

# CHAPTER OPERATING HANDBOOK

## Cradle of Texas Chapter July 12, 2023



## Texas Master Naturalist Program

The Texas Master Naturalist Program's mission is to develop a corps of well-informed volunteers to provide education, outreach, and service dedicated to the beneficial management of natural resources and natural areas within their communities for the state of Texas.

# **CHAPTER OPERATING HANDBOOK**

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# CHAPTER OPERATING HANDBOOK

## Cradle of Texas Chapter

### Texas Master Naturalist™ Program

#### **1. CHAPTER ORGANIZATION**

**Governing documents** - The documents governing this chapter are our *Bylaws*, the Texas Master Naturalist™ Program's *Chapter Management and Operations Protocols (CMOP)*, and this *Chapter Operating Handbook (COH)*. A chapter's COH must comply with the *Bylaws* and the *CMOP*. [Reference *CMOP* at <https://txmn.tamu.edu/chapter-resources/chapter-documents/> ] The chapter is structured for governance as described in this *COH*.

#### **2. BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

**2.1 Makeup of the board** – The board consists of the officers, the directors, the immediate past president, and the chapter advisor(s). All are voting members of the board.

2.1.1 Officers are elected by the membership [Reference *Bylaws* Article V, A. and E.] They are:

- President
- Vice President
- Secretary
- Treasurer

2.1.2 Directors are appointed and approved according to *Bylaws* Article V, F. and G. They are:

- Advanced Training (AT) Director
- Chapter State Representative
- Communication Director
- Membership Director
- Training Class Director (term begins when training class ends)
- Training Class Representative (term may be shorter than other directors)
- Volunteer Service (VS) Projects Director
- Outreach Director
- Hospitality Director

**2.2 Term of office** - For officers and directors, the term of office is 12 months, and they are eligible for re-election or re-appointment.

**2.3 Executive committee** - The elected officers comprise the executive committee [see 5.1.1]

#### **3. DUTIES OF BOARD**

##### **3.1 Duties of all board members**

- a. Communicate effectively with the Texas Master Naturalist (TMN) state office about any questions or issues that arise and keep it informed of what the chapter is doing.
- b. Maintain confidentiality when dealing with individual member issues.
- c. Whenever possible, maintain the privacy of members' personal information.
- d. Strive to further the TMN mission in everything that one does.

- e. Adhere to the *TMN Code of Ethics and Standards of Conduct* [Reference at <https://txmn.tamu.edu/chapter-resources/chapter-documents/>].
- f. Assist with maintaining an environment where all members, whatever their gender, race, ethnicity, national origin, age, sexual orientation or identity, education or disability, feels valued and respected.
- g. Assist with recruiting new members and selecting candidates for leadership positions
- h. Remember that every chapter and every member represent the public face of the TMN Program and its sponsoring agencies.
- i. Serve as a model of leadership and recruit and develop new leaders for the chapter.
- j. Adhere to Chapter Records Retention Policy as applicable to their role.

## 3.2 Duties of officers

### 3.2.1 President

- a. See 3.1 - Duties of all board members
- b. Serve as chair of the board of directors
- c. Prepare an agenda for board and chapter meetings
- d. Preside at board and chapter meetings
- e. Sign all board-approved documents that may be legally binding on the chapter
- f. Ensure that the president is one of the three authorized signatories on the chapter bank account
- g. Authorize in writing in advance any payments to be made of \$1,000 or greater from the chapter bank account
- h. Communicate with board and chapter members as needed
- i. Present a summary of the chapter's accomplishments at the chapter's first general meeting each year
- j. Conduct votes by manual or electronic means as required by responsibilities of the board [see 4.4]
- k. Present a slate of candidates for all director positions for review and approval by a majority vote of the executive committee, immediate past president, and chapter advisor
- l. Appoint all committee chairs and serve as an ex-officio member of all committees, assisting as appropriate
- m. Ensure all officers and directors perform their duties and responsibilities as stated in this *COH* and are familiar with program guiding documents (i.e., *Bylaws*, *CMOP*)
- n. Ensure that before the chapter makes any written commitments to county governments, city councils, etc., or executes contracts or memorandums of understanding with other entities, the TMN state program coordinator's approval is obtained
- o. Communicate with the TMN state office, other chapters, and state agencies as appropriate
- p. Be the chapter's state representative or appoint an alternate to serve [see 3.3.2]
- q. If there is no immediate past president, reassign the duties of that position [see 3.4.1]
- r. Serve as immediate past president upon completion of term as president
- s. As needed, facilitate a retreat of all newly elected officers and directors with the outgoing board members to help in the transition of responsibilities and to chart the chapter's new year
- t. Write donor-appreciation letters
- u. Present recognition awards to out-going officers and board members
- v. Maintain a secure list of all websites, social media platforms, email distribution lists, apps, data storage sites, financial accounts, and any other tools the chapter uses to conduct its business (include username and password if appropriate)

### 3.2.2 Vice president

- a. See 3.1 - Duties of all board members
- b. Assist the president and act for the president in the president's absence

- c. Meet with the president to recommend chapter and board meeting dates and locations for approval by the board
- d. Arrange for programs for the chapter meetings
- e. Select and secure the venue for upcoming chapter meetings
- f. Participate as a member of the annual financial examination committee [see 5.2.1]
- g. Along with advanced training director, coordinate chapter field trips
- h. Form and chair program committee, as needed

### 3.2.3 Secretary

- a. See 3.1 - Duties of all board members
- b. Conduct necessary chapter correspondence as assigned by the president
- c. Record, publish, and preserve the minutes of all meetings of the board, executive committee, general membership, and any special meetings [see 8.4]
- d. Keep a record of attendance at each meeting and whether a quorum is present
- e. Maintain a paper copy or a secure digital record of all minutes and correspondence according to the chapter records retention policy [Reference at <https://txmn.tamu.edu/chapter-resources/chapter-documents/> ]
- f. At board and chapter meetings, have access to electronic or paper copies of past minutes, the *Bylaws*, *CMOP*, *COH*, and *the parliamentary authority, Roberts Rules of Order*
- g. Ensure that a method is in place for maintaining the chapter's paper and electronic files [see 4.6]
- h. Facilitate chapter members' compliance with the chapter records retention policy
- i. For 501(c)(3) chapters, ensure that all board members sign the required Conflict of Interest form each year [Reference form at <https://txmn.tamu.edu/chapter-resources/chapter-documents/> ]

### 3.2.4 Treasurer

- a. See 3.1 - Duties of all board members
- b. Receive all monies for the chapter and maintain them in a chapter bank account
- c. Develop and maintain an annual budget for the chapter with input and approval by the board. The proposed budget should be finalized and submitted for approval as soon as possible after the start of the new calendar year.
- d. Pay all bills promptly upon receipt of a written statement, invoice, or receipt and any other required documentation for approved expenses
- e. Make all financial reports and documents available to any chapter member or advisor upon request
- f. Ensure that the required two or three signers are on the chapter bank account
- g. If any other financial tools are used by the chapter, such as PayPal or Square, ensure that at least two other board members have access
- h. Sign all checks, drafts, or other instruments for payment or notes of the chapter. In the absence of the treasurer, the president or another designated officer may sign any instruments under \$1,000 for payment or notes of the chapter.
- i. For any payments of \$1,000 or greater, the president or another designated officer must co-sign the payment instrument with the treasurer. Written authorization must be provided in advance by the president for any payments of \$1,000 or more
- j. Present a financial report at all board and chapter meetings that includes the status of all financial transactions and bank statement reconciliations
- k. Prepare and submit all annual financial records, reports and audits as required by law and sponsoring agencies
- l. Present the financial records to the financial examination committee [see 5.2.1] annually as requested

- m. Maintain the financial records of the chapter in such a way that quality financial reports can be produced that are easily understood by any chapter member or advisor. Financial management systems can be a detailed spreadsheet or commercially available programs such as QuickBooks or Quicken
- n. For 501(c)(3) chapters, file the 990N or other tax form with the IRS annually
- o. For 501(c)(3) chapters, use a financial management system that meets Generally Accepted Accounting Principles
- p. Retain a detailed account of all income, expenses, disbursements, and other financial matters (including a paper copy of such documentation) for seven years plus the current calendar year, according to the chapter records retention policy [Reference the *TMN Chapters Records Retention Policy* at <https://txmn.tamu.edu/chapter-resources/chapter-documents/> ]
- q. Serve as a member of the chapter's committee for grants, contracts, and donations, if the chapter has such committee
- r. Each month provide the Board with a list of members who have paid dues.

### 3.3 Duties of directors

#### 3.3.1 Advanced training director

- a. See 3.1 - Duties of all board members
- b. Chair the advanced training (AT) committee [see 5.1.2]
- c. Maintain and utilize a form or process for members to request that a program be considered for AT credit
- d. Working with the AT committee, review and recommend for approval or disapproval all AT requests and events [Reference *CMOP* 5.10]
- e. Coordinate with the membership director and/or VMS Administrator to set up and manage AT opportunities in the chapter's Volunteer Management System (VMS)
- f. Notify chapter membership of approved AT opportunities and ensure that upcoming opportunities are on chapter calendars

#### 3.3.2 Chapter state representative

This position may be assumed by the president, or the president may appoint a board member to assume these responsibilities.

- a. See 3.1 – Duties of all board members
- b. Work as a chapter liaison with the TMN state program coordinator
- c. Represent the chapter in state level matters of the TMN Program
- d. Enhance the communication between the state and the chapter
- e. With the immediate past president, help guide and educate the chapter's new officers and directors using the state governing documents
- f. Participate in meetings as requested by TMN state program coordinators
- g. Review draft state documents as requested
- h. With the Immediate Past President, lead an annual review of the chapter's *COH* and update if necessary to reflect actual chapter policies and procedures as well as to ensure compliance with all TMN state governing documents [Reference <https://txmn.tamu.edu/chapter-resources/chapter-documents/> ]
- i. Help with planning and coordination of activities for the TMN statewide annual meeting
- j. Attend the TMN annual meeting or delegate an alternate

#### 3.3.3 Communication director

- a. See 3.1 – Duties of all board members
- b. Oversee volunteers or committees to handle these various aspects of chapter communications:
  - history/archives



- newsletter
  - outreach
  - publicity
  - social media
  - website
- c. Write publicity press releases for print and electronic media covering training class application, chapter meetings and special events or delegate to committee member.
  - d. Work with training class director, membership director, and outreach director to develop recruiting materials
  - e. Arrange for printing and distribution of recruiting or promotional materials or delegate to committee member.
  - f. Oversee social media platforms and content developed for chapter members. Social media should be compliant with the *TMN Brand Guide* [Reference at <https://txmn.tamu.edu/chapter-resources/tmn-brand-marketing/>] and with policies of the TMN sponsoring agencies: Texas Parks & Wildlife Department (TPWD) and Texas A&M AgriLife Extension (AgriLife Extension)
  - g. Ensure all board and committee members adhere to Chapter Record Retention Policy

#### 3.3.4 Membership director

- a. See 3.1 – Duties of all board members
- b. Chair the membership committee [see 5.1.3]
- c. Maintain a roster of all chapter members with pertinent contact information
- d. Manage the chapter’s use of the TMN Volunteer Management System for reporting VS and AT hours [Reference *CMOP*, 5. and 6.]
- e. Supervise the chapter VMS administrator’s process for reviewing and approving hours logged by members
- f. Ensure all members are trained in the use of the VMS
- g. Ensure all member VMS profiles are up to date to allow for an annual criminal background check
- h. Publish names of members achieving certification and milestone awards monthly
- i. Present awards at chapter meetings
- j. Coordinate with training class director to manage training class application process
- k. Coordinate with communication director and training class director to develop recruiting materials
- l. Coordinate with communication director and officers to manage electronic communications to all chapter members (such as an email list like Google Groups)
- m. Manage the chapter’s mentor program in coordination with the training class director [Reference *CMOP*, Appendix 3.]
- n. Ensure that rosters with member contact information are not shared on public sites such as the chapter website or social media platforms

#### 3.3.5 Training class director

Note about term of office: The term of the new training class director begins as soon as the current training class concludes.

- a. See 3.1 – Duties of all board members
- b. Chair the training class committee [see 5.1.4]
- c. Develop a budget for the class and submit to the board for approval
- d. Recommend class tuition fees to the board for approval
- e. Work with membership and communication directors to develop recruiting materials
- f. Work with the membership director to manage the training class application process
- g. Coordinate with membership director to review applicants and share with the board as appropriate

- h. Present to the board for approval a proposed class syllabus that covers the state-approved curriculum for Initial Training [Reference *CMOP* 2.3]
- i. Serve as manager for the training class, including planning, curriculum development, calendar, instructors, venues, attendance tracking, etc.
- j. Coordinate all communications with trainees
- k. Ensure that a mentoring program is in place for trainees [Reference *CMOP Appendix 3*]
- l. Ensure each trainee receives appropriate instruction to use VMS.
- m. Provide training class information to the VMS Administrator as needed to document Member-in-Training hours in VMS

### 3.3.6 Training class representative

Note about term of office: Class representative serves from the end of a training course until the end of the next training course.

- a. See 3.1 – Duties of all board members
- b. Represent the previous training class as a member of the board, attending board and chapter meetings
- c. Participate as a member of the annual financial examination committee [see 5.2.1]
- d. Report back to the previous training class to provide information about chapter business
- e. Talk to the current training class about selecting a training class representative
- f. Optional: participate as a member of the training committee [see 5.1.4] planning for the subsequent class

### 3.3.7 Volunteer service projects director

- a. See 3.1 – Duties of all board members
- b. Chair the volunteer service (VS) projects committee [see 5.1.5]
- c. Maintain and utilize a Volunteer Project Activity Request Form [Reference <https://txmn.org/tmncot/organization/guidelines-and-forms/>] and process for members to request approval of a new VS project, using as a guideline the information required for setting up a new opportunity in VMS [Reference <https://texasmasternaturalist.freshdesk.com/support/home/>]
- d. With the VS projects committee, review and recommend for approval or disapproval all chapter VS project requests [Reference *CMOP*, 6.8 Appendix 2]
- e. Coordinate with the membership director/VMS administrator to add or modify volunteer opportunities in VMS Coordinate with project leaders to ensure their responsibilities are met [see 6.2]
- f. Ensure that a complete description of every volunteer service project is accessible to all chapter members through the chapter website, event calendar, email announcements and any other communication methods used by the chapter

### 3.3.8 Hospitality director

- a. Along with the membership director, coordinate chapter volunteer recognition events
- b. Coordinates general meeting social activities
- c. Arrange for members to bring snacks to each general meeting
- d. Maintains a sufficient supply of drinks, paper goods, condiments, utensils and an ice chest for general meetings, training classes, and field trips
- e. Assist training class director with class social activities
- f. Ensures that tables for refreshments are set up prior to general meetings and organizes a clean-up crew after each meeting
- g. Arranges for special refreshments at the general meetings to honor members who reach a 2500 hour and above milestones, or other significant achievements.
- h. Coordinate food for special chapter events including initial training meetings and bonus AT events

### 3.3.9 Outreach director

- a. Coordinate chapter outreach activities
- b. Ensures that outreach booths at all events are staffed
- c. Provide impact data for each event to the chapter VMS Administrator after each event
- d. Acquires and maintains a chapter display board
- e. Along with the membership director, promotes chapter and recruits new members
- f. Assists the training director and membership director as necessary
- g. Create and maintain educational displays used for outreach events, including nature trunks, exhibits and live animals.

## 3.4 Duties of other board members

### 3.4.1 Immediate past president

In the absence of an immediate past president, the president assigns these responsibilities to a previous past president or another board member

- a. See 3.1 – Duties of all board members
- b. Provide continuity from prior board to ensure local policies and procedures are being followed
- c. Provide counsel to officers and directors on fulfilling duties and responsibilities
- d. Assist the president as requested
- e. With the State Representative, lead an annual review of the chapter's *COH* and update if necessary to reflect actual chapter policies and procedures as well as to ensure compliance with all TMN state governing documents [Reference <https://txmn.tamu.edu/chapter-resources/chapter-documents/>]
- f. Chair the nomination committee [see 5.2.2] [Reference *Bylaws*, Article V, E, 2]

### 3.4.2 Advisor

The duties and responsibilities of the chapter advisor are described in detail in Appendix 1 of the *CMOP* and in Article V, B of the *Bylaws*. Also see 3.1 – Duties of all board members

## 4. RESPONSIBILITIES OF BOARD

**4.1 Authority** – The board is responsible for the success of the chapter and has the authority to conduct the business of the chapter as defined in the *Bylaws*. [Reference Article VI, A. 2-3]

**4.2 Committee oversight** – All committees and their activities are subject to review and approval by the board.

**4.3 Expenditure limits** – The board will honor any expenditure limits set by the chapter.

**4.4 Voting** – All business before the board requires approval by majority vote of board members in attendance (either in person or via electronic method) at a board meeting where a quorum is present. All official board votes shall be recorded in the minutes.

**4.5 Setting dues** - The board may set annual membership dues payable to the chapter, with approval of a majority of members present at a duly called and convened general membership meeting.

- a. The board must notify voting members at least 30 days prior to the general meeting that the subject of dues or their increase will be brought before the convened general membership for action.
- b. The board, under special circumstances, may waive part or all of an individual's annual membership dues on a case-by-case basis, if approved by a majority vote of the board.

- c. Dues shall be payable on or before January 31 each calendar year. If dues are not paid by March 31 each calendar year, then all privileges afforded a TMN member are rescinded until dues are paid. A TMN member who is not current in the payment of dues will be considered inactive and categorized as such in VMS.

**4.6 Records retention** - The board must conduct chapter business in compliance with the chapter records retention policy, that in turn must meet requirements as outlined in the state policy. [Reference *TMN Chapters Records Retention Policy* at <https://txmn.tamu.edu/chapter-resources/chapter-documents/>]

- a. Ensure the chapter has a records retention policy in place
- b. Establish and maintain a remote data storage system (e.g., Dropbox) that gives appropriate access to chapter members responsible for retaining records of their positions
- c. Train all chapter members who are in leadership positions (officers, board members, committee chairs, project leaders) in the requirements of the records retention policy and the proper use of the chapter's designated data storage system

**4.7 Non-discrimination and inclusion** - Assure that membership in the chapter is open to individuals aged 18 or over, based on the equal opportunity policies of the state sponsoring agencies, TPWD and AgriLife Extension.

## **5. COMMITTEES**

All committees serve subject to the oversight and approval of the board. The president appoints committee chairs. The chair is responsible for seeing that the committee fulfills its responsibilities and meets its objectives. Committees may meet remotely.

### **5.1 Standing committees**

#### **5.1.1 Executive committee**

- a. The executive committee is composed of the elected officers of the chapter [Reference *Bylaws*, Article VI, B. 2.]
- b. With the immediate past president and the advisor, approve proposed directors to fill vacancies in a position
- c. In matters of discipline or removal of a member from TMN, review allegations and supporting documentation to make a recommendation to the TMN state program coordinator [Reference *Process for Disciplining or Removing Members* at <https://txmn.tamu.edu/chapter-resources/chapter-documents/>]
- d. In matters of serious incidences of malfeasance or behavior inconsistent with the principles of the chapter (of a board member other than an elected officer), review the issues and vote to remove that board member from position if necessary [Reference *Bylaws* Article V, I, 2]

#### **5.1.2 Advanced training committee**

- a. Support AT director in reviewing and approving AT opportunities for chapter members
- b. Assist in publicizing approved AT opportunities to chapter members in a timely fashion by a variety of means such as email notifications or website event calendars
- c. Assist in managing the chapter's AT opportunities in VMS
- d. Assist in organizing special AT events

#### **5.1.3 Membership committee**

- a. Serves under the leadership of the Membership Director, typically composed of the VMS Administrator

- b. Assist the membership director in managing the chapter's records and reports within VMS (The membership director may designate an assistant VMS administrator to assume some of these responsibilities.)
- c. Support the membership director in ensuring the accuracy of hours and activities logged into VMS (The membership director may designate an assistant VMS administrator to assume some of these responsibilities.)
- d. Assist in maintaining the current roster of members including members-in-training
- e. Define new members in VMS, including members already in TPWD system.
- f. Assist the membership director in tracking and reporting the names of members who have completed the Initial Training course, achieved initial certification, achieved re-certification, earned milestone awards or specialty certifications, and who serve in board and committee positions
- g. Help publicize and celebrate member achievements (e.g., at chapter meetings, on the chapter website, in newsletters, at volunteer recognition events)
- h. Receives verification of member dues payments from the Treasurer and updates VMS records accordingly
- i. Update member activity status as needed

#### 5.1.4 Training class committee

- a. Serve under the leadership of the training class director
- b. Help plan, implement, and evaluate the chapter training curriculum and develop the calendar for Initial Training course.
- c. Acquire the *TMN State Curriculum* for each class member and prepare additional class materials
- d. Help select presenters and make arrangements for their class/presentation including materials, handouts, and audio-visual equipment needed
- e. Help arrange for speaker gifts, travel, lodging needs, confirmation, and thank you letters
- f. Works with the communication director/committee to help arrange for publicity, e.g., newspaper articles, flyers, brochures, electronic media
- g. Help to arrange for training venue and required facilities equipment for all class periods
- h. Assist with class field trips
- i. Ensure there is a method in place for tracking attendance of trainees and monitoring their progress toward completion of Initial Training course
- j. Host training class orientation and course completion events
- k. Arrange for refreshments/amenities during class periods

#### 5.1.5 Volunteer service projects committee

- a. Support VS projects director in reviewing and approving volunteer opportunities for chapter members.
- b. Assist in publicizing approved volunteer project opportunities to chapter members in a timely fashion by a variety of means such as email notifications and website event calendars
- c. Assist in drafting a complete description of those project activities for which volunteer service hours may be accumulated and to assure the descriptions are kept up to date where all chapter members can easily access them (e.g., on the chapter website).
- d. Assist in organizing and hosting volunteer project fairs or similar events for chapter members (in particular for members-in-training enrolled in the chapter's Initial Training course)
- e. Assist in managing project opportunities in the chapter's VMS
- f. Assist project leaders in fulfilling their responsibilities [see 6.2]

#### 5.1.6 Communication Committee

- a. Assists the Communications Director, as necessary
- b. Includes a committee member to serve as a webmaster

- c. Includes a committee member to serve as a newsletter editor
  - 1) Collects, produces, and distributes chapter and state TMN news in the newsletter
  - 2) Solicits and accepts contributions from officers, directors, and members for the newsletter
- d. Includes a committee member to serve as a publicity coordinator
  - 1) Manages the chapter's Facebook and Social Media activities
  - 2) Creates and distributes press releases to promote the chapter and its activities
- e. Includes a committee member to serve as a Speaker's Bureau coordinator
  - 1) Survey membership to determine who has interest in participating and skills needed (presentation development skills, speaking skills, support skills, etc.) and build team
  - 2) Develop library of "canned" presentations and put together trunks of educational materials to support specific topics as needed
  - 3) Coordinate with outreach director and volunteer service director as needed
- f. Includes a committee member to serve as a historian/archivist
  - 1) Maintains the historical records of the chapter under the direction of the communications director
  - 2) Historical records include but are not limited to: training classes, projects, recognitions, events, elections, meetings, scrapbook and newsletter archives
- g. Assists the secretary as necessary
- h. Includes a committee member to assist with Information Technology (IT)

#### 5.1.7 Outreach committee

- a. As needed to assist Outreach director in coordinating and setting up outreach events in the community
- b. Assist with recruiting volunteers for all events
- c. Assist with set up and take down at events.
- d. Help create and maintain educational displays used for outreach events, including nature trunks, exhibits and live animals.

#### 5.1.8 Other Committees

Other standing committees may be identified and formed to meet specific needs. All committees will be under the leadership of a designated board member and the chairman shall be appointed by the president.

### 5.2 Ad hoc committees

Ad hoc committees are formed for a particular and specific short-term purpose. Every chapter must form the first 2 committees described below. Additional committees or a task force may be formed by the board as needed to address specific tasks or purposes.

#### 5.2.1 Financial examination committee

- a. Conduct the annual examination of chapter financial records [Reference *Bylaws* Article IX]
- b. Members include vice-president, secretary, training class representative, and chapter advisor
- c. President appoints the chair
- d. Treasurer provides financial records for review
- e. Results of financial examination will be reported and recorded in the minutes at the board meeting following the completion of the audit with signed attestations from each committee member

#### 5.2.2 Nomination committee

This committee must be used for the selection of officer candidates. It may also be used for recommending director candidates.

- a. For elected officers, proceed in accordance with *Bylaws*, Article V, D. 2. Election Process.
- b. For director positions, proceed in accordance with *Bylaws*, Article V, E. 2&3
- c. President appoints members to the committee, chaired by the immediate past president.
- d. Committee must review the required skills, duties, and responsibilities of each position with the proposed candidate to assess the candidate's understanding and willingness to perform the functions of the position prior to nominating the candidate
- e. Committee presents a slate of candidates to the president, considering the following attributes. Selection of candidates based on these attributes would maintain experience and continuity for the board while recruiting new members to serve.
  - 1) Officer candidates must be certified Texas Master Naturalists and members in good standing. An exception is made for chapters in their first year of operation.
  - 2) The committee shall endeavor to select candidates from the chapter membership who demonstrate appropriate skills for managing the position for which they are being nominated. Candidates should not be selected only on length of time in a certain position, length of time in the chapter, or on amount of service hours attained.
  - 3) Where possible, candidates should be selected with an eye to increasing diversity. Diversity considerations should not be limited to sex, ethnicity, creed, or national origin, but include attributes such as age, sexual orientation, gender identity, formal education, background experience, and county of residence.
- f. Election procedure:
  - 1) President must publish the slate of officer candidates to the chapter membership in writing at least 15 days prior to the last general membership meeting of the calendar year.
  - 2) Nomination committee will conduct the election at the last general membership meeting of the calendar year.
- g. TMN state program coordinator may provide oversight to a chapter's nomination process.

### 5.2.3 Grants, donations, and contracts committee

- a. Any grants or donations solicited for the chapter must be approved by the chapter board
- b. Membership on the grants and donations committee should at least include the chapter treasurer and the project leader of a project that has grant funding or receives donations
- c. Any chapter that receives a grant or donation of \$5,000 or more must notify the TMN state office. Chapters are encouraged to share with the state office any news of grants or donations received.
- d. The term of service for the committee or any subcommittees is based on the specific functions performed by the committee or on the required reporting period of a Memorandum of Understanding/Agreement (MOU/MOA), grant, donation, or project
- e. Volunteer service hours cannot be used as match for any grant, contract, or MOU/MOA
- f. Chapters cannot enter into any contract, MOU, or MOA without prior review and approval by the TMN state office.
- g. Functions of this committee may include:
  - 1) Review grant opportunities for the chapter
  - 2) Coordinate grant application process
  - 3) Track progress of grants
  - 4) Ensure that reports are made to grantors as to the progress on grant spending
  - 5) Monitor MOUs and MOAs. Form ad hoc subcommittees as necessary for monitoring each MOU/MOA. The project leader of projects that fall under the MOU or MOA should chair the subcommittee and must report regularly to the Executive Committee.

## **6. CHAPTER PROJECTS**

**6.1 New projects** – A new or expanded volunteer service project may be proposed by any active chapter member, following the instructions provided by the VS projects director. [Reference Volunteer Project Activity Request Form <https://txmn.org/tmncot/organization/guidelines-and-forms/>]

**6.2 Travel time** – Members may include a reasonable, typical amount of travel time when recording volunteer service hours. Travel time should not include side trips for personal activities. [For further guidelines, see 11.1.9]

### **6.3 Responsibilities of project leaders**

6.3.1 Keep the chapter membership informed of events concerning your project, including information about location, date, time, and equipment needed for workdays

6.3.2 Provide contact information for the leader at each workday

6.3.3 Ensure that the president and website editor or calendar keeper are informed of details so event listings can be kept up to date

6.3.4 Record impact data in VMS about each workday or appoint one of the volunteers to do it

6.3.5 Report on your project periodically via the newsletter, email blasts, newspaper articles, or at a chapter meeting.

6.3.6 Submit a budget request for expenses associated with your project.

6.3.7 Work with the chapter board to solicit grants or donations if appropriate. The TMN state office must be notified of any grants of \$5,000 or more received by the chapter. [See 5.2.3].

6.3.8 Maintain contact with partners at the event venue or worksite for your project. (Partners may include cities, counties, schools, parks, non-profit organizations, or site supervisors)

6.3.9 Maintain an updated file for your project on the chapter's data storage system. Include pictures, reports on workdays, and partner and volunteer contact information.

## **7. MEMBERSHIP** [Reference *Bylaws*, Article IV]

**7.1 Non-discrimination and inclusion** - Membership in the chapter is open to individuals aged 18 or over, based on the equal opportunity policies of the state sponsoring agencies, TPWD and AgriLife Extension.

### **7.2 Member categories**

- Texas Master Naturalist-in-Training (Member-in-Training) – a member enrolled in a chapter's Initial Training course
- Texas Master Naturalist – an active member who has completed Initial Training course requirements
- Certified Texas Master Naturalist – an active member who has met all the requirements of initial certification and thereafter, attains annual recertification



### **7.3 Membership status**

- 7.3.1 Criminal background check - All persons who are chapter members in any category must submit to and pass the required annual criminal background check
- 7.3.2 Dues - Members must be current in the payment of any dues set by the chapter
- 7.3.3 Transfers - Members may transfer between chapters within the state of Texas [Reference *CMOP*, 3.2]
- 7.3.4 Reinstatement - Members who have been moved to inactive status may petition a local chapter for reinstatement, providing all chapter membership requirements are met

## **8. MEETINGS**

- 8.1. Chapter meetings** - Our chapter has regularly scheduled membership meetings 12 times per year. Meeting dates and times are published on the Chapter website calendar. Any number of members present at a meeting, in person or remotely/virtually, constitutes a quorum.
- 8.2 Board meetings** - Our board has regularly scheduled meetings 12 times per year. Meeting dates and times are published on the Chapter website calendar. A majority of the members of the board must be present in person or remotely/virtually to constitute a quorum.
- 8.3 Meeting remotely** - All meetings may be conducted by remote communication technology if the following requirements are met:
  - a. Reasonable notice is given to persons entitled to participate in the meeting and includes relevant information to be discussed
  - b. The system provides access to the meeting in a manner or using a method by which all meeting participants can communicate with each other
  - c. Minutes include documentation that the requirements in a. and b. above were met
- 8.4 Minutes** – Minutes are the legal record of a meeting and are never destroyed. They include actions considered by the board or general membership and business topics discussed. These items should always be included:
  - a. Date and place of meeting. If held by remote communication technology or with a combination of remote and in-person attendees, that must be stated. [see 8.3]
  - b. Who presided over the meeting and who recorded minutes if the secretary was absent.
  - c. Time of call to order and of adjournment.
  - d. The number of members in attendance (to establish a quorum). May include the titles of officers and directors in attendance.
  - e. Whether previous minutes were approved (as published or as corrected)
  - f. Summary of the treasurer’s report (beginning balance, totals of income and expenses, and ending balance). Entire report will be attached to the minutes.
  - g. Motions made and votes taken. Include names of those making motions; names of seconders are not necessary. Discussion on motions is not usually included, but may be signified by a phrase such as, “After much discussion, the motion carried.”
  - h. The fact that a report from a committee was given, but not usually the details of the report unless it involves a recommendation or requires a vote.
  - i. Name of presenter of a program and the topic, but no summary of the program.
- 8.5 Board action without a meeting**- The board may take action outside of its regularly scheduled monthly meeting only if:

- a. Three business days' notice is given to each person entitled to participate and includes relevant information to be discussed; and
- b. The system provides access in a manner or method by which each person participating can communicate with each other (i.e. in person, email, videoconference, etc.); and
- c. Motions are made, and votes are recorded in the written minutes of the next meeting; and
- d. Documentation of each of the requirements of paragraph a, b, and c above must be contained in the secretary's minutes of the next scheduled board

## **9. ADOPTION AND AMENDMENT OF HANDBOOK**

**9.1 Initial adoption** - For a new chapter, the proposed COH must be distributed to chapter members in writing (conventional mail, email, or equivalent means) at least 15 days before the next general meeting, with notice that the ratification vote will be held at that meeting.

### **9.2 Amendment or revision**

9.2.1 Board approval - Amendments or revisions to this *COH* must be approved by a two-thirds vote of the board members in attendance, either in person or remotely/virtually, at a regular board meeting

9.2.2 Notification requirements - The general membership must be notified in writing (conventional mail, email, or other equivalent means) of the proposed amendments or revisions at least 15 days before the next chapter meeting, with notice that the ratification vote will be held at that meeting.

9.2.3 Membership approval - The general membership will have the opportunity to discuss the changes at the meeting. Approval requires a majority vote of those in attendance, either in person or remotely/virtually.

**9.3 State office notification** - Once a chapter has adopted, revised, or amended the *COH*, an electronic copy must be sent to the TMN state office within 30 days.

## **10. REFERENCES AND RESOURCES**

**10.1 TMN state website:** <https://txmn.tamu.edu/>

**10.2 State documents:** All referenced state documents (or guides to creating chapter-specific documents) can be found on the state website at <https://txmn.tamu.edu/chapter-resources/chapter-documents/>.

**10.3 Volunteer Management System (VMS) help desk:**  
<https://texasmasternaturalist.freshdesk.com/support/home/>

**10.4 Chapter website:** <https://txmn.org/tmncot/>

## **11. APPENDICES**

### **11.1 Additional Guidelines for Volunteer Service and Travel**

The requirements for volunteer service are outlined in the CMOP (Chapter Management and Operations Protocols Section 6). Some additional guidelines are outlined below for TMN-COT. The list may not be all-inclusive. All questions should be directed to the chapter Volunteer Service Projects Director.

#### 11.1.1 Volunteering with Chapter Sponsors

- a. Chapter members are encouraged to volunteer for chapter projects and for projects and events conducted with our partner and sponsor organizations, including TPWD, AgriLife, USFWS, Brazoria County Library System, and Friends of Brazoria National Wildlife Refuge. All projects and activities sponsored by our partners are automatically approved for volunteer hours credit provided they are not specifically forbidden by our state organization. Projects and activities for credit are limited Brazoria County. Consideration may be given to projects outside the chapter's service area and ecological zone if the project's service is compatible with the mission, goals, and training of the chapter and the TMN Program. Consult the Volunteer Project and Activity Lists available on the TMN-COT web site for examples of approved/unapproved activities for specific partners.
- b. Citizen science projects initiated by a partner as either a one-time event or requiring on-going data collection are covered under the umbrella of partner activities. No additional approval is required to volunteer and report hours for such activities.

#### 11.1.2 Volunteering with Other Nature Organizations

- a. There are many nature-related volunteer activities available in Brazoria and adjacent counties. TMN-COT does not maintain a partnership agreement with all of them, but many of their activities count for volunteer service hours. A Volunteer Project and Activity Request Form (VPAR) must be filled out for any projects and activities conducted with a non-partner. The VPAR must be submitted to the Board for approval before volunteer service hours may be submitted. The Board will review and verify that the planned activities fall within the mission of the Texas Master Naturalists.
- b. Citizen science projects initiated by an approved organization as either a one-time event or requiring on-going data collection are covered as stated in the VPAR. No additional approval is required to volunteer and report hours for such activities. Examples of such activities are the Texas Stream Team Water Quality Monitoring and Audubon Christmas Bird Counts.

#### 11.1.3 Other Citizen Science Projects

- a. An important aspect of field observation is reporting with data or with data and photographs to on-line data repositories of survey data. Examples include e-Bird, iNaturalist, BAMONA, Lost Ladybug, etc. In most cases, the member accumulates data and photos while pursuing other volunteer or outdoor activities. Generally, only the time that is required to report the data and upload the photos may be counted as volunteer service hours. The Board has decided to limit this time to actual time spent reporting the observation or a maximum of 15 minutes per observation - 17 - (for iNaturalist, one observation may represent more than one photo of a species being submitted). If the member is initiating a self-directed survey of an area, the Volunteer Projects Director may approve the actual survey time in addition to the data/photo reporting time. All citizen science projects MUST HAVE a data reporting element to a nature organization. The chapter may also approve citizen science projects initiated by members as long as the goal is consistent with the Texas Master Naturalist mission. An example is the Big Tree Registry project. Time reporting for such projects is outlined in the VPAR and associated activity list. Again, a reporting element is required.

#### 11.1.4 Citizen Science Projects Conducted Entirely at Home

- a. The state TMN organization suggests that volunteer-credited home citizen science projects must include a component of data reporting to a national database where the information is published or open to the public for study. Examples include Project Feeder Watch and the Great Backyard Bird Count from Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Because at-home projects include

limited or no involvement of others, the state TMN suggests that credit for volunteer hours on these projects be limited.

- b. In accordance with this, the COT Board limits credit for home citizen science projects conducted entirely at home to two hours per week per home citizen science project. This time should not include any time that would normally be considered home maintenance activities, even though they may benefit wildlife, for example maintaining feeders, ponds, drips, etc. Any variance to this rule may be appealed to the Board.

#### 11.1.5 State sponsored Virtual Volunteer Service Projects from Virtual Volunteer Fair

For all VIRTUAL Service Projects from the annual TMN Virtual Volunteer Fair, all volunteer service hours are to be reported under the Statewide opportunity “TMN Virtual Volunteer Service Fair”. For the “Service Performed,” enter the title of the Virtual Service Project and other information that would be helpful to the VMS approver. To report Virtual Service Project hours, you must be signed up for or be approved for the “TMN Virtual Volunteer Service Fair.”

#### 11.1.6 Animal Rehab Done at Home

- a. Because at-home animal rehab includes limited or no involvement of others, the state TMN suggests that credit for volunteer hours on this activity is limited. The COT Board limits at-home animal rehab to three hours per week. Any variance to this rule may be appealed to the Board. All animal rehab volunteer work must be reported under the “Other: Animal Rehab” opportunity code.

#### 11.1.7 Outside Board Activities

- a. The state TMN has ruled that participation on a partner Board as a representative of TMN-COT is allowed and may be reported as volunteer service. However, when chapter members serve in an officer position of another nature organization (e.g., President, Secretary, Treasurer), many of their activities are administrative in nature and not related to specific nature projects or activities. The outside Board administrative activities may be reported for service hours but should be coded under the “Other” opportunity.

#### 11.1.8 Volunteer Service Hours Not Approved

Some examples of volunteer opportunities that are not approved for Master Naturalist hours are listed below:

- a. Gift shop operation.
- b. Acting solely as a greeter such as counting the number of people who come to an event/or through a Visitor Center door. (Visitor center docents whose volunteer duties include educating the public about natural resource ecology, biology, and management may be approved for Master Naturalist hours.)
- c. Any project required by the terms of your employment or for which you are compensated.
- d. Hours reported to another organization, which would result in double counting at the state level such as working as a volunteer at the Sea Center and submitting those hours to both the Sea Center and TMN program. You must report those hours to ONLY ONE organization.

#### 11.1.9 Travel

Travel time may be added to volunteer service time but is subject to the limits as noted below.

- a. Travel time MAY NOT be added to advanced training time or to initial training time hours that are reported.
- b. In most cases, actual travel time may be reported for any approved volunteer service activity within Brazoria or the immediately adjacent counties.
- c. Travel time reported should not be unreasonable in proportion to the service activity.

- 1) Example 1: The volunteer service time of an event is 1 hour. If travel time is 1 hour each way, total time that may be reported is 3 hours– 1 hour for the meeting and 2 hours for the travel.
- 2) Example 2: A member visits a State or National Park or refuge area, and while there, attends an approved volunteer service event during their stay. No travel time should be recorded, as the service event is not the sole purpose of the travel.
- d. Travel that is part of a Christmas Bird Count event is always counted with the total volunteer service time for the event. For Christmas Bird Counts, count all time from home starting point until returning home. Social dining time must be excluded, but meals at the end of each event associated with data gathering and reporting may also be included.
- e. There are other events that may require travel. For example, volunteering for events at two different libraries on the same day for the Summer Library Program: Time to travel from site 1 to site 2 may also be included in total report time.
- f. Travel that is part of pick-up and delivery of an injured animal on behalf of Gulf Coast Wildlife Rescue or related organization may all be included in report time, i.e., time from door to door should be counted. Similarly, the time required to pick up and deliver an injured sea turtle to Padre Island (or intermediate spot), may also be reported.
- g. Any questions regarding the recording of travel time should be directed to the chapter's Volunteer Service Projects Director. (Please see the Chapter website/Board of Directors list)

## 11.2 Additional New Member Training Guidelines

The Texas Master Naturalist-Cradle of Texas Chapter (TMN-COT) offers new member training at least annually. The requirements for graduation for the new member (intern) training class are outlined in the Chapter Management and Operations Protocols, Article IV Requirements Section. Some additional guidelines are outlined below for TMN-COT. The list may not be all-inclusive. All questions should be directed to the TMN-COT Training Class Director or Board of Directors.

- 11.2.1 Interns must attend a minimum of 10 combined classroom and field trip curriculum unit sessions of the Cradle of Texas intern training program. The combined classroom and field experience must total a minimum of 40 hours. Make-up sessions are required for classroom and field trip curriculum units missed.
- 11.2.2 If only eight or nine of the required 10 sessions are attended, make-up of as many as two missed classroom curriculum unit sessions and two field trip curriculum unit sessions is permitted. Subject to the approval by the Training Class Director and/or approval by the Board, make up is limited to:
  - a. Attendance at an intern training session(s) at another TMN chapter. These make-up training sessions must not have the same content as an intern training session attended for the Cradle of Texas chapter.
  - b. Attendance at the missed session in a future intern course given by Cradle of Texas chapter.
  - c. Equivalent training hours at a pre-approved Advanced Training session covering the missed topics. Pre-approval by Training Class Director is required.
  - d. Extra curriculum unit session topics may be offered in each intern training class. The extra session(s) can be used as a make-up.
  - e. If there are videos available, watching videos of the missed chapter training session(s) can be used as make-up if the following conditions are met. First, a training team member must be in attendance, and second, the instructor must be available to answer questions after the intern views the video.

- 11.2.3 Interns have a maximum of 12 months from the start of their intern training classes to complete the above requirements. For example, if they began their classes on September 1, 2019, then certification must be completed by August 31, 2020.
- 11.2.4 Exceptions to these guidelines will be handled by the Board of Directors on a case-by-case basis
- 11.2.5 Intern training registration fee guidelines including refunds, members transferring from another chapter, financial assistance, and other special circumstances are listed on the chapter's website [Reference <https://txmn.org/tmncot/organization/guidelines-and-forms/>]

### **11.3 Additional Guidelines for Chapter Financial Management**

The requirements for management of chapter finances are outlined in the COH (Chapter Operating Handbook) under duties of the Treasurer. Some additional guidelines are outlined below for TMNCOT. All questions concerning management of chapter finances should be directed to the Chapter Treasurer or the TMN-COT Board of Directors.

- 11.3.1 Expenditure Approval- All expenditures approved must conform with the purpose of the Chapter as outlined in the Chapter By-laws.
- 11.3.2 Budgeted Expenses - The Treasurer is authorized to pay any expenditure outlined in the board approved budget.
- 11.3.3 Non-budgeted Expenses
  - a. The Treasurer must authorize the payment of any non-budgeted expenditure less than or equal to \$100.
  - b. The Board of Directors must approve any non-budgeted expenditure of more than \$100.
- 11.3.4 Chapter Charge Card - The chapter charge card may be used by the Chapter Host or Treasurer to purchase supplies for training classes, meeting events, or other approved expenditures under the dollar limits outlined under the budgeted/non-budgeted expense guidelines above.
- 11.3.5 Tax Exempt Form -If possible, the Chapter 501(c)(3) form should be presented when payment is made for chapter expenses so that taxes do not have to be paid.
- 11.3.6 Mileage Reimbursement - All Board authorized mileage reimbursement is done at the current IRS business travel rate.
- 11.3.7 Speaker Travel and Honorariums - In general, speakers represent partner organizations or related nature organizations in the area. As such, no reimbursement for speaker mileage or travel expenses is made. Likewise, speakers who are paid employees whose costs are already covered by their employer may not be additionally reimbursed. Upon request, speakers from non-partner organizations who travel from outside of Brazoria County are reimbursed under the following guidelines
  - a. Mileage: Speaker mileage is reimbursed at the current IRS business reimbursement rate
  - b. Hotel/Food: In general, no hotel/food reimbursement is provided to speakers with prior Board approval, one night of overnight stay at a local motel and a per diem for food may be paid for a speaker for exceptional travel needs. The maximum lodging and food reimbursement amount will be no more than the current U.S. Government Service Administration reimbursement rates. [Reference <https://www.gsa.gov/travel/plan-book/per-diem-rates>]

- c. No speaker honorariums are paid. The board may approve a speaker honorarium on an individual basis for special occasions or events.

11.3.8 Reimbursement for State Meeting Expenses- Some or all of the costs to attend the state meeting are approved under the following guidelines:

- a. The Chapter will sponsor two Board members (President and State Representative or designated alternates) to attend the State TMN meeting
- b. The Board members will be reimbursed for registration, lodging at the event venue(s), and mileage
- c. Mileage is reimbursed at the current IRS business rate
- d. Pre-approval of mileage reimbursement is recommended

11.3.9 ECO Fund Program-

The purpose of the TMN-COT ECO Fund Program is to provide financial support for specific projects that will enhance the chapter's mission to provide education, outreach, and service dedicated to the beneficial management of natural resources and natural areas within the Brazoria County community. If budgeted funds are available, TMN-COT will award a grant for ECO Fund projects annually. ECO Fund Program rules and guidelines are posted on the chapter website. [Reference <https://txmn.org/tmncot/organization/guidelines-and-forms/>]