



Georgia Native Plant Society

Chapter Quick Start Guide

This document provides an outline of steps for forming a new chapter of the Georgia Native Plant Society. Some of the steps to chapter formation require BOD approval and legal designations must be consistent across all chapters, so consult frequently with the executive director to avoid missteps that may complicate the process. The Chapter Manual provides more extensive instructions. Email executivedirector@gnps.org throughout the chapter formation process to communicate progress, ask questions, and make suggestions.

The State Board of Directors(BOD) will partner with you to form your chapter. Frequent communication throughout the process is essential for a smooth chapter creation Process.

executivedirector@gnps.org
membership@gnps.org



Step 1

Preliminary Considerations

Do you have enough members to support a chapter?
Do you have enough volunteers for leadership roles?
Have you thought about a meeting venue?

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GNPS bylaws require a minimum of 10 members to start a chapter, but more will be needed to keep it going. The Chapter Manual and executive director will guide the chapter start-up committee on how to grow membership and sustain a vibrant chapter.



Step 2

Form Startup Committee

The startup committee is a temporary leadership team that manages things until chapter officers and board of directors are elected.
Three to five members recommended.



Step 3

Chapter Interest Meeting

May combine with an educational program
BOD and GNPS staff will attend the meeting if requested and help with email invitations, promoting the event and hosting virtually if needed.





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Step 4

Chapter Name

Geographic or Georgia native plant name
The *Dogwood* Chapter of The Georgia Native Plant Society
or
The *Southeast Metro Atlanta* Chapter of The Georgia Native Plant Society
You must submit for approval via the [Chapter Name Application form](#).

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Required for bank account
Required for name reservation
Required for FEIN Application
Required for Incorporation
Required for Sales Tax ID Application

Requires Executive Approval



Step 5

Chapter Address

Many of the steps below require a street address.
You may also wish to obtain a P.O. Box for receipt of mail.

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Required for bank account
Required for name reservation
Required for FEIN Application
Required for Incorporation
Required for Sales Tax ID Application

\$ Fee varies for P.O. Box



Step 6

Elect Temporary Officers

Hold an official meeting of the startup committee
Keep minutes of the meeting
Nominate and elect President (CEO), Treasurer (CFO), and Secretary
May be required for Incorporation documents
May be required to open a chapter bank account



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Step 7

Business Name Reservation

Secretary of State's website

This is an optional step

You must create an account before reserving a name

\$25 - Reimbursable from State

[Login to GA Corporate Division of SOS](#) and navigate to **Name Reservation Request**



Step 8

Select a Registered Agent

A registered agent is the "mailbox" for the corporation.

The registered agent is the person designated to receive any service of process, documents, or other official communication on its behalf.

The registered agent's address must be a street address.

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Required for Incorporation



Step 9

File Articles of Incorporation (AOI)

Secretary of State's website

Incorporate as a corporation using 'Inc.' designation
and your approved chapter name

'The Dogwood Chapter of The Georgia Native Plant Society, Inc.'

You will need the business name, street address, and email address
for at least one incorporator

Specific language is required for non-profits

Strongly recommend having executive director review

\$100 Reimbursable from State GNPS

[Login to GA Corporate Division of SOS](#)

GNPS Model AOI - [Model AOI for GNPS Chapters](#)

Instructions -> [Instructions for Filing AOI](#)





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Step 10

Notice of Intent to Incorporate Newspaper Publication

Required within one business day of filing for incorporation
Must be published in designated "legal organ" (newspaper) of county
Search the Secretary of State website for your county legal organ

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Required to complete the Incorporation process

\$40 Reimbursable from State GNPS

Legal Organ Search link-> [Secretary of State - Clerks](#)
Model Newspaper Notice link -> [Georgia Filing Procedures](#)



Step 11

File Annual Registration

Secretary of State's website
Must be completed within 90 days of incorporation and
annually thereafter between Jan 1 and April 1
Must list three principal officers, CEO (President), CFO (Treasurer), Secretary
These should be the officers you elected in step 6
Registered Agent name and address required.

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Required for ongoing compliance

\$30

Annual Registration link -> [Annual Registration - GA](#)



Step 12

Apply for Employer Identification Number (EIN)

IRS website
The EIN is the identification number for the chapter.
The president or other officer must apply for the EIN.

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Required for bank account

\$ Free

EIN Application link -> [Apply for an Employer Identification Number \(EIN\) Online](#)





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Step 13

Acquire Sales Tax ID Number (STIN)

Georgia Dept of Revenue website

Requires FEIN, chapter name, chapter address, business activity, ownership info, etc.
The Tax ID Number is required if the chapter will sell plants or any other tangible property.
Non-compliance results in penalties and fines, so don't try to skirt this requirement.

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Required to sell plants or tangible property

\$ Free

Dept of Revenue - Sales Tax ID link ->[Tax Registration](#)



Step 14

Create Chapter Mission Statement

Chapters will adopt the GNPS bylaws as their own

Chapter Mission Statement is Included in Model Chapter Bylaws

Must align with GNPS mission statement

You must submit for approval via the [Chapter Mission Statement Application form](#).

Requires Executive Approval



Step 15

Chapter Bylaws

Model chapter bylaws are available [Model Chapter Bylaws](#)

Instructions for completing model chapter bylaws [Instruction for Completing Bylaws](#)

Submit the completed bylaws to membership@gnps.org

Requires BOD Approval



Step 16

Apply For Tax Exempt Status - Chapter 501(c)(3)

Read the [Form 1023-EZ Instructions](#) and complete the 1023-EZ Eligibility Worksheet

Register for a company account at pay.gov

Search for 1023-EZ on pay.gov, complete form 1023-EZ and submit payment

A preview of the 1023-EZ form can be found [here](#).

\$275 Reimbursable from State GNPS





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Step 17

Chapter Affiliation Agreement

The chapter and GNPS will execute a chapter affiliation agreement
The affiliation agreement will be renewed annually as part of the chapter survey.



Step 18

Submit Chapter Application Form to GNPS

You must submit via the [Chapter Application form](#).



Official BOD Approval for Affiliate Chapter



Step 19

Officer Selection

May vary depending on bylaws but may include
President / Vice President / Treasurer / Secretary / Directors
Must be GNPS members



Step 20

Vote on Chapter Board Slate and Bylaws

Notify members and hold the meeting
One vote per membership
This is an official business meeting - keep minutes



Step 21

Open Business Bank Account

Requirements vary by the financial institution but may include
FEIN, Articles of Incorporation, chapter name, chapter address, list of elected officers, and
business meeting minutes where officers were elected
Two signatories on the account
No fee/interest-bearing account if possible



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Step 22

Finances - Accounting

A standard set of accounts and sample budget will be provided by GNPS Treasurer

treasurer@gnps.org



Step 23

Live Plant License

Required for chapters that sell plants

Must be renewed annually

[Live Plant License Information](#)

[Live Plant License Application](#)

[Live Plant License Regulations](#)

\$ Free



Step 24

Required Chapter Activities

Minimum of four activities per year

(Field Trip, Workshop, Educational Program, member meeting, plant sale, etc.)

At least one activity is an educational program.

Annual Business Meeting with Elections is required



Step 25

Chapter Responsibilities

Adhere to 501(c)(3) requirements

Adhere to GNPS and chapter bylaws

File Annual Registration with Secretary of State -> [Annual Registration - GA](#)

File annual tax form 990, 990-N, or 990-EZ (see [Publication 4839](#) for filing requirements)

Pay sales tax on merchandise sales if applicable

Complete annual chapter survey

Contribute to NativeScape newsletter

501(c)(3) guidance -> [Exemption Requirements - 501\(c\)\(3\) Organizations](#)



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Frequently Asked Questions

Questions	Answers
Questions about Finances	
What chapter startup costs will the state cover?	<p>The state will pay or reimburse for the following expenses, limited to \$750</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$25 Name reservation fee - Secretary of State website • \$100 Incorporation fee - Secretary of State website • \$30 Initial Annual Filing Fee • \$40 Newspaper Publication fee • \$275 1023 EZ application • Nametags • Promotional materials • Signage
A person or organization wants to donate money to help get our chapter started. Since we don't have a bank account yet, how do we handle the donations?	<p>Donations made to the forming chapter must be made through GNPS at the state level. The funds, less any chapter expenses paid from the funds, will be set aside to be paid to the chapter once chapter formation is finalized and a chapter bank account has been established.</p>
A person or organization wants to donate items (in-kind donation) to help get our chapter started. How do we handle the donations?	<p>A business donating products or services to the chapter should invoice GNPS for the full value, with a subtraction shown for the value contributed. Send the invoice to the GNPS Treasurer (treasurer@gnps.org) GNPS will account for this donation on its records. Individual in-kind donations not exceeding \$250 are normally not acknowledged or accounted for by GNPS. For such donations whose value exceeds \$250, contact the GNPS Treasurer.</p>
Is there a standard chart of accounts we should use for tracking our income and expenses?	<p>Yes. The GNPS Treasurer will provide a standard chart of accounts.</p>



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<p>Do we need a CPA to manage our accounting?</p>	<p>No. However, you will need someone with accounting experience to maintain accounting records, retain supporting documentation, generate financial statements for the board and reporting required by GNPS, and file periodic state sales tax returns if the chapter sells merchandise or plants. The chapter may benefit from retaining an outside accounting firm for assistance.</p>
<p>What financial reporting, if any, are we required to provide to the state board?</p>	<p>All chapters will provide financial reports during the annual chapter survey and at other times as may be requested.</p>
<p>Questions about meetings</p>	
<p>How do we find speakers?</p>	<p>GNPS can provide a list of potential speakers. Check with local universities and gardening groups for other resources.</p>
<p>How much do speakers cost?</p>	<p>Honorariums for speakers vary. Some speakers don't charge an honorarium if they can sell their merchandise (books, posters, plants, etc.) Honorariums may range from \$50 to several hundred dollars.</p>
<p>Will the state pay for our speakers?</p>	<p>During the chapter formation process, the state will reimburse a pre-approved amount for speakers.</p>
<p>Will the state pay for renting a meeting venue?</p>	<p>Free meeting venues may often be found through local extension offices, libraries, and churches. If no free venue can be found, the state will pay for a meeting venue with prior approval.</p>
<p>How do we promote our meetings and events?</p>	<p>Use social media, local news outlets, and the GNPS webpage to promote your event. We will grant someone from your chapter access to the GNPS webpage to add your meetings and events to the GNPS event calendar. You may</p>



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	email communications@gnps.org if there is not yet a chapter member with webpage access.
Questions about membership	
Does the chapter keep the annual dues from its members?	Chapters receive a percentage of their members' dues, rebated annually. The amount is determined by the GNPS BOD.
How do we know who our chapter members are?	GNPS uses Neon, a CRM software to manage membership data. The GNPS membership team can provide you with reports of your members. Each chapter may have one or two members who can access the membership data and create and run reports.
How do we communicate with our chapter members?	GNPS uses Neon, a CRM software to manage email distribution to members. Using this software allows us to send an email to your chapter members seamlessly. Each chapter may have one or two members who have access to create and send emails.
Questions about Insurance	
Will the state provide general liability (GL) insurance for our chapter?	GNPS provides accident insurance coverage for all recorded volunteers and participants at GNPS sponsored and supervised events.
Will the state provide directors & officers (D&O) insurance for our officers?	Since each chapter is a separate legal entity, the insurance carrier requires that each chapter have its own insurance policy. GNPS recognizes the importance of this coverage and will work with new chapters on funding.
What happens if a member or visitor gets hurt at a chapter event? Does GNPS insurance cover this?	The GNPS GL policy covers all members and invitees for medical expenses up to \$5,000 each, except vendors, performers, exhibitors, and entertainers.
Should chapter members and guests complete	All members and guests must sign a GNPS



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any type of waiver before participating in events?	liability waiver form before engaging in any volunteer physical activity such as plant rescues, restoration work, and field trips. Chapters will maintain the signed waivers as permanent records. The GNPS Liability Release Waiver can be found here: Liability Release Waiver
Questions about taxes	
Who files our federal and state income tax forms?	The chapter must annually file a Federal Return form 990-N, 990-EZ, 990 before May 15 for the prior year ending December 31.
Are we required to pay sales tax on the merchandise we sell? What about plants?	All sales of merchandise and plants are subject to sales tax rates based on the jurisdiction that the sales were made in. The frequency of filing returns will be determined at registration and will likely be annual or quarterly, with filing due by the 20th of the month after the period ending. (You may benefit from having expert assistance when doing an online filing for the first time.)
What other tax considerations are there?	No other taxes. However, you will need to register your corporation with the Secretary of State Office (SOS) each new year, for which a fee is charged.