

Cook County Master Naturalist Policies

Date revised: December 11, 2020



In addition to the policies outlined in Chapter 1 of the Illinois Master Naturalist Handbook, the following are the Cook County Master Naturalist (MN) Policies.

1. To remain a certified MN in good standing (i.e. active), volunteers must complete the annual agreement, any additional University required forms training & background checks, a minimum of 30 activity hours (volunteer & planning), and 10 continuing education hours per calendar year.
2. Volunteer Activity is defined as service in the community within Cook County in activities involving natural resource stewardship, environmental education and outreach program delivery, citizen science efforts, and administrative service to perpetuate the Illinois Master Naturalist Program.
3. Planning Hours are defined as the time taken to prepare for volunteer activity. This includes: program preparation & development, traveling to and from programs, picking up and dropping off supplies for programming, and other activities approved by Extension Staff.
4. All activities entered in the database must report the number of engagements in the comment section in order to be approved by the MN Coordinator. Engagements are defined as an interaction with a member of the public. If no engagements occurred during that activity, enter zero. If no record was kept, make an approximation. See “Recording Engagements Process Document” for guide.
5. Volunteer and continuing education hours including number of engagements should be entered into the database monthly. See “Guide to Reporting Activities in VCMS” for clarity on how to report activities.
6. If a volunteer activity is not already in the database, it must be pre-approved and added to the database prior to volunteering. If this Volunteer Activity is with a new organization, you must contact the Master Naturalist Program Coordinator to ensure appropriate paperwork has been filed through the new organization.
7. All volunteer activities must have precise locations (i.e. a street address). To add a volunteer activity, please email the following information to the Master Naturalist Program Coordinator: activity name, date(s), street address including city and zip. If a precise address for the site cannot be found, please email the name and approximate locations (e.g. Dan Ryan Woods at 87th and Western, Chicago, IL) to the Master Naturalist Coordinator, and we will determine an address.
8. Activities taking place outside of Cook County are counted towards Volunteer hours. However, a minimum of 30 of the volunteer hours must take place in Cook County in order to recertify.
9. Continuing Education (CE) is defined as instances in which a Master Naturalist is the recipient of information. This includes: Master Naturalist training sessions, partner-sponsored workshops, and approved short courses, and other instances approved by Extension Staff. Contact the Master Naturalist Program Coordinator prior to attending a CE to determine if it is approved. To request the addition of continuing education activities to the database, please place a request through VCMS.
10. Only Active Master Naturalists, interns and trainees will be allowed access to the closed Facebook page “Master Naturalists in Cook County- University of Illinois Extension”.
11. Per University of Illinois Extension’s agreement with the Forest Preserve of Cook County, the 60 hours of volunteer service required to complete the Master Naturalist internship must be for Forest Preserve of Cook County Programming.

