

So Am I a VMN or Not? Important VMN Program Misunderstandings A Brief Summary with Action Items

Refer to the resources at the end for more in-depth information about this very important topic to share with your members.

Throughout this past year, we at the VMN state office and your chapters have heard many incorrect assumptions about our fundamental VMN program logistics from both volunteers and Board members in all our Chapters. Many of these misunderstandings especially came to light during the Roster Status Clean-up Project this year when your chapters got to talk to many of your lapsed members and those not reporting their earned hours.

We feel it very important, therefore, to correct and clarify the many misunderstandings going forward, and need your assistance with this.

Using a "true/false/not sure" quiz-style approach with anonymously-answered polls, I explained a few of these major misconceptions that are common across chapters. True statements are below, including some that were asked as part of the quiz along with the percentage of those Board members attending the talk who answered that question correctly. (See how you would have done.)

A key takeaway is that amongst those 60 Board members participating in the quiz, even a fair percentage of them were unsure or incorrect in what they believed about our program fundamentals. That gave us all a real-time example of what your members may also be misunderstanding.

Also, these confusions about how the VMN program works has **affected the retention and activity of chapter volunteers** all across the state, as we all also discovered during your member conversations.

Some of Most Common VMN Program Misunderstandings - below are true statements -

- An active enrolled VMN volunteer does not have to recertify any given year (80% of participating BOD answered this correctly)
- Dues payment alone does not mean 'active' status (77% answered this correctly)
- **VMN program is not a club – it's a volunteer program of VCE (Important!)**
- If classified as 'inactive', the now former member can no longer volunteer as a VMN nor identify as one (only 41% answered this correctly)
- Not all chapters collect dues, nor does the VMN state office require this (72% answered this correctly)
- Reporting even a few hours does matter to "bigger picture" – for VMN and other programs' success and survival

But finally knowing about the misunderstandings is a good thing. That means we all can start correcting and clarifying these in your chapters. No one really tests volunteers on it all to make sure they are correct in their thinking about the VMN program logistics.

My CALL-TO-ACTION to you - it's so important to address.

Your assistance is necessary, please, to help us clarify and get rid of the misunderstanding of these important principles. To get everyone on the same page, so to speak, since so many volunteers seem to process and understand these differently.

Actions to Work On

1. Please review the basic VMN program foundations and logistics with your members.

Don't assume everyone understands. Maybe have a quiz via zoom poll or trivia-style contest, add in your newsletter maybe as a "did you know?"
And please don't hesitate to ask us at the state office any questions you're unsure of or just want us to look over something as you create all of this.

2. Let me know what volunteers are confused about, or any concepts or terms that you think may be problematic, along with any suggestions for better clarification. (Email Terri tkeffert@vt.edu)

We brainstormed WHY some of these confusions were happening and ways to help clarify them. I ask you to keep an ear and eye open in your chapter.

3. Please encourage all your Board members and Chairs who did not attend the talk to review the attached or listed resources.

Then at your next Board meeting, use that as a starting point for a **discussion** about what to do regarding misunderstandings. (The resources are listed at the end)

It's very important that our leadership, at the very least, understand and can explain to others the correct VMN program fundamentals. Many of your leaders will probably have 'ah-ha' moments like you may have had. It's all about making things better in our program.

I can assure you that you will get more response from those not reporting hours AND better retention of volunteers once they truly understand. And they will then see that it's about the big picture – not just about being rewarded.

Thank you all for your help with this!

PRESENTATION RESOURCES TO SHARE WITH BOARD AND CHAPTER MEMBERS

- *Powerpoint and speaker notes of "So Am I a VMN or Not?" Leadership Month presentation to use with your members if you wish (on our VMN state website <http://www.virginiamasternaturalist.org/leadership-month-2020.html>)*
- *PDF document of "So Am I a VMN or Not?" powerpoint presentation with speaker notes (attached; on VMN state website above)*
- *NOTE: A recording of the November 6, 2020 Leadership Month presentation is also located on the above website. The important key message of the talk is relayed on the recording as well. However, you may find it preferable to instead share the powerpoint or PDF with your Board and membership, due to the Zoom-related logistical distractions and unrecorded poll questions and chat box responses that were a large part of the presentation.*