

REPORTING VOLUNTEER SERVICE & ADVANCED TRAINING HOURS ✦ Frequently Asked Questions ✦

SUBMITTING TIME REPORTS

Q1: Why do I need to report my time?

A: Your time reports document the advanced training and volunteer service hours you need to certify as a Texas Master Naturalist and to renew that certification yearly. They are also used to compile the chapter's annual report to the state headquarters, which summarizes all chapter activity. The data in these reports is used to measure the success of the program and justify its continued funding.

Q2: How often should I submit time reports?

A: Time reports should be submitted monthly. However, it is not necessary to submit a report for a month in which you have no activities to report. You may also combine months with limited activity on a single report. PLEASE try to report all activity for a month on one report, e.g., do not report activities for May on your May, June, and July reports.

Q3: How do I submit reports?

A: You have several options for reporting your time. It can be submitted by (1) Traditional mail, (2) e-mail, or (3) on-line from our web site. To use any of these options, first go to our web site and select "[Volunteer](http://www.lostpinesmasternaturalist.org/volunteer.html)." (<http://www.lostpinesmasternaturalist.org/volunteer.html>)

1. Download the PDF version of the time report. Print and complete by hand, sign, and mail to Marsha Elrod, 187 Billingsley Hts, Cedar Creek TX 78612.
2. Download the appropriate MS Word version of the time report from our website. Open it, fill in your time, sign, save, and e-mail to melrod1@earthlink.net.¹
3. Click on the link for "On-line Reporting Form." It will bring up a fillable time report form. Enter your time, sign, and click "Submit." Please provide your e-mail in the space provided so I can get back with you if there are any issues that need to be resolved. (This feature is currently not available due to spam problems. Our webmaster is looking into the problem.)

Q4: How do I sign a non-paper report?

A: There are 2 options for e-signatures.

1. If you have a scanner, you can scan and save your signature, then copy and paste it into the space provided on the report form. Alternatively, you can print and sign the paper report, then scan the entire form and submit it. This method allows you to maintain the paper copy for your own records.
2. If you do not have access to a scanner, you need to download the version of the form that includes the statement "Electronically signed by" over the signature line. Type in your name beneath it, save, and e-mail as usual.

If problems with the on-line reporting form can be resolved, it will include an "Electronically signed by" field for your signature.

¹ If you do not have MS Word, you can download a Word-compatible program for free from <http://www.openoffice.org/>.

REPORTING VOLUNTEER SERVICE HOURS

Q5: What counts as volunteer service?

A: You may claim volunteer service hours for any project or activity approved by the chapter. Some are ongoing activities; others are one-time-only. Approved activities are listed in the chapter newsletter and discussed at chapter meetings. A list of previously approved on-going activities and projects is located on-line at <http://www.lostpinesmasternaturalist.org/volunteer.html>. Officers frequently send out e-mails requesting volunteers for specific requests received on short notice. Information is also sent out through our Yahoo group. If you have not already signed up for it, go to <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/LPMN/> to join.

Q6: What is the difference in Chapter Development, Community Service/Outreach, and Environmental Service and why does it matter?

A: The distinction is made largely to assist in reporting the various activities' impact, i.e., the number of people and the amount of land we directly affect as a chapter.

Chapter Development applies to activities internal to the chapter, which are largely administrative in nature. It includes time spent by the officers and timekeeper in performing their duties, time spent in organizing and supporting chapter training classes, time attending board meetings, etc. It also includes time preparing food or securing drinks for chapter meetings. Chapter Development activities have no "impact" outside the chapter itself.

Community Service/Outreach generally involves direct contact with and, therefore, impact on members of the public. It includes such things as time spent working in a booth at a community event, working with children or adults in an educational activity related to the Texas Master Naturalist (TMN) mission, as well as serving on committees and participating in activities aligned with and approved by the TMN program.²

You must report the impact, i.e., the number of people the activity **directly** affected. State HQ defines direct impact as having a basically captive audience for the duration of the event you are reporting. So, if you lead a 1 hour nature hike attended by 6 children and 8 adults, you would report them on the impact portion of your time report. If you work our booth at Nature Fest, there is no direct impact even though you may talk to dozens of people, as they are free to come and go. On the other hand, if you lead nature hikes at Nature Fest, you would be having a **direct** impact on the hikers and report them.

We are only required to report the numbers of **events** in which we had indirect impact, so you can simply note "indirect" in that column on the report form and estimate the number of people you came in contact with.

Environmental Service may or may not involve interaction with 3rd parties but primarily impacts the environment. Conducting a bio-census or bird count, replanting pines trees at Bastrop (or other) State park, assisting with a prescribed burn, are all examples. Here, impact is measured in miles or acres and must in some fashion directly affect the landscape.

In the examples above, the bio-census has no direct effect on the land, so there is no impact to report. Replanting trees and the prescribed burn both benefit the land and change it, so you would report the acreage involved. Developing a new nature trail also alters the landscape and would be reported in miles. However, maintenance of that same trail or other established trails has no new impact, so none should be reported.

Q7: What if I have an idea or know of an activity that has not been approved by the chapter?

A: You will need to submit a "Request for Volunteer Project Approval" form to a member of the chapter Volunteer Services Committee for approval. The form is available on our website at <http://www.lostpinesmasternaturalist.org/chapter.html>. Be sure to complete the form in its entirety, providing sufficient detail for the committee to accurately assess the request.

² Activities performed as a member of another organization are not creditable as TMN volunteer service hours.

Q8: Are there guidelines for the types of activities that are likely to be approved?

A: Yes. The state has specific guidelines used to determine if an activity is appropriate for the program. You can review examples of both acceptable and unacceptable activities at <http://www.lostpinesmasternaturalist.org/volunteer.html>.

All volunteer work must be done within the state of Texas. While many citizen-scientist-type programs, such as CoCoRaHS, Great Backyard Bird Count, etc., can be performed on your own property, you cannot count hours spent on activities that benefit only you or improve your property, such as planting natives, putting in a pond, working on a wildlife tax valuation, etc. Remember, we are a community service organization, so the community, not private individuals or businesses, should in some way benefit from your efforts. If an activity is supported by one of our sponsors, i.e., TPWD or TAES, it will generally be approved.

Q9: Can I claim travel?

A: Yes, up to a point. You can claim actual travel time – up to one hour per event - for Volunteer Services only. You cannot claim travel for attending chapter meetings, even if you bring food or drinks or perform some other function at the meeting.

REPORTING ADVANCED TRAINING HOURS

Q10: What counts as advanced training?

A: You may claim advanced training hours for any training approved by the chapter. Speaker presentations at all chapter meetings count as advanced training. Other advanced training opportunities are listed in the chapter newsletter and disseminated by e-mail or through the Yahoo group. **NOTE: Only actual presentation time at chapter meetings (usually one hour) counts as advanced training.**

Q11: Do I need to report advanced training I get at chapter meetings, or am I automatically credited since I signed the roster?

A: You must report your advanced training time from chapter meetings. It is not cross-referenced to the meetings' sign-in sheets.

Q12: If I attend one of our chapter training class sessions for new members, can I claim advanced training for that class?

A: Generally, no. The material being covered is the same material covered in your own initial training, so it is redundant, not new training. There can be exceptions, but these will be announced in advance to give everyone the opportunity to attend.

Q13: Where else do I get advanced training?

A: There are many opportunities for advanced training throughout the year, in addition to those offered by the chapter. A list of approved training topics and sponsors can be found at <http://www.lostpinesmasternaturalist.org/chapter.html>. Classes and presentations that meet these guidelines may be claimed as advanced training without prior approval by the training committee. **Be sure to note on your time sheet both the topic and sponsor of the activity in order to assure you receive credit for it.**

Q14: If I attend another organization, like Bastrop Audubon's, meeting to hear their speaker, how do I claim my time?

A: Just like at our chapter meetings, only the speaker's actual presentation time counts as advanced training. The rest is simply a meeting and not creditable.

Q15: How do I report all-day classes that include a lunch break?

A: The lunch break is not training time. Training only occurs when there is an instructor teaching and students present. Short breaks (e.g., 15 minutes) occurring during lengthy presentations may be included in training time.

Q16: What about registration and field trips?

A: Many classes include a 15 to 30 minute window for registration before training actually starts. This, again, is not creditable training time. If the course includes a field trip as well as a classroom presentation, the field trip is considered a part of the training and should be claimed. If travel is required from the classroom to the field trip site, it is not considered training time if it exceeds 15 minutes.

Q17: Can you provide an example?

A: O.K. Here's a sample agenda:

9:00 - 9:30	Registration
9:30 - 10:00	Intro and Overview
10:00 - 10:50	Presenter A
break	
11:00 - 12:00	Presenter B
12:00 - 1:00	Lunch
1:00 - 2:30	Presenter C
break	
2:45 - 4:00	Presenter D
4:00 - 4:30	Travel to field trip site
4:30 - 6:00	Field trip

In this case, creditable hours would not include registration time, but would include all time from 9:30 to noon, since break time is minimal. Lunch would be excluded. All time from 1:00 to the end of Presenter D's session would be counted. Travel to the field trip site is excluded since it exceeds 15 minutes. Time spent on the field trip is counted.

So if the class were advertised as 9:00 to 6:00, total creditable time would not be 9 hours (i.e., the span from 9:00 am to 6:00 pm), but, rather, would be: 9:30 - 12:00 (2½ hrs) plus 1:00 - 4:00 (3 hrs) plus 4:30 to 6:00 (1½ hrs) for a total of 7 hours.

To help keep this clear, think of it as the "Rule of 15," i.e., interruptions (breaks, lunch, travel) of less than 15 minutes can be included in training time; those in excess of 15 minutes cannot.

Q18: What if the field trip is at the same site as the classroom and starts after presenter D's session?

A: Assuming there would be a short break (15 minutes or less) after Presenter D finished, then that time could be included as training time.

Q19: What if I learn of a class/presentation I would like to attend that has not already been approved and is not included in the "LPMN Approved Advanced Training" document?

A: Submit a "Request for Advance Training Approval" form to a member of the Advanced Training & Programs committee for approval. You can download it from our website at

<http://www.lostpinesmasternaturalist.org/chapter.html>. Be sure to complete the form in its entirety.

NOTE: All training must take place in Texas to be creditable.

Q20: Can I claim travel?

A: No. Travel time to and from training is not creditable.