

Additional Guidelines for Volunteer Service and Travel

The requirements for volunteer service hours are outlined in the CMOP (Chapter Management and Operations Protocol). 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 Projects Director.

1. Volunteering with Chapter Sponsors

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 to Texas. Consult the Volunteer Project and Activity Lists available on the TMN-COT web site for examples of approved/unapproved activities for specific partners.

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.

2. Volunteering with Other Nature Organizations

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.

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.

3. Other Citizen Science Projects

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

(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.

4. Citizen Science Projects Conducted Entirely at Home

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.

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.

5. Animal Rehab Done at Home

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.

6. Outside Board Activities

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.

7. Volunteer Service Hours Not Approved

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

- Gift shop operation.
- 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.)
- Any project required by the terms of your employment or for which you are compensated.
- 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.

8. Travel

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

- Travel time **MAY NOT** be added to advanced training time or to initial training time hours that are reported.
- Travel time reported per event **MAY NOT** exceed the service time for the event.
 - Example 1: the chapter allows 1.0 hour volunteer service time for attending a chapter meeting. Your travel time is 45 minutes each way. The total time that may be reported is 1.0 hour for the service and 1.0 hour for the travel, for a total of 2 hours.
 - Example 2: You attend a chapter sponsored event where the volunteer service time is 4 hours. Your travel time is again 45 minute each way. The total time that may be reported is 4 hours for the service and 1.5 hours for the travel, for a total of 5.5 hours.
- Travel that is part of a Christmas Bird Count event is always counted with the total time for the event. For Christmas Bird Counts, you may count all of your time from your home starting point until you return 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.
- There are other events that may require travel. For example, if you volunteer for events at two different libraries on the same day for the summer library program, then your time to travel from site 1 to site 2 may also be included in your total report time.
- 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 your 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.