

Virginia Master Naturalist Program Recognition Items in 2021 rev



An Explanation for Procedures in 2021

As you all know, the VMN program transitioned to a new volunteer management platform in 2021. VMN is now using Better Impact and 2021 will be our first year using this new system for reporting recognition items. This document will outline how we are handling this process for 2021.

One of the benefits of this new platform is that Better Impact allows staff at the State Office to pull reports that were not possible in the old system. What does this mean for chapters? It means significantly less work for chapter leaders in regards to recognition items. It means no more Certification Spreadsheets! That's right. Better Impact allows us to pull the data and make updates easily so we will be doing that the State level from now on. Please read through this document to understand our new procedures and what is expected of chapters.

Please note that we are using the same procedures for the 2021 end-of-year reports that we used for the 2021 mid-year reports. We understand that this process was not as smooth as we had hoped and in early 2022, we will be revisiting all of your suggestions and feedback to update and refine this process as we continue to learn the best ways to utilize Better Impact.

One point of feedback that we received during the mid-year reports process was that the VMN State Office did not explain very well what we expected chapters to do with the reports that were sent. We apologize for this oversight and offer the following clarification:

- We are not expecting chapters to re-run the reports (though we are happy to give you directions on how to do that if you are just the type of people who want to do it).
 - The data in Better Impact should be such that we can tell who should be getting recognition items.
 - However, at this point we know that the data in Better Impact isn't complete just yet and so we want chapters to double check us
- If you have a big chapter where it is difficult to have individual knowledge of people then you may only be able to glance at it and say 'looks good'.
- A smaller chapter might know of some individual circumstances that need to be addressed.
- There is always the option to just trust us!
- Really, these reports are meant as a courtesy so that you can have input if you want to do so before we ship everything out AND to make sure we didn't miss something that you know should be looked at.

Nametags (no changes for 2021)

Those individuals who complete the VMN Basic Training Course are eligible for a VMN nametag. Nametags are ordered by chapters through the VMN State Office. Nametag Information and Ordering Procedures are in a separate document and can be found here: <http://www.virginiamasternaturalist.org/volunteer-management.html>

Diplomas (no changes for 2021) – **Basic Training Course Diploma (Virginia Master Naturalist Members)**

Chapters may choose to provide diplomas to those individuals who complete the VMN Basic Training Course. The participants may appreciate receiving a diploma during their last day of class, particularly if the chapter is holding a graduation event. A template for a Basic Training Course Diploma is available on the VMN state website. The template is a Microsoft Word file and has places to fill in the Chapter's name, the graduate's name, the signature of the Chapter Advisor and/or other chapter leaders, and the date. The diploma confers the title of "Virginia Master Naturalist Member", and it should be provided only to those individuals who have completed the course requirements and satisfactorily passed the assessment. Basic Training Course Diplomas are filled in and printed by the chapter when they

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are ready to give them to their Basic Training Course graduates. The template can be found here:
<http://www.virginiamasternaturalist.org/volunteer-management.html>

Certificates – Certification (Certified Virginia Master Naturalists)

The VMN State Office will provide state-level certificates to those individuals who complete all the requirements to become Certified Virginia Master Naturalists. This certificate is provided upon initial certification and confers the title of “Certified Master Naturalist”. Volunteers who re-certify each year will receive the recertification pin for that year. Initial certification does not receive a pin, only this certificate. Certificates will be sent from the state office twice a year, in February and August. Exact timeline and procedures are outlined on pages 2-3 of this document. **Please note that in order for the State Office to run accurate certification reports, it is important for the chapter to mark who has graduated from Basic Training in Better Impact by December 31.**

Each volunteer who achieves certification will also be able to see a corresponding badge in their Better Impact profile. These badges are updated by the VMN State Staff in July and January. We understand that chapters would like to do this more often and will be working on a way to make that happen.

Pins

Recertification Pins

In 2011, we began issuing a limited-edition recertification pin for Virginia Master Naturalists who have qualified for recertification. Recertification pins will be mailed in one batch to each chapter in February based on the number of volunteers recertifying according to hours entered in Better Impact. Volunteers whose initial certification already extends through that calendar year are not eligible for a recertification pin unless they have done an **additional** 20 hours of volunteer service and 4 hours of continuing education in the same calendar year that they completed their **initial** certification requirements. For example, if a volunteer completes the requirements for initial certification in April 2021, s/he is a Certified Virginia Master Naturalist through the end of 2022 and is not eligible for the 2022 recertification pin. If that same volunteer completes an additional 20 hours of service and 4 hours of continuing education between May 2021 and December 2021, s/he may receive a 2022 recertification pin as recognition for going above and beyond the requirements. Recertification pins will be distributed once a year to each chapter following the procedures outlined on pages 2-3 of this document.

*NOTE: During December 2021, The VMN State Office will be adding a field in Better Impact that will note the date a volunteer initially certified, if they have at all. This way, we will be able to tell if a volunteer is **initially certifying** or if they are **recertifying** after a break. The VMN State Office will be updating this information for each chapter. You do not need to fill in this field.*

Milestone Pins and the VMN Golden Circle

We have special milestone pins for volunteers who complete 250, 500, 1000, and 2500 hours of service. At 250 hours, the first milestone, the volunteer receives a silver VMN base pin along with a rocker that says ‘250 hours’. For subsequent milestones, the rocker is changed out to one that says 500 hours, 1000 hours, etc., but the volunteer keeps the same original base pin. *Each volunteer who achieves a milestone will also be able to see a corresponding badge in their Better Impact profile. These badges will be updated by the VMN State Staff in July and January. We understand that chapters would like to do this more often and will be working on a way to make that happen.*

When a volunteer achieves 5000 hours of service, they become part of the VMN Golden Circle and will be sent a gold VMN base pin. The gold VMN base pin denotes the 5000-hour achievement (rather than a rocker). As for previous

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rockers, volunteers can choose to return them to the state for reuse/recycling or they can keep them to be reused with their gold VMN base pin, should they achieve that milestone. This means that a gold VMN base pin + a 250-hour rocker will denote that a volunteer has 5,250 volunteer hours.

Milestone pins will be distributed twice a year to each chapter following the timeline and procedures outlined on pages 2-3 of this document.

Volunteers May Decline Recognition Items

Volunteers are welcome to decline receiving certificates and pins. Some individuals do not want them. We are now going to keep track of this preference in Better Impact. We have added a question to everyone's profile in Better Impact noting if a volunteer wants to receive recognition items. Everyone will default to YES for this question.

Based on our records at the State Office, we have updated the profiles of volunteers who have opted out of pins in the past and changed their preference for receiving recognition items to NO. We will not send pins for these people.

Timeline for Receiving Pins and Certificates

IMPORTANT NOTE ABOUT PACKAGES

Check your package as soon as it comes in to make sure the items you received are correct. If the package sits for four weeks and only gets checked the day before your chapter-wide recognition event, there is no time to replace anything that might be missing. The person putting the package together is only human and can make mistakes (inadvertently, of course). Help them out and allow some time to send corrections if they are needed.

Make a plan to get every volunteer the recognition items they have earned, even if they are unable to attend the chapter meeting or other special event. If you choose to mail the items to members, document envelopes are recommended for sending certificates and padded envelopes are recommended for sending pins.

Packages with Recognition Items will be sent to Chapters twice annually:

- End of Year packages are sent in FEBRUARY
 - This package will include certificates, re-certification pins and milestones earned through December 31 of the previous year.
 - Chapters will need a plan to encourage their members to have all hours updated in Better Impact by December 31
 - Tiffany will pull reports from Better Impact in early-January to view all hours reported as of December 31.
 - Tiffany will send an email to each chapter's Membership Chair and President by January 15 with two reports attached: 1) New Milestones Earned, 2) New initial Certificates and Re-certifications earned
 - Each chapter will have until January 31 to review the reports and respond with any questions or corrections.
 - Please note that if your chapter has any extenuating circumstances preventing you from getting any questions or corrections back to us in that timeframe, let us know and we will work with you
 - *For clarification on this step, please see the explanation in the first section, fourth paragraph of this document*
 - Packages will be put together and mailed out in February.
- Mid-year packages will be sent in AUGUST
 - *NOTE: Mid-year packages are no longer optional. We would like for volunteers to be able to receive their latest recognitions at least twice a year.*

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- This package will include certificates, re-certification pins (if any were missed in the February package) and milestones earned through June 30.
- Chapters will need a plan to encourage their members to have all hours updated in Better Impact by June 30
- Tiffany will pull reports from Better Impact in July to view all hours reported as of June 30.
- Tiffany will send an email to each chapter's Membership Chair and President by July 15 with two reports attached: 1) New Milestones Earned, and 2) New initial Certificates earned.
- Each chapter will have until July 31 to review the reports and respond with any questions or corrections.
 - Please note that if your chapter has any extenuating circumstances preventing you from getting any questions or corrections back to us in that timeframe, let us know and we will work with you
 - *For clarification on this step, please see the explanation in the first section, fourth paragraph of this document*
- Packages will be put together and mailed out in August.

New Roles for Chapter Leaders and the VMN State Office

With these new procedures in place, these are the roles of the Chapter Leaders and the VMN State Office as we see them:

Chapter Leaders

- Encourage/remind volunteers in the chapter to enter any hours by December 31 and June 30 of each year
- Apply Qualification for VMN Training to indicate new basic training graduates. We need this information so that we can determine who is eligible for certification.
- Let volunteers know they can opt out of receiving pins by updating that field in their profile on Better Impact
- By January 31 and July 31 of each year, review the lists of new certifications and milestones (and re-certifications when applicable) sent to you by the VMN State Office and respond with any questions or corrections
 - *For clarification on this step, please see the explanation in the first section, fourth paragraph of this document*
- Receive the recognition items at a single address and distribute to volunteers

VMN State Office

- Generate reports from Better Impact to create lists of new certifications, new milestones, recertifications
- Send reports to chapter leaders for their review and respond to any resulting questions or corrections
- Apply Qualifications for 1) Certified VMN volunteers and 2) Milestone Levels, as well as the date of the last milestone to each volunteer's in Better Impact profile
- Compile and send out packages to each chapter with the recognition items