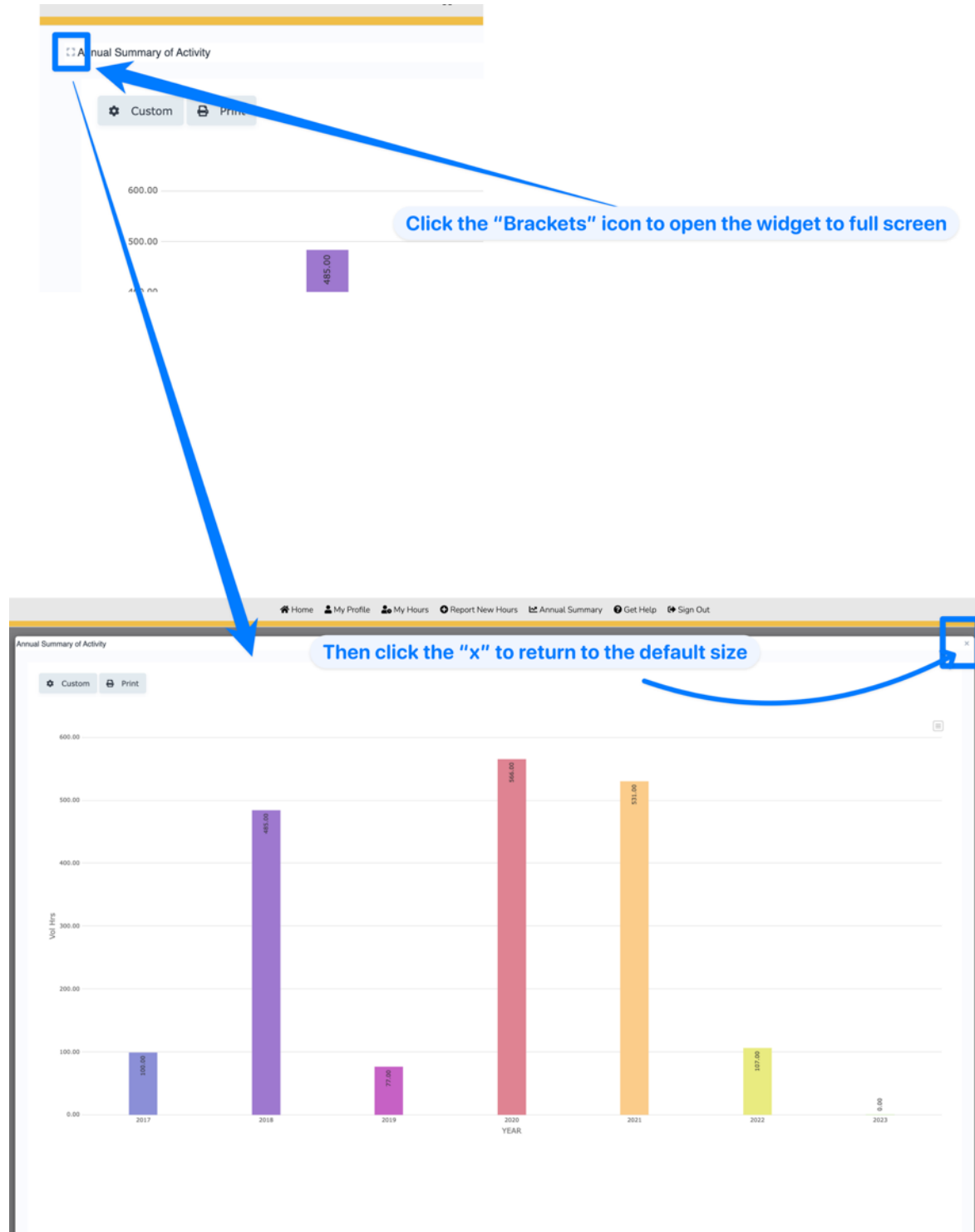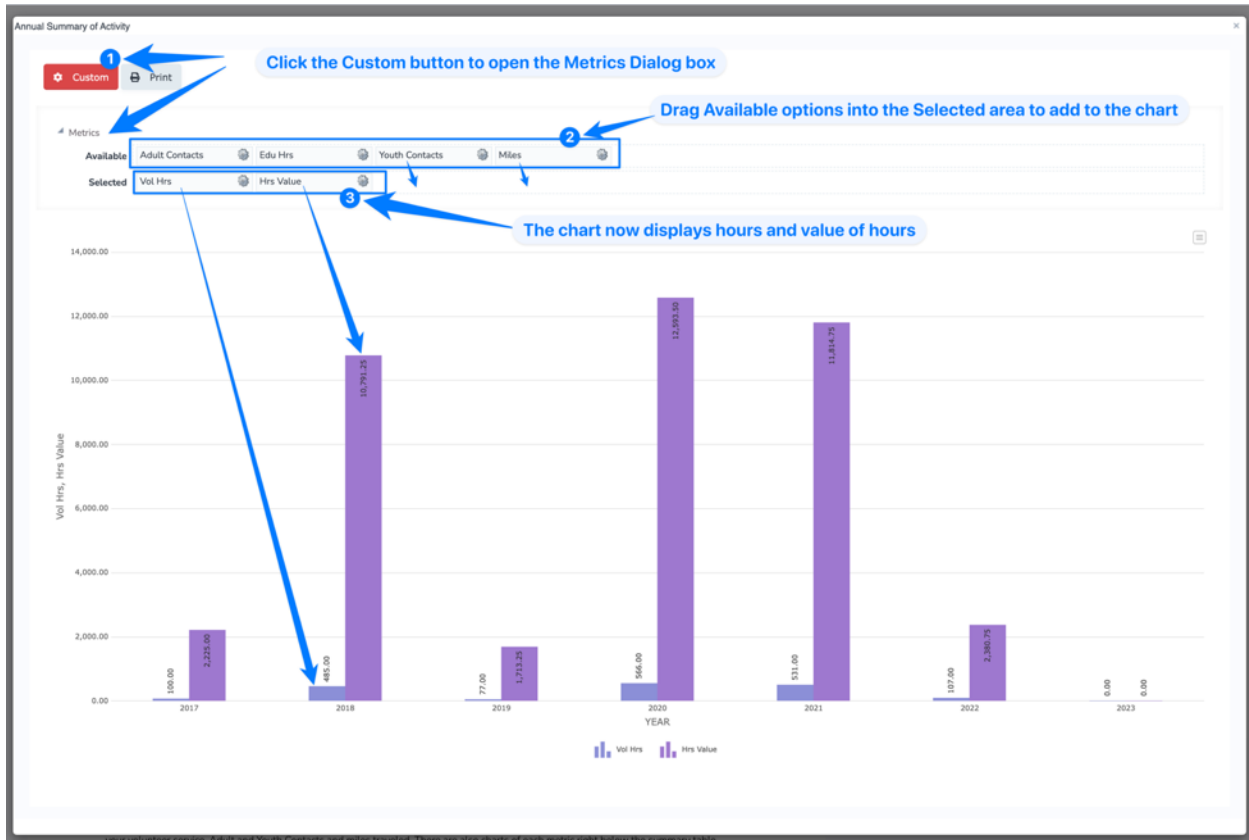
ILLUSTRATION: OPEN WIDGET TO FULL SCREEN

Click the "Brackets" icon to open the widget to full screen

Then click the "x" to return to the default size

My Profile

The first menu item to the right of "Home" is "My Profile", which directs to the My Profile form. This is the application which allows the user to update their contact information, set their demographics, maintain their user credentials, check on their progress and select and modify their skills and interests.

The form is divided into Tabs for each of the above functions. Navigate between tabs to view and edit the information on the tab. *(Note: the information on the Progress Tab is disabled for editing and can only be changed by an Extension staff member in your county or at the state level.)*

The following illustrations serve to acquaint you with the application you will use whenever you need to modify your account.

The Personal Info Tab

Whenever a menu item (1) is clicked (or tapped in a mobile device), the application opens in a tabbed interface, just below the menu (2). Each application will remain open as other menu items are clicked. One can then navigate among open tabs if desired.

The My Profile application has a set of tabs, too (3), which breaks down the user's profile information into categories of Personal Info, Demographics, User Credentials, Progress and Skills & Interests.

The Demographics Tab

For some of you, these questions may not have been answered and are blank, as in the illustration above. In that case, when you open your profile to edit your address, for example, you'll be prompted to update your demographics at the same time. An error will occur if you attempt to update your profile without also checking the * Required field(s) on this and other tabs.

The demographic data is important to the program and helps us determine if we are achieving our goals of serving a variety of communities. While the questions are required, if you prefer not to share this information, you can select, "Prefer Not to Answer" on any of the questions.

The User Credentials Tab

On this tab you can update your email, username (which is usually the same as your email), change your password and view your current Auth Level (permissions to access the VRS). The Acct Active field represents whether your account is enabled or not. It will always be set to Yes, otherwise you would not be able to login to the system.

At the top of the form is your User ID, which is the unique number set for your account and integrates your profile with all the other applications. **You need only one user account in the VRS.**

The Progress Tab

You can't edit any of the fields on the Progress tab as they are for viewing only. If you feel any of the information is outdated or inaccurate, contact your county's Extension Master Gardener Coordinator to have it changed.

Skills & Interests

Maintain and update your Skills and Interests on this tab.

My Hours Report

The My Hours Report application is primarily used to look up records you've already submitted so they can be edited (because of wrong data entered) or deleted (if the whole record was submitted erroneously.) But the report can also be used to analyze your volunteer and educational activity and has several ways the data you've stored in the VRS can be manipulated, if you choose to do so. Many of these features are subjects for a more advanced tutorial or VRS Guide, so we won't be covering that here. But you do need to know the basics and that's what we'll cover with the following illustrations and instructions.

My Hours Report – Overview

The report has several sections:

1. The Filters – these provide quick ways to filter (add or remove) certain records from the report and include Date (year), Location, Category, Subcategory (local projects), Approval Status and Location (Other).
2. The Search functions – include Quicksearch which acts like a Google search, looking for the terms submitted somewhere in the report, and the Search button, which gives a more granular version of search through the Search form.

3. The Pagination functions – determine the number of records viewed on a page, permits scrolling through the report and indicates how many total records there are, and which ones are being viewed at the time.
4. Options and Export – including the advanced features of Options (grouping and summarizing records, advanced sorting, and report configuration through adding and removing columns) and Export which allows the report to be printed or exported to a spreadsheet format.
5. The column headings have a double-arrow icon which, when clicked, sorts the report either in ascending or descending values for that column.
6. The report body, which is sorted by most recent record by date, and which contains the link to the individual record for editing or deleting (the red number in the far-left column.)
7. And a second set of Pagination options at the bottom of the report.

The Filters

The filters can be used to narrow down the report results to a year, a location or category. Multiple selections can be made as well. The report will automatically regenerate after Apply is clicked. The filters are removed the same way they are added.

The Quicksearch Function

The Quicksearch field will search the report for text you submit by hitting Enter or Return on your keyboard

Use the Quicksearch function to perform, well, a *Quicksearch*. Type in your term or terms and either hit the Enter or Return key on your keyboard or click the magnifying glass within the search field, to the right. The report generates automatically, finding and returning the results displaying terms wherever they are found.

The Search Form

On the other hand, use the Search form (accessed through the green Search button) to be more specific about what you are looking for. Here you can search for records of a certain date, category, location and more. You can find records within a date range, say May 1 through September 1 of a given year. You can also look up records which fit an Hours value, say all records with 3.5 Volunteer hours, or greater than 5 hours.

Clicking the green search button next to Quicksearch at the top left of the report will open the Search form, right.

A more detailed search of the Hours Report can be done by using this form. For example, next to Date, the parameter can be changed to Greater Than and the date filled in with any day of a month. After Run Report is clicked, the report will only show records after that date.

If you do a particular search often, you can save the parameters using the Save Filter option and then use it the next time you need to filte the report that way.

Above: The Search Form permits more specific searches including by date or date range, hours description or volunteer/education hours which equal or are greater or lesser than a specific value.

The Hours Report Toolbar

The pagination options allow you to change the number of records viewed on one page, scroll through pages of the report and see which records you are viewing at the time.

The Options button features Advanced functions to group and summarize the report as well as advanced sorting and column configuration.

The Export function will save the report in CSV, Excel or Print formats. The PDF function does not currently work.

Above: A more detailed look at the toolbar and its functions and features. The Options button contains mostly advanced features many will never need.

The Hours Report Edit Link

The My Hours Report is, as we've mentioned, primarily for finding and editing records submitted in an earlier time. For that purpose, the Edit Link exists. This link, which corresponds to each record, is represented by the ID for the hours record. When clicked, it will open the record in an editable form.

The red numbers on each row are links to the hours form which allows editing of the record, or if necessary, deletion.
Clicking any of the number links will open the hours form in Edit mode where the record can be updated and re-saved with the changes.

Once the form is opened, changed are made and the record is saved.

Sorting My Hours Report

In the header of the report are up and down arrows which allow simple sorting by the column name. By default, the report is sorted by DATE DESCENDING, which puts the most recent hour records on top.

The double arrow icons can be clicked or tapped to sort by that column, either in ascending or descending values. The report sorting is by default, Date Descending, putting most recent records at the top.

Reporting New Hours

Now we come to the most important feature of the VRS: the hours report form. Most of you will head to this item, add your hours, and log out. That will be the extent of your use of the VRS. And that would be OK! The main reason we have an online reporting system is to…report hours!

When you have completed filling out the form, click either "Save" button to save it.

+ Save

Work Details

Education or Volunteer Hours?
To report education hours, select "Continuing Education Requirement" from the Category drop down. The Education Hours field will appear at the bottom of the form. Any other selected Category will reveal the input fields for volunteer hours and contacts.

Instructions
Fields marked * are required.
Some select fields (drop down boxes) need to be selected for others to populate. The "?" holds hints and further instructions for a field.

At the top of the hours report form are instructions.

Date * ?
03/17/2023

The date can be typed in or the calendar date picker can be used. The system will insert the slashes; only the numbers need to be typed.

Location * ?
--Select--

Category * ?
--Select--

Select the Location, Category and Local Project, if any.

Local Project or Sub-Category ?
--Select--

Description ?

These sections open based upon the Category selection above. If Continuing Education is selected, then the Education block opens with fields to be filled in. The Volunteer block opens if a Volunteer Category is chosen.

Volunteer

Education

Administration

Admin use only. Sets the date the record was stored and/or updated.

* Required field(s)

+ Save

Reporting Hours – The Date Field

It's important to remember that this reporting system can and should be flexible.

"Date" can have several applications. It does not necessarily only pertain to service on a single day. If you volunteer over a period of a week or month and your service can be attributed to one category, you may use "Date" as a week ending or month ending date. There is no need to input 5 separate records for work that took place over a week's time.

Example 1:

> You volunteer 5 days per week doing administrative duties at the Extension Office. Use "Date" as the week ending date and input your total hours for the week. In "Description", submit "Weekly service at Extension."

Example 2:

> You work at the Demonstration Garden every Wednesday from 9 am to noon. Use "Date" as the month ending date and input your total hours for the month. In "Description", submit "Monthly hours at Demo Garden."

Example 3:

> You are the committee chairman for the annual Garden Tour. Over six months' time, you put in 60 hours on the project. Using the date of the tour as your "Date" you submit 60 hours. In the "Description" you submit "Garden Tour committee - planning and execution."

Reporting Hours – Category and Local Projects (Subcategories)

When you select a Category the Local Projects (Subcategories) options change to fit your selection. For example, if you select Demonstration Garden as the Category, you can expect to find a list of gardens in your county which have been approved for volunteer work. In some counties, the list of Local Projects and Subcategories is not as complete as in others. So, sometimes you may not have a Local Project option at all. In that case, just leave it blank and move on to the next field, which is Description.

Reporting Hours – The Description Field

While not a required field, the Description of your work can assist your coordinator in determining whether to approve your hours or not. It's not meant to be a book (or even a chapter) but do add enough information to indicate what was done and whether it met basic criteria of volunteering for the category. How much is too much data? Let your coordinator be the judge.

The Tooltip

Next to some field titles in the Report Hours form (for example Description) are small "buttons" with a question mark (?) inside. (This is true of other forms in the VRS.) If you hover your cursor over them (or on a mobile device, tap them) a "tooltip" will appear with instructions or a tip about the field. These are very helpful the first few times you submit your hours.

Editing an Hours Record

Once you've submitted a record of your hours, should you ever need to edit it or delete it, you'll need to go to the My Hours Report, find it and click its corresponding ID. When you do that, the hours form will open in "Edit" mode. It looks a little different, so we've included it in this guide.

1. Add New – opens a blank form to start a new record.
2. Save Changes – save the edits you are working on.
3. Copy – is like a Save As button. Opens a new record with the same information filled out but not saved. Make a change and save as a new record.
4. Delete – removes it.
5. Back – go back to the My Hours Report.
6. Work Details.
7. Metrics – hours, miles, and contacts.
8. Admin – no need to worry about it.

The Edit Hours form has several buttons at the top and bottom.

The work details section when it's filled out.

This is a volunteer hours record, so the Volunteer block holds all of the information.

The Admin blocks shows the record status, Date Approved and Dates Submitted and Last Modified.

The annual summary report shows your progress in the MG program over the time you've been involved in it.

1. The top section displays your hours, miles, $ values and contacts over the years, with grand totals at the bottom.
2. The first chart shows volunteer hours.
3. Next is Education Hours.
4. Hours Value is next – based on values from independentsector.org.
5. Adult Contacts and
6. Youth Contacts are the last 2 charts.

The Get Help Form

Whether you access this form from the Login page (while not logged in) or after you've accessed the VRS, use it to ask a question, submit a bug or problem you've encountered. Allow a couple of days for a response.

To Get Help or Technical Support, Fill Out and Submit the Form Below

Name *

First Name   Last Name

E-mail *

ex: myname@example.com

Phone Number

Area Code   Phone Number

I'm having a problem with: *

○ Forgot Password
○ Forgot Username
○ Trouble Logging Hours
○ Other

Describe Your Problem *

Be as detailed as possible, please.

☐ I'm not a robot

Submit - Send Help Request

When filling out this form, all fields except phone number are required.

Please make sure your email address is entered correctly as that is how we will reply to you.

Be as complete and detailed as possible in your Description, especially if it's a bug report. That way, we don't need to ask you more questions to figure out what's going on and this saves everybody lots of time.

In Closing…

We hope this Guide to the Iowa Master Gardener Volunteer Reporting System has been helpful to you and thank you for taking the time to read it.

We are always open to suggestions about the VRS and welcome your comments. Please use the Get Help form to submit them. Reports of bugs are forwarded to the developer who tries to troubleshoot and fix anything reported as soon as possible.

Any software application is subject to improvements, additions, and modifications and the VRS is no exception. We'll continue to adopt the best ideas to improve the VRS and make it as user-friendly and as "newbie-friendly" as we can.

Additional References

Below are some additional references regarding the VRS and the MG Program in general you might find helpful.

Master Gardener Program Main Website

What counts as volunteer hours?

The Iowa Master Gardener Tutorial Video Series (YouTube)

Master Gardener Volunteer Manual

Volunteer System Help Form

Search for Excellence Award

Pesticides Policy

Upcoming Events