

## Chapter Focus

There are over 375 chapters of TU in the United States. This wealth of diversity is a tremendous strength for our organization. Local TU leaders are constantly generating new and innovative ideas to deal with the challenges that arise in our unique organization. Passing those ideas around, especially the successful solutions is crucial to expanding the size and effectiveness of our grassroots base.

TU leaders agree that chapters are the key element for furthering the organization's excellence in conservation and TU's work on local, state, and national levels. To support the chapters in this role, the NLC developed and the board of trustees approved a new system for increasing the effectiveness of chapters called the Chapter Focus Project. The fundamental goal of this effort is to help chapters evaluate and then increase their effectiveness in the four areas of: conservation, youth education, service to members and business practices. To do this, the Chapter Focus Project introduced three tools: the Chapter Effectiveness Index (CEI), the Tacklebox, and chapter rechartering process.

The Chapter Effectiveness Index (CEI) is a series of a few questions at the bottom of the Annual Financial Report. It is to be filed at the same time (October 1-November 15) from year to year. The questions were developed to help chapters evaluate and quantify progress over time. Some chapters are inclined to score their progress on [a 1-100 scoring scale](#); however, it's important to note that the CEI is meant as a self-evaluation tool only. Scores are only intended for chapter use to measure the chapter against itself, not against other chapters or any national standard.

To help chapters achieve their goals, volunteer operations staff developed the Tacklebox. This online resource is organized into the four core areas of focus for the CEI: conservation, youth education, membership tools and business practices. Each area has a list of downloadable tools and links. The Tacklebox is accessible to all TU members and is a great resource for any TU member active in their chapter, particularly if they are a committee member. Because it is an online resource, it is constantly updated and improved with new chapter programs, examples, tools, links and ideas.

Councils track their chapters' progress using their own set of rechartering criteria with which to recommend a chapter recharter to TU national. Council recommendations are compiled by [Volunteer Operations staff](#) for the board of trustees to approve at either the February or September Board meeting. For chapters that are showing measurable progress in effectiveness or a sustained high level of effectiveness, councils recommend rechartering. For chapters that are struggling, councils help them develop a reasonable plan for increasing their effectiveness and assist with carrying out that plan. Councils monitor chapter progress in conjunction with the chapter. If progress is made (as determined by the council,) then councils recommend rechartering. If progress is not being made, then councils recommend dechartering and the chapter's members will be reassigned to active chapters. Every chapter must be recommended for rechartering (or dechartering) every four years. Chapter rechartering status and deadlines are available for review in [the Tacklebox](#).

## Chapter Conservation

TU is a conservation organization and local restoration projects are at the very heart of what we do. Every TU chapter should be directly involved in conservation whether it is an in-stream project (if your chapter is lucky enough to have coldwater resources in its area) or in advocacy (if your chapter is far away from coldwater resources.) Neighboring councils and chapters can be an excellent source of guidance on restoration and advocacy projects.

Many chapters are involved in [advocacy](#), working to influence policy, at the local municipal or county level. Councils are involved in advocacy at the state level. More information about being an effective advocate for coldwater resources can be found in TU national's publication, [Speaking for Trout and Salmon](#). Advocacy campaigns are most effective when they involve a large number of people. For this reason, it usually makes sense to work with other chapters, your council or TU national when engaging in advocacy. Remember that certain types of advocacy are limited by TU's status as a 501(c)(3) organization. The most important of these limitations are that chapters or councils may not endorse or oppose any candidate for public office and must strictly account for the portion of its activities devoted to lobbying.

Additionally, no council or chapter should participate in any lobbying activities without first consulting the TU national office. These limits are explained more fully in the chapter on risk management.

### **Chapter Youth Education**

More than half of TU chapters do some sort of education project, ranging in scope from a half-day casting class or stream restoration workshop to a week-long residential youth fishing and conservation camp. Education projects are a good way to establish partnerships with other organizations such as Boy Scout troops, schools, or other youth groups. A good place to start when planning an education project is consulting [the Tacklebox](#) or [Youth Education staff](#). For a comprehensive description of all the types of youth education and outreach activities done by TU chapters, councils, and staff across the country, please see TU's [One TU Youth Education Report](#).

### **Chapter Service to Members/ Communications**

Chapters provide a critical level of service to TU's members by making them feel connected to a local group. Communicating effectively and in a timely manner with TU members is crucial to this service.

Chapter meetings are essential for keeping in touch with members. Many chapters have meetings on a monthly basis and are scheduled the same day (for example, the first Tuesday of each month). Business is discussed, information is passed on, and future plans are made. Many chapters include an entertainment element, such as a speaker or slide presentation, to help inform their members of local, regional, or national topics of interest. It is important to remember that your members' time is valuable and that keeping chapter meetings consistent, organized and to the point is a great way to keep members coming back and increase their involvement. The chapter president should facilitate the meeting and be prepared with an agenda that is followed throughout the meeting. Being inclusive of new members and actively involving them will help to grow membership. Create a social, yet controllable and effective, atmosphere where comments are shared yet decision making can be done.

The chapter newsletter and e-newsletter are the most important vehicles used to disseminate information to chapter members. The newsletter/ e-newsletter, as a monthly publication, will keep chapter members informed about chapter meetings, events, and issues that are important to TU. The printed newsletter can also be the single biggest expense of a chapter so establishing funding should be a priority. The cost of publishing a newsletter can be covered in a number of ways. Selling advertising in your newsletter is a very good source of revenue and can certainly cover the entire expense (note that advertising revenue is Unrelated Business Income and would trigger the filing of an IRS Form 990-T if annual revenue exceeds \$1,000.) Some chapters solicit donations from their members to cover the mailing and printing costs, but in accordance with TU's bylaws, chapter dues cannot be required for chapter membership.

Your chapter should try to reduce the costs of publishing as much as possible. At a minimum, your chapter should offer to deliver your newsletter via e-mail to as many members as possible. Another strategy for reducing costs, particularly for large chapters, is to acquire a bulk mail permit, although your chapter should be aware of potential delays in delivery using this postal rate. Another option is to contract with a bulk mail company to print and mail your publication. Partnering with other chapters to pursue this option will lower your pricing even further.

When e-mailing to a group as large as a chapter's membership, please remember that we must all be compliant with federal CAN-SPAM requirements. These restrictions include, having an obvious way for e-mail recipients to opt out of the e-mail chain, inclusion of a physical address, a clear statement of why they are receiving the e-mail, etc... Failing to adhere to federal C-SPAM law has significant consequences to TU including: our tu.org being flagged as a spammer - causing all emails originating from our domain to be blocked from incoming email servers, fines, costly litigation, and lost fundraising dollars. TU offers volunteers the ability to easily e-mail council/chapter membership with the utmost regard for a member's privacy and preferred communication preferences. This tool is designed as a way for you to communicate important information to your membership without concern for CAN-SPAM violations or costs associated with e-mailing vendors. Visit the Leaders Only Tools section to learn more.

Chapter websites are critical as a means to communicate with chapter members and the general public. To set up a website requires the talent and skills of somebody experienced in this field and in many cases this

person can be found within the chapter. This is also another venue to get the newsletter out to membership.

With all the various communication options available to chapters today, please refer to [TU's style guide](#) in the Membership Tools section of the Tacklebox for downloadable images and guidelines on how to use the official logo.

### **Chapter Budgeting**

In order to ensure that chapter funds are used in correctly and in accordance with the chapter's budget, internal controls should be implemented. Although determining the best method of internal control is up to the chapter, a person or group that is not signatory to the chapter accounts should review bank statements to ensure proper use of funds. If this role proves difficult to fill, then the responsibility may fall to the board of directors. In this scenario, the chapter treasurer should periodically present the financial spending records to the board to ensure that the chapter accounts are being used properly. Of course, careful budgeting is also an effective internal control and exposes any inconsistencies in chapter spending.

Budgeting should be at the top of the list of important tasks of every chapter or council leader. An active chapter or council can raise and spend a significant amount of money, and effective budgeting allows the chapter to make the most of its income and enjoy greater success with less pain. Newsletters, projects, chapter and council administration, etc. will need funding, and the budgeting process helps chapter leaders plan and prioritize activities each year. Budgeting and policy decisions go hand-in-hand. While the budgeting process may vary from chapter to chapter and state to state, there are simple fundamentals to successful budgeting:

- Maintain current and precise financial records for both income and expenses. Historical income and expenses are the best guide to projecting future finances. Without a true record of the past, estimates into the future lose the precision required to lessen financial anxieties for your chapter or council.
- Make conservative estimates. When estimating emergency expenses or future income, overly optimistic projections for either can be financially dangerous.
- Develop an annual budget with both projected income and projected expenses.
- Use the budget as a management tool. By periodically (e.g., quarterly) tracking "actual" expenses and income against the projected numbers, chapters and councils can plan accordingly.
- Provide continuity in financial and budgeting matters. The outgoing treasurer has worked with the budget a few times and has a grasp of overall revenue and expenses. It is helpful to plan ahead and train the incoming treasurer. Officers with experience in budgeting (among other activities) should try to recruit the next treasurer and include him or her in the budgeting experience.

The simplest method of developing your chapter's or council's first budget is to use the outline of the Annual Financial Report that you are required to submit to national at the end of the year. This report includes all the common areas of revenue and expenditures used by TU chapters and councils. The Annual Financial Report function on the Leaders Only Tools section allows you to view and print your chapter's submission from previous years. Looking at previous reports gives you a good place to start for future budgeting. More resources are found in [the Tacklebox](#).

### **Chapter Bylaws**

An important outcome from the 2010 Annual Meeting was the approval of model chapter bylaws by the NLC and the board of trustees. While the new bylaws contain some basic requirements to align chapters with the national bylaws, many areas allow flexibility for chapters to make adjustments for their own specific operating practices. Although most chapters already have existing bylaws, any updates or changes should be made using the model chapter bylaws as a guide. Additionally, chapters have been asked to upload their bylaws in the Leaders Only Tools section as to have an electronic record of the most up-to-date version.

### **Chapter Volunteer Leader Position Descriptions**

It is important to note that all TU volunteer leaders must be active TU members.

#### **Chapter President**

The chapter president is the chief executive officer of the chapter. This volunteer is responsible for the general and active management of the business and affairs of the chapter. The president serves as chair of the board of directors and presides at all membership meetings. The president should supervise the operations of the chapter, making sure that the various officers and directors are performing their jobs properly, and offering them assistance whenever necessary. A good TU chapter president is a good administrator, because many of his or her responsibilities will be overseeing the work of chapter committees, coordinating their activities and assisting them with various special projects from time to time. The president is responsible (with the chapter treasurer) for the chapter filing its Annual Financial Report on time, in addition to ensuring that chapter contact information is kept current in the Leaders Only Tools section of the website. The president also must assume the responsibility for leadership development, to ensure the chapter's continued success when the current leadership moves on.

While keeping in mind the larger context of TU's state, regional and national goals, the president must coordinate the four core areas of the chapter: 1) conservation; 2) education; 3) service to members; and 4) effective chapter business practices

A good chapter president must also be a good listener, constantly aware of the mood and direction of the chapter. Without becoming a dictator, the president must steer a basic course for the group. A president should encourage members to approach him or her when they have a question or a problem. The president serves as spokesperson for the chapter at public gatherings and hearings, and should maintain good relations with local press, conservation commissions, environmental organizations and government officials. The president is a key connection between the chapter and state council. In addition, the president represents TU and the chapter to the general public. One of the president's most important duties is identifying and grooming his or her replacement. For a full checklist of duties, please visit [the Tacklebox](#). The below is an abridged version of items to consider when taking over as president:

- Communicate with the outgoing president, and ask about lessons learned
- Confer with the treasurer to make sure the signatories on the chapter bank account are current, EFT information is on file with TU staff, and proper controls are in place (e.g. no use of personal accounts for chapter funds, double signature requirement for big checks, periodic review of records, etc.)
- Ensure the past chapter president enters you as the new president in the Leaders Only Tools section of the website. This is critical for many reasons as it allows you to access rosters, print mailing labels, email your members, make chapter or leadership changes, as well as view and download various membership reports. It's also the only way we know you are a chapter president and gives us the ability to communicate with you about important leader's specific information.
- Log in to the Leaders Only Tools section to update your chapter's information, including a chapter address, point of contact, website and more. This information displays in the chapter/council search.
- Contact your state council to alert them of the turnover
- Ensure the chapter's Annual Financial Report (AFR) is filed in the Leaders Only Tools section between October 1 and November 15.
- File required forms with the IRS (Questions about the correct Form 990 to file? Please visit: [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov) or contact TU national for more information.)
- Ensure elections are held regularly in accordance with chapter bylaws and that you are identifying and grooming replacements throughout the year.
- Attend regular council meetings, encouraging other chapter representatives to also attend.

### **Chapter Vice President**

The vice president of a TU chapter is second in command. The position of vice president is often used as training for a leader to step into the president position. The vice president should be sure to read the description of chapter president above. In addition, the vice president is responsible for:

- Maintaining a high profile in the chapter.
- Presiding over meetings from which the president is absent.
- Providing support and assistance to the president in order to achieve the core functions of the chapter.
- Performing duties as assigned by the president or the board directors.

### **Chapter Secretary**

The secretary may also serve on the membership committee, or in the case of a small chapter, may serve as membership chair. For a full checklist of duties, please visit [the Tacklebox](#). The below is an abridged version of items to consider when taking over as secretary:

- Preparing and distributing the meeting minutes of the Board of Directors and membership meetings.
- Records retention (such as original chapter formation bylaws & revisions, board and committee rosters, agendas and minutes)
- Prepare general membership meeting agendas and minutes
- Prepare slate of board nominees for the annual general membership meeting
- Prepare and distribute notice of general membership meeting to members

### **Chapter Treasurer**

The role of a treasurer is without a doubt one of the most important in the chapter. It is critical that the chapter treasurer be conscientious and has good systems in place; otherwise the chapter is at serious risk. For a full checklist of duties, please visit [the Tacklebox](#). The below is an abridged version of items to consider when taking over as treasurer:

- Read through the entire TU Leadership Manual (paying particular attention to the chapter on liability and risk management.)
- Communicate with the outgoing treasurer and ask for lessons learned.
- Ensure the chapter president enters you as the new treasurer on the chapter officer roster and chapter contact information in the Leaders Only Tools section. This is critical for many reasons as it allows you to access the Annual Financial Report, among other things. It's also the only way we know you are a chapter treasurer and gives us the ability to communicate with you about important leader's specific information.

Annual requirements:

- Ensure chapter financial report is filed with TU national in the Leaders Only Tools section between October 1 and November 15. Even if your chapter has had little activity in the last year, submitting a financial statement is required. It is not acceptable to file zeros.
- File required forms to file with the IRS (Questions about the correct Form 990 to file? Please visit: [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov) or contact TU national for more information.)
- With chapter president and other members of the Executive Committee, develop, approve and track a budget of chapter expenses and revenues each fiscal year.
- With the chapter president, ensure that your chapter is set up with an electronic funds transfer (EFT,) to ensure delivery of chapter rebate.

### **Chapter Membership Chair**

Many chapters appoint a membership chair whose duties include tracking the membership of the chapter. The membership chair performs the key role in helping current members resolve membership issues, maintain members contact information, and communicate changes or issues with member records with TU national staff. The membership chair also tracks membership numbers within the chapter (using the roster and membership reports found within the Leaders Only Tools), welcomes new members that joined, and follows up with members who have not renewed. Beyond tracking these statistics, the membership chair takes the lead on programs to recruit new members. TU has a number of programs to help the membership chair with these responsibilities (including a checklist;) many are listed in [the Tacklebox](#).

### **Chapter Conservation Chair**

Many chapters appoint a conservation chair to be the central point of contact for the chapter's conservation activities. This officer coordinates conservation projects and campaigns and stays abreast of conservation issues in the chapter's area. This person should be the one to answer questions regarding conservation from members, local media, or the general public. The conservation chair should be well aware of TU's National Conservation Agenda and the conservation priorities of the state council because a chapter's conservation activities must be consistent.

### **Other Committee Chairs**

Because the officers listed above are often busy keeping the chapter running, it is usually a good practice to appoint other standing committees and committee chairs. Some additional committees that many TU chapters find useful are: outreach/publicity, fundraising/banquet and youth education. The duties of these committees will vary with the activities or priorities of the chapter.