

# Frequently Asked Questions about the Virginia Master Naturalist Volunteer Management System (VMN-VMS): Help for Administrators

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## Where do I input Advanced Training hours?

You have two options for setting the system up to accept Advanced Training hours.

(1) If it is important to your chapter to track specific advanced training opportunities, then just load them in like projects, give them the category of “Administrative”, and then make sure that when people enter their hours, they put the hours down as “Continuing Education” and not volunteer service. You can help make it clearer by including Advanced Training in the project name (e.g. “Advanced Training: Wildlife Mapping”, “Advanced Training: Virginia Aquarium Program”).

(2) If it is not important to your chapter to track specific advanced training opportunities, then just create one project that has the name “Advanced Training” and the category of “Administrative.” All Advanced Training hours for 2011 and beyond can be attributed to that project. When a volunteer enters his/her hours, there is also an open field called “Event Description” where he/she can write more details about what the training was exactly. That field gives you some ability to look at what the Advanced Trainings were (though not easily sortable because different people will describe the same thing in different ways.)

It is far easier to go with #2 except if there are particular advanced trainings that you really want to keep a record of and be able to report on in the future. Otherwise, every advanced training will end up as part of your project list, even if it is something that is only going to happen once, and then you will have to go in and inactivate it later.

## How can I organize my projects so that they show up in a logical order?

It is helpful if you start each project name with a code that helps organize the list. This will also help you when it comes time to run reports on your chapter’s activities. Your code may indicate the type of project (education, citizen science, stewardship, administrative), the type of activity, and maybe even the partner organization. For example, you could have several invasive species removal and trail maintenance projects, named as below.

- S1a-Invasive plant removal in County Parks
- S1b-Invasive plant removal at DCR Natural Area Preserve
- S1c-Invasive plant removal at DGIF Wildlife Management Area
- S1d-Invasive plant removal at other sites
- S2a-Trail maintenance in County Parks
- S2b-Trail maintenance at DCR Natural Area Preserve
- S2c-Trail maintenance at DGIF Wildlife Management Area
- S3c-Trail maintenance at other sites

This sort of coding is not required, but you may find it to be quite helpful.

## How do I enter advanced training hours prior to 2011?

From your previous records, assemble a list of chapter members and a total number of Advanced Training hours that each person completed prior to 2011. In the VMN-VMS, create one project called “Advanced Training 2006-2010” or something similar, and give it the category of “Administrative.” Go to the “Manage Roster” page. For each volunteer, click on the “Hours” link to the left of his/her name. Then click the “Add Hours” link that appears near the top of the screen. Enter the information as described below.

Field	What To Type/Select
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Event Description	Type "Advanced Training Hours Prior to 2011"
Event Date	Select 12/31/2010
Apply To Project	Select the "Advanced Training 2006-2010" project that you created.
Miles Driven	Leave as 0
Volunteer Hours	Leave as 0
Continuing Education	Type the total number of advanced training hours the volunteer completed prior to 2011.
Population Served	Leave blank

### How do I enter volunteer hours prior to 2011?

From your previous records, assemble a list of chapter members and a total number of volunteer hours that each person completed prior to 2011. In the VMN-VMS, create one project called "Volunteer Service 2006-2010" or something similar, and give it the category of "Administrative." Go to the "Manage Roster" page. For each volunteer, click on the "Hours" link to the left of his/her name. Then click the "Add Hours" link that appears near the top of the screen. Enter the information as described below.

Field	What To Type/Select
Event Description	Type "Volunteer Service Hours Prior to 2011"
Event Date	Select 12/31/2010
Apply To Project	Select the "Volunteer Service 2006-2010" project that you created.
Miles Driven	Leave as 0
Volunteer Hours	Type the total number of volunteer service hours the volunteer completed prior to 2011.
Continuing Education	Leave as 0
Population Served	Leave blank

### Should I enter the educational contacts prior to 2011? If so, how?

It is not absolutely necessary for you to enter the educational contacts from 2010 and earlier. These data are on your chapter's annual reports, if you provided them. However, it is nice to have all your records in one place, so you may choose to enter them into the system following the procedure below.

Choose one chapter member who completed hours prior to 2011. Go to the Member Roster and click on the Hours link next to that person's name. Click on the activity listed for 12/31/2010, "Volunteer Service Hours Prior to 2011". On the page that comes up (where that person's total volunteer hours prior to 2011 should be indicated), enter all of the contact demographic information for your whole chapter prior to 2011. It will look, in the system, as if this one volunteer made all of those educational contacts, but that is not important. The important factor is that the contacts will be in the system and will be attributed to the years before 2011.

### Does the system automatically email members when I add them?

You can choose whether the system automatically emails the members with the login information, or whether you do this manually. Most will prefer to do it manually, so that your members do not log on before you are ready for them to do so. To turn this feature off or on, go to "Member Roster", and then click "Add New Member" at the top. You will see a line that says either "Email

notifications will NOT be set. Turn this feature on" or "New members will receive an email with access instructions. Turn this feature off." Click the underlined words to either turn the feature on or off.

### **Will the new system automatically keep track of certification status?**

Unfortunately, no. In December/January each year, I will remind the system administrators to go in and update the status for their members so that it stays current. You will have to go to "Hour Reports" and set the date to be 1/1/11 through 12/31/11, and then "Create Excel". The resulting spreadsheet will have the total number of advanced training and volunteer hours for each member just for 2011, so you can easily sort it and identify those folks who have achieved 40+8. Then, you will go in for each volunteer and update their status as appropriate. If you have many members, this may take up to an hour. When someone achieves certification for the first time, you will also need to go into the system and manually change his/her status to Certified. Volunteers cannot change their own status.

### **Our training course typically ends in May, so our new trainees have until May 2012 to complete their first 40 hours of service and 8 hours of advanced training for their initial certifications. How can I use the system to help me keep track of this?**

The system is not really designed for this, unfortunately. You might want to put the month and year of each member's certification expiration (if he/she is certified) or the due date for certification requirements (if he/she is not yet certified) in the "Comments" field available for each member on the Member Roster. This will give you a reminder of when each person should be due to complete the initial requirements for certification.

### **Will the new system automatically keep track of the lifetime milestone achievements?**

There isn't an alert when someone hits a milestone. However, it is very simple to get a report of total number of hours. Go to "Hour Reports", leave the dates blank, and then "Create Excel" and you will get a spreadsheet with each member and his/her total number of advanced training and volunteer hours. From there, you can easily sort it by volunteer hours so that you can quickly identify those who are over each milestone level.

### **What happens when someone is a member of more than one chapter?**

When the person logs on to the system, it will give him/her the option of choosing one chapter or the other. The person can have a different status and different contact information in each chapter's roster.

### **Is there a place in the system to indicate whether a member has paid his/her dues?**

No, sorry! Your treasurer will have to keep track of this information, or you can use the "Comments" field in the member roster.

### **How many system administrators should our chapter have?**

At minimum, your chapter advisor(s), chapter membership chair, and chapter record keeper (if a different individual) should be administrators. Keep in mind that you can also have administrators who only have access to part of the system (just membership, just projects, etc.) So, your projects chair should probably be an administrator for the projects section of the site, and your newsletter editor should probably be an administrator for the newsletter section of the site.

### **I have members who live in other states, but the system will only let me choose Virginia as the state.**

Yes, that is a current problem with the system. I have requested that UC Davis fix this problem, but I do not know exactly when they will be able to work on it. Meanwhile, you could just include the state abbreviation as part of the city name in the roster so that you can at least easily identify the correct states for each member.

**Who should be included on our membership list? Should we include members who have moved away or left the chapter for other reasons?**

It is recommended that you include everyone who has taken your basic training course in your membership list. This will allow you to keep an accurate count of the total number of people you have trained. If members have moved away or officially withdrawn from the chapter, you can set their status to “inactive”.

**Are there certain projects I should keep separate?**

Any projects for which you want to be able to track hours separately need to be separate projects in the system. For reporting services, it would be helpful if projects with our sponsoring agencies are not lumped together with other projects. For example, if your chapter regularly maintains a trail at a Virginia state park and also at a local county park, it would be helpful to have the trail maintenance at the state park listed as a separate projects (since the Department of Conservation and Recreation is one of our sponsoring agencies.) You may have certain local partners to whom you would like to be able to report a total number of hours.

There is no limit on the number of projects you can have in the system, though keep in mind that volunteers will have to scroll through the list to choose a project each time they enter hours. If you organize the projects in a logical order, then having a long list of projects will not be problematic.