

The How To's of Starting a Chapter of The Prairie Enthusiasts, Inc.

Organizing a chapter of The Prairie Enthusiasts, Inc. is a great way to get together with friendly, knowledgeable people who share your interest and passion to manage and preserve our disappearing prairies and oak savannas

Start by reading this basic information and then feel free to contact The Prairie Enthusiasts for additional information either by email at carolwinge@yahoo.com or by phone at 608-577-0584.

Chapters form in a variety of ways. They can evolve from an existing organization such as a garden club or nature center volunteers, or simply by a few people who are interested in prairies and oak savannas and want to share their interest with the public.

As the hub of the organization, the TPE Board provides support, guidance and information to help you form a viable chapter in your area. Basic chapter guidelines, membership application and copies of past newsletters are provided below and on our website to help you get started. Feel free to make as many copies of the membership application www.theprairieenthusiasts.org/membership.htm as you need.

Please feel free to call Evanne Hunt, TPE President or Carol Winge, TPE Business Manager, if you have any questions about the materials or procedures.

Good luck with your TPE Chapter start-up!

Prerequisites

New chapters are authorized and formally created by the TPE Board of Directors. Your Chapter is ready for TPE Board consideration when the TPE Business Manager receives the following information:

- Official chapter name
- Names of your chapter officers
- Name and contact information of your chapter contact person
- Names of ten paid members from your proposed geographic area
- Proposed Chapter Rules

Minimum Membership Requirements

The Prairie Enthusiasts, Inc. requires a minimum of ten (10) members to start a chapter. These can be current members of the organization who live in an area not covered by an existing chapter, members who are part of the general membership, or members of another chapter outside their geographical area.

New members can also be recruited. New members fill out an application and send it and dues to the TPE Business Manager. Indicate the membership is for the new chapter and the Business Manager will earmark it.

The goal is to have at least twenty paid members within twelve months of being approved, and to maintain at least that number of members in order to maintain chapter status.

Officers Required

The minimum officers required for a new chapter are:

- A Chair
- A Vice Chair
- A Secretary
- A Treasurer

The position of Secretary may be combined with Treasurer. All officers and the chapter contact must be paid members.

There will also be a designated chapter member to represent that chapter as a member of the Board of Directors for The Prairie Enthusiasts, Inc.

Chapter Rules (insert link to Template here)

Chapters are required to submit to the Board of Directors for The Prairie Enthusiasts, Inc. a set of guidelines which minimally address the following:

- structure of the chapter, e.g., how the chapter officers are appointed or elected, how long will they serve, any additional officers and duties, etc.;
- how the representative to the Board of Directors for The Prairie Enthusiasts, Inc. is appointed or elected and for how long;
- what are the main purpose and goals of the chapter, e.g., acquiring land, preserving private land, raising funds to give to other organizations to preserve prairies, etc.

Geographic Area of New Chapter

The geographical boundaries of the chapter can be defined by the new chapter providing that:

- the area defined is not already part of an existing chapter's boundaries;
- that the area encompassed by the new chapter is of a feasible size to make participation in chapter events relatively easy for anyone within its boundaries

Final approval is given for the boundaries by the Board of Directors of The Prairie Enthusiasts, Inc.

Chapter Finances

Memberships

New and renewing members send their forms and dues to the Corporate Treasurer who processes them and sends them an acknowledgement. Dues are currently split, with 70% allocated to the Corporation and 30% allocated to the chapter.

Donations

Donations made specifically to a chapter are placed in that chapter's bank account. Donations made for a specific purpose, such as the purchase of land in the chapter's area, are placed in a chapter restricted account for that purpose. The Corporate Treasurer processes all donations.

Sales

If a chapter sells items and services for fundraising, 100% of the chapter proceeds are kept by the chapter minus sales tax. All sales are reported to the Corporate Treasurer by the Chapter Treasurer using an Income Advice Form (IAF) and in accordance with the Treasurer's Handbook to ensure appropriate taxes are paid.

Bills incurred by Chapter

All bills incurred by the chapter are submitted to the Corporate Treasurer using a Purchase Advice Form (PAF) and in accordance with the Treasurer's Handbook. The Corporate Treasurer processes payment and mails it directly to the vendor.

Monthly a detailed membership report, donation report and financial statement are sent to the Chapter Treasurer reflecting financial activity for the month and reflecting the chapter account(s) balance(s).

What the Chapter Receives from the Corporation

- Provides 501(c)(3) tax exempt status with the United States Internal Revenue Service as a nonprofit organization.
- Allocates 30% of membership dues to chapter for their use in support of their chapter mission.
- Publishes Field Trip information for the chapters in *Prairie Promoter* and on the website.
- Provides membership brochures to chapters at no cost.
- Provides a central location for membership data, generates membership renewal notices, collects dues and maintains a computerized membership database.
- Each member of the organization receives a newsletter (*The Prairie Promoter*) four times a year, which is organized by the TPE Editor and distributed from the organization.
- Each chapter receives space in the *Prairie Promoter* for chapter news, activities, events and each member has the opportunity to submit articles and items of interest to the Editor for publication in the general portion of the *Prairie Promoter*.
- Each chapter is covered under the organization's General Liability Insurance coverage and Prescribed Burn Insurance coverage.
- Each chapter is represented on the Corporate Board of Directors.
- All paperwork for processing memberships, bills, donations, is done by the Corporate Treasurer. Each chapter receives monthly reports of activities, memberships, donations and chapters can request special reports such as members sorted by county or city.

- The Corporation files taxes and renews our nonprofit status every year.
- The Corporate Treasurer files state sales tax reports.
- The organization, working with a designated chapter, holds an annual banquet. The annual banquet includes auction and raffle opportunities for each chapter to raise funds. The Corporation maintains a state raffle license.
- Each chapter has space on the organization's website free of charge.
- A wealth of resources and networking opportunities with other chapters and experts.

How to Get Started

Step 1

Contact people in your area who are like-minded in their enthusiasm for prairies and oak savannas to see if they would be interested in helping you organize a chapter. You may also check with the TPE Business Manager for a list of current TPE members in your area that may be interested in helping to start up a chapter.

Is there a nature/environmental center in the area? You could ask for time at one of their meetings to generate interest in a chapter. Even a local garden club might have some members looking for something other than the traditional.

Set a meeting date to get together to discuss the details. Ask the invitees to bring other acquaintances. Make it a fun as well as an informative meeting. Look at it as an opportunity to do some first-contact networking. From this meeting you should get a feel for a few dependable, enthusiastic people to assist in the start-up efforts.

Please keep the TPE Business Manager informed of your progress. Also let her know what you'd like to call your chapter and if you'd like your name listed as a contact person on the TPE website and in *The Prairie Promoter*.

Step 2

Next decide on a date and place for your first organizational meeting. Once you have confirmed the meeting place and time, you need to advertise it. To do so you can send a press release to the local newspapers and radio/TV stations. Other places to publicize your meeting include the local nature center and botanical garden, local university extension office, local DNR office, technical college, library, park department and retail shops such as nurseries and grocery stores.

Step 3

Plan your meeting agenda. You'll want to include what it means to be a TPE chapter and the need for such a chapter in your area. You may wish to contact TPE for information if you need it. Once attendees have agreed to organize a TPE chapter, the next step is to get the commitment

of ten members and elect officers. Offer attendees the opportunity to join TPE. If they didn't bring money to pay the dues, send a membership application along with them, filled in with your chapter name. They can mail the completed application and payment to the TPE Treasurer.

Once you have ten or more members, the next step is to elect officers. You will need to fill the positions of chair, vice chair, secretary and treasurer. You may also wish to consider adding a publicity chair, newsletter contact and program chair. In the beginning it is common that some officers handle multiple duties.

As you get organized, fill out the Chapter Information Sheet and return it as indicated for review by the TPE Board of Directors.

During the meeting you should ask for ideas for monthly educational programs. Your officers and/or your program chair can use this list to set up a schedule of planned meetings and programs for the year.

Step 4

Following the meeting, submit the Chapter Information Sheet (**Enter Link to it here**) to the TPE Business Manager along with any membership applications and payments you may have received. All dues will be held until such time as the TPE Board approves your chapter status. Once you have achieved chapter status, 30% of your member dues is allocated to a chapter checking account opened by the TPE Treasurer on your behalf.

Step 5

And finally, carry on. You are now ready to begin the work of managing and preserving prairies and oak savannas in your area. Spread the word. As your chapter matures and you take on more prominence in the area, you will grow and have a larger impact in your area.

Starting a chapter takes time, dedication and persistence. It also brings satisfaction, new friends, and balance back to the environment. Remember to have fun and enjoy the rewards.