

West Virginia Master Naturalist
HOW TO ORGANIZE AND CONDUCT MASTER
NATURALIST TRAINING

1. Remember that your chapter must be chartered by the WVMN State Advisory Committee (SAC) before classes can begin (See “*General Guidelines for the Establishment of Chapters Within the WV Master Naturalist Program*”).
2. Use program materials provided by the SAC. All of the forms, lists, class descriptions, etc. mentioned below will be found in your start-up package and can be photocopied as needed. They can also be printed from the WVMN web page at <http://www.wvdnr.gov/wvmn> .
3. When questions arise or assistance is needed, contact the [WVMN State Coordinator](#) at 637-0245 or rosesullivan@wvdnr.gov.
4. If you have successfully partnered with your county extension agent, a local conservation organization, school, interested business, etc., they may be able to provide a meeting space, materials, equipment, publicity, or scholarships.
5. Locate an indoor meeting place with adequate chairs and tables, and suitable for projecting slides and videos. It will be a great advantage if this classroom is within short walking distance to a park or other natural area.
6. Your trainees should number not less than 12 nor more than 20. Use posters and local newspapers and radio to recruit prospective students. The State Coordinator will place notice of your course on the WVMN web site and will notify all those in your area who have inquired about WVMN. When the class is full, make a waiting list for future workshops and forward a copy to the State Coordinator.
7. Consult with these participants to determine the most convenient time for classes. Several time frames have been successfully used, including weekly 3-hour sessions on weekday or weekend mornings, afternoons, or evenings; all-day Saturdays; four weekends that run from Friday evening to Sunday noon; and a combination of weekday evenings and weekend sessions. Bear in mind that the core classes require a minimum of 48 hours. Whatever schedule is decided upon, it should include the opportunity for as much out-of-doors training as possible.
8. Find instructors that are able and willing to present the classes, and draw up your schedule of classes to accommodate them. The start-up package provided by the SAC includes a *List of Qualified Instructors*, and you may want to enlist others who are not yet on this list. To propose additional instructors, send a few paragraphs describing their qualifications and contact information to the State Coordinator. (New instructors may teach once, after which they must be approved by the SAC or State Coordinator.)

9. Provide each of your instructors well in advance with a copy of *Suggestions for Instructors*, with the subject, date, time, and place filled in, and copies of the relevant *Class Description* and *Class Outline*.
10. Have prospective participants fill out applications and sign volunteer liability waiver forms. Collect registration fee for the course. The amount will depend on expected expenses, but it must include \$40 per trainee to be forwarded to the SAC for manuals, pins, patches, certificates, and other materials. Expenses for the course may include rental on meeting place, honoraria or travel expenses for instructors, photocopying, coffee and snacks, etc. Fees for most Master Naturalist courses are generally in the \$65-\$125 range.
11. Provide name tags to students and ask that they wear them at every session. Remember, even after trainees have had time to learn one another's names, instructors will be new to the group.
12. Arrangement of classes is flexible but should start with a brief introduction to the program. Plan an "icebreaker" or get-acquainted activity for the first session. Introduce each instructor, and make sure there are sufficient breaks. Keep presentations on schedule, and do not allow breaks to linger on beyond their allotted time!
13. Be sure to have a host on hand for each session to introduce and assist instructors, keep track of time, and record attendance.
14. After each subject is presented, have the students fill out the brief *Class Evaluation Form*. At the end of the course, they should complete the *Course Evaluation Form*. Copies of these should be forwarded to the State Coordinator.
15. Each student's attendance must be recorded for each class. Classes missed can be made up at a subsequent course or at a course in some other location. Coordinators of local WVMN classes should be flexible about allowing students that have missed classes to sit in. In some cases, a student may be allowed credit for experience outside the WVMN Program, but this must be limited to no more than eight hours and must be experience obtained within the previous five years.
16. Provide suggestions for volunteer service (30 hours required for certification). The state MN coordinator can provide suggestions for many specific projects, and can answer questions about the suitability of projects (see *Volunteer Projects and Advanced Training*). Some time should be allowed at the last training session to discuss volunteer service.
17. Maintain a local list of course participants, and keep track of their training and volunteer hours. Follow up with each course graduate to make sure they have

found a suitable volunteer project. When requirements for certification are met, forward this information to the WVMN State Coordinator.

18. Distribute certificates and pins to graduates who have completed the required training and volunteer hours.

19. Begin to think about organizing your next class. How can you make it even better? Which instructors do you want to invite back? What electives would you like to offer?

Cutting Costs and Raising Funds

The West Virginia Master Naturalist Program offers valuable, high-quality training. But not every potential Master Naturalist can afford to pay what the course is really worth. Here are some suggestions for keeping costs – and registration fees – at a reasonable level.

1. It is often possible to find a meeting room at no cost. Try the county extension office, community center, schools, churches, parks, local natural resource agency offices, and local chapters of conservation organizations.
2. Some instructors may require an honorarium of \$100-\$200, or perhaps travel expenses, but others may agree to teach at no cost to you, especially if public education is a part of their job. Most people love to share what they know. *Try to make the class a good experience for the instructor as well as the student.* Follow up with thank you notes to instructors.
3. Local newspapers and radio stations are often glad to find local news of general interest – such as the start of a Master Naturalist class. Also, public service announcements are generally free. Conservation organizations usually have newsletters that would happily publish notice of your class, especially if you provide ready-for-print copy. You will find that most periodicals greatly prefer to receive your announcement in digital form, emailed or on diskette.
4. Remember that helping to organize, conduct, or teach a class may qualify as volunteer hours for a WV Master Naturalist or a WV Master Gardener.
5. It is sometimes possible to find local businesses that are willing to sponsor a class. Heavy manufacturing, chemical, and natural resource industries such as coal, timber, limestone, oil and gas have an interest in environmental quality, and, no less than many small local businesses, they like to see their names associated with programs that promise to improve the community.
6. Consider one of the classic fundraisers to help underwrite your MN course: bake sales, rummage sales, plant sales, raffles, ramp dinners, etc.

Remember, send to the WVMN State Coordinator copies of application forms, volunteer liability waiver forms, class and course evaluation forms, \$40 per participant, and notification (in the form of training and volunteer records) when participants qualify for certification.

- Sam Norris, 16 Mar 2006