

VMN MEMBERSHIP ROSTER CLEAN-UP: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS & CONCERNS

“Why are having accurate member statuses in the VMS so important? Why should we make especially sure to update those who are no longer volunteering to 'inactive' status?”

1. **We as a program, and your chapter by extension, are responsible for those people if they are listed as 'active' members**, even when they are not reporting their activities, as per VMN agreement. Thus, the state program and your chapter can be made responsible for:
 - Any risk management or liability issues that may arise due to volunteering they do while representing themselves as VMN volunteers. If a liability issue does arise, your chapter will also have to be involved in rectifying it.
 - Their adhering to program policies, even though they are not a true volunteer participant. Since they are reported as a 'currently enrolled' member, we are expected to be able to advise and update them on proper VMN protocol.
 - Accounting for them to the government and funding agencies in terms of demographics, and the like. For your chapter, it means more work to keep track of and update their records, their demographics and reports, and their documents, at least annually.
2. It's important that we report to our funding agencies, both state and federal, **a more truthful representation** of the size of our program. Those agencies will also be using this data in their own reports.

“What about those members who are *only paying dues and not volunteering*? They want to stay connected or support the program, too.”

Dues payment alone does not constitute an 'active' membership status. We are trying to help our chapters move away from this situation of people being members but not volunteering.

The Virginia Master Naturalist program, like the other VCE/VT 'master volunteer' programs, is a volunteer program, not a club.

Our mission is to provide well-trained volunteers to help with the beneficial management of natural resources and natural areas within their communities. Our sponsoring agencies and partners that support the VMN program expect this kind of program from us.

Ask them why they are only paying dues.

- If it is to support the program or chapter, ask them if this can be a donation instead. You'll want to explain to them that, as mentioned above, the VMN is a volunteering program, not a club.
- Is it that they are actively involved, and just not tracking and reporting their activities? Offer to help them enter their hours, explaining to them the importance of these records to the funding of both our program and the sponsoring agencies we help. It may be that they didn't realize why this mattered, or that they have an issue with computers.
- Regarding chapter communications with them: Making them inactive on the VMS means that they won't get any news or emails from your chapter *if it is sent through the VMS*. If you wish to continue to send emails to those who are now 'inactive', you can decide to keep them on your other email notification lists. It's up to your chapter.

IMPORTANT! Just make sure that they know that are no longer acting as an enrolled VMN volunteer, only as a public participant, if they take part in a chapter activity.

"We don't want to chase anyone away. They may come back."

This is why it's important to hear their intentions or their story! We don't mean to chase them away! And hey, once they know you're paying attention and care, it might nudge them to begin volunteering again!

Those who **wish to start volunteering again as a VMN after 2-3 year or more absence** should be talking to a Chapter board member for many reasons. For instance, to let the chapter know they have returned, to see what has changed, to see if a project they were working on is still active, and to make sure they are included in chapter notifications. You as a Board member would want to know, I'm sure.

And they can then be easily re-activated when they want to start volunteering again, since you've kept their records. Simply change their status in the VMS records back to "VMN member".

But for most part, you will probably find that those who haven't volunteered for that long are no longer desiring to be a VMN and have moved on to other worthy causes.

"We make members 'inactive' for *not paying dues*, even if they are actively volunteering."

While some chapters require annual dues, not all do. If your chapter does require dues, we can sympathize with you as you try to collect dues that help to sustain your chapter. But remember - if you choose to make a volunteer 'inactive' because they did not pay their dues, they should not be participating in any of the VMN-only activities, including continued project volunteering unless it is open to public volunteers. They are, by definition, no longer a VMN member. From what we have observed, most people who aren't paying their dues are also not reporting volunteer service.

However, by making an active volunteer 'inactive' because of unpaid dues alone, it is preventing our VMN mission from happening by that volunteer who is cut off from continuing with and reporting their service. And this may indeed chase those valuable members away.

We do not want to lose active members for financial reasons. If there is a member who reports hours but does not pay dues, reach out to the member. Perhaps the member doesn't understand what the dues are for or just hasn't gotten around to paying. Some chapters reward payment of dues with an annual "gift". Perhaps the member might benefit from your chapter's scholarship fund if you have one. There may be other ways to get members to pay their dues. Please consider other methods instead of making them 'inactive'.

"So what DOES it mean to be 'inactive'? Should the chapter be telling those who are now marked that way about this?"

Yes. It's very important to explain what this means to them, so they are fully aware of the responsibilities they now have regarding this.

What it means to be 'inactive' and a now former VMN member:

1. They can no longer represent themselves as a Virginia Master Naturalist in public or while doing chapter-approved volunteer service.
 2. They are not covered by VT liability insurance in the case of an incident.
 3. They will no longer be able to access their records or profile on the Volunteer Management System.
- Remind them that the important purpose of a VMN is to aid the conservation and management of our natural resources through their volunteer service. The VMN program and our sponsoring agencies depend on this agreement.