

Frequently Asked Questions about Historic Rivers Chapter Basic Training Class

Why should I take this course?

If you love nature, want to learn more about the natural world around you, and like to volunteer for activities benefiting nature in your area, this course is for you. There is an expectation that members will provide at least 40 hours of volunteer service and obtain 8 hours of continuing education each year after graduation. If you will not have time for volunteer work, then this course is not for you.

What will I get out of training?

The course provides an overview of the natural sciences given by expert instructors. Classroom and field trip experiences will increase your knowledge and comfort level to volunteer in our local community.

I would just like to join the chapter to volunteer. Can I do that without taking this course?

No, as a state-sponsored organization, basic training is required to be a member of the chapter and volunteer. However, you can start volunteering during basic training after you have had instruction in risk management.

When and where do classes meet?

Classes meet in Williamsburg (location to be determined). Classes take place every other Tuesday evening from 6-9 pm, starting in early September and continuing through February, with graduation scheduled in March. Field trips are scheduled on Saturdays approximately once a month.

What are the training dates?

The following dates are **SUBJECT TO CHANGE**. We hope not, but we may have to make changes to accommodate instructors' schedules:

September 5, 19, 23 (All day Saturday Field Day)

October 3, 14 (All day Saturday Field Day), 17, 21, 24

November 4 (All day Saturday Field Day), 14, 28

December 9 (All day Saturday Field Day), 12

January 9, 20 (All day Saturday – 2 training classes), 23

February 6, 10, (All day Saturday Field Day), 20, 27

March 2 (All day Saturday Volunteer Day), 13 (Graduation Day!!)

How much time does the program involve?

Basic Training is time intensive. The Basic Training program requires the following time commitments (over a 6-month period):

- 14 classes = ~ 40 class hours
- 5 field trip experiences = ~ 24 hours
- 5 hours for external requirements
- Additional hours for pre-class preparation, and post class research and topic exploration

If you wonder whether you have the time to take the course and fulfill the requirements, please carefully consider the significant time commitment involved over the six-month period.

How do I apply?

By May 22, you will receive an email with the link to the online application on a site called Better Impact. On June 1, the application will be “live” and you can apply. The link will be “live” until June 30.

To successfully complete the application, we suggest the following preparations:

1. Prepare to devote approximately one hour to completing the online application. It must be completed in one sitting. You will not be able to save your responses to return later.
2. When you open the link, you'll have to enter a username and password. If you're accepted into Basic Training, you will use these login credentials. Of course, they can be changed later if necessary or if you request.
3. When completing the online application, you'll need to answer the following questions. You may want to prepare for these questions before you log in:
 - a. Have you applied to or been in a Master Volunteer program before (Master Gardener Program, Master Financial Education Program, Master Food Volunteer Program, Virginia Master Naturalist Program)?
 - b. If so, which VCE Master Volunteer programs have you applied to or been a part of?
 - c. Why are you interested in becoming a Virginia Master Naturalist volunteer?
 - d. How did you hear about the Virginia Master Naturalist program?
 - e. What kind of volunteer work would you like to do as a Virginia Master Naturalist volunteer?
 - f. Please describe any previous volunteer experience you may have.

- g. What do you consider your strengths, special talents, or abilities that would make you a good match for this volunteer program?
4. You will need to provide the following information for three references. The course coordinators will contact your references.
 - a. Name
 - b. Relationship
 - c. Address
 - d. Primary Phone #
 - e. Secondary Phone #
 - f. Email address

What does tuition cover?

Tuition is \$175 and covers these major items plus some other materials:

- Class resource materials
- Books such as Department of Forestry Field Guides and Department of Wildlife Resources Field Guides
- Several laminated folding guides (birds, ducks & geese, etc)
- Jeweler's magnification loupe
- One-day Admission to Virginia Living Museum for two classes

How do I pay the tuition?

After you've completed the application, we'll send you instructions on payment. You will be able to pay by check or online. Payment is due by July 15, 2023.

What is the refund policy?

If an applicant withdraws before the first class, tuition will be refunded. Since course materials are handed out at the first class, no refunds are given after that time.

Do you have a payment plan?

If your financial situation makes it difficult to pay the full amount up front, please contact the course coordinator for possible payment options. Contact Shirley Devan:

Shirley_devan@icloud.com

Do you offer scholarships?

A limited number of need-based scholarships are available. To request a scholarship, send an email to the course coordinator stating your need and the portion of the course fee that you can pay. Contact Shirley Devan: Shirley_devan@icloud.com

Are instructors and course coordinators paid positions?

No. All instructors and Chapter board and committee members volunteer their time. They are role models for future graduates who will go on to volunteer their services as trained Master Naturalists.

What is your COVID policy?

The Virginia Master Naturalist program and the Historic Rivers Chapter abide by the Virginia Department of Health guidelines currently in effect at the start of training.

<https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/coronavirus/protect-yourself/infected/>

Is Historic Rivers Chapter affiliated with another institution?

The Virginia Master Naturalist program is a statewide program sponsored by these public agencies and institutions:

- Virginia Cooperative Extension
- Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation
- Virginia Department of Forestry
- Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources
- Virginia Museum of Natural History
- Virginia Department of Environmental Quality
- Virginia Institute of Marine Science, Center for Coastal Resources Management

What background, knowledge, and skills do you look for in an applicant?

Historic Rivers Chapter seeks people with:

- A basic knowledge of and curiosity about the natural world
- Time available to fulfill course requirements and to volunteer after graduation
- A desire to volunteer in the community for the benefit of nature

As a trainee, do I need computer skills?

Trainees need to know how to use email, search the internet, receive and print Microsoft Word and/or PDF documents, and send documents. Our leadership team is available to help with technical support, but access to a computer with internet access and a printer is essential for every trainee.

Some of our classes will be conducted by ZOOM and pre-recorded video. So, trainees should feel comfortable and be familiar with Zoom participation and online learning.

Trainees need access to a computer, laptop, or tablet. We disseminate course materials using DropBox and email. We distribute very few paper copies of materials.

The Basic Training team and the Chapter communicate primarily by email so you should be prepared to check your email regularly and frequently (at least once per day) and respond promptly if requested.

For whom is the program not a good fit?

If you're looking for skills for employment as a naturalist, this is not the course for you. Our mission is to train volunteers who support our local, state, and/or national activities and partners. If you don't intend to volunteer, or don't have time to volunteer, then this course is not for you.

May I take the course just to increase my own knowledge of nature, and not volunteer afterwards?

Our mission is to train volunteers who support our local, state, and/or national activities and partners. Much as we applaud anyone who wants to learn more about nature, we don't have sufficient resources to offer the course only for self-enrichment.

What happens if I can't attend all the classes?

Participants may miss 2 classes and 1 field trip only, so check the schedule carefully to make sure that you do not have conflicts. Weather cancellations are sometimes necessary, and we ask trainees to treat scheduled makeup days as mandatory. There is usually a built-in "make up class" scheduled toward the end of the session.

What are the requirements after graduation?

To become certified, and to remain so, requires 40 hours of volunteer service and 8 hours of continuing education each calendar year. There are numerous activities and

opportunities through which to earn volunteer hours and continuing education credit within our chapter, and members can develop new activities if desired.

Below is a sample only of a few opportunities for which you can volunteer in the Historic Rivers Chapter:

- Planning and activities for accessibility for individuals with reduced mobility and/or physical/mental disabilities aimed at Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)
- Cleanups of trash/litter/pollution
- Communications: social media, e-newsletters, blogs
- Computer-based work
- Creating/writing educational materials
- Detail-oriented or organizational tasks
- Giving a demonstration, presentation, or hands-on workshop
- Inventories and monitoring of wildlife/plants/environment – including bats, butterflies, turtles, and birds
- Leadership and chapter administration
- Leading a nature walk or field program
- Publicity and outreach
- On-site work to plant, restore, and maintain gardens or habitat, including removing invasive plants, planting native plants/trees
- Public outreach - booths/tables at events
- Trail maintenance and improving access to nature
- Youth programs

How is my application evaluated?

Applicants are accepted on a “first-come, first-serve” basis after all references and payment are received.

Where can I find more information about the chapter's activities?

You can find more information on our chapter website: <http://www.historicrivers.org>

Check out the State Virginia Master Naturalist website:

<http://www.virginiamasternaturalist.org>

Or check out our Chapter's Facebook page. Search for Historic Rivers Chapter of Virginia Master Naturalist

Still have questions?

Contact course coordinator Shirley Devan: Shirley_devan@icloud.com