

# ECO AmeriCorps

2024-2025



## **Clean Water Communications Specialist**

Clean Water Initiative Program, Department of Environmental Conservation

1 National Life Drive, Davis 3 Montpelier, VT 05602-3901

CWIP Mission: To efficiently, effectively, and equitably align and coordinate clean water efforts statewide with a broad network of partners, develop and provide financial and technical resources for clean water partners to implement and sustain projects, and capture, assess and communicate the progress and impact of clean water efforts.

Position Supervisor: Lauren Sopher, Data Management & Communications Specialist

Lauren is on a team with CWIP's Tracking and Accounting Supervisor to: 1) Track and account for investments in and results of CWIP-funded clean water projects, from project identification through verification and maintenance, using the Watershed Projects Database (WPD); 2) Lead a team of internal and interagency partners to publish the Vermont Clean Water Initiative Annual Performance Report; 3) Maintain and implement accounting methods to estimate pollution reductions associated with clean water projects across all land use sectors (agriculture, stormwater, roads, natural resources, and wastewater); and 4) Support crosscutting CWIP team functions and priorities, including supervision of the ECO AmeriCorps member.

### The Role:

This member will play an integral role in helping the Clean Water Initiative Program (CWIP) communicate the impacts of clean water partnerships, programs, and projects to the public. The member will serve as part of the CWIP team, learning from and communicating with state staff and external partners. This position provides a great opportunity to network and gain experience in many aspects of environmental service. We expect the member to focus on assisting with communications and data visualization, with flexibility depending on their areas of interest and program priorities.

1. Clean Water Communications

Maintain and enhance clean water project communications via online and print communications tools:

- Coordinate DEC's Clean Water Conversations – a monthly presentation on a variety of clean water-related topics.
- Develop content for Vermont DEC's Instagram and Facebook accounts, as well as CWIP's website, e-newsletters, and plain language one-pagers.
- Assist with developing and designing education and outreach materials to improve clean water communications.

- Assist in improving the relevance, understanding, and accessibility of our program communications (website, social media, online events, and other communications), including integration of digital accessibility best practices and ANR's Language Access Plan.

- Serve as part of the DEC Social Media Team to learn from and network with a diversity of communications professionals.

## 2. Data Analysis & Visualization

- Assist in developing and improving interactive data visualization tools, such as Microsoft Power BI, to increase public engagement in clean water data.

- Analyze clean water project data to better understand trends in clean water funding and project results, as well as exploring opportunities to better capture projects' co-benefits, including climate and flood resilience, habitat restoration and protection, and justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (JEDI) impacts.

## 3. Other CWIP Program Support

- Support the CWIP team in implementing strategies to make our programs more diverse, equitable, and inclusive for our partners and the public.

- Support clean water site visits, as needed.

- Support on-going efforts to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of clean water data management and reporting processes.

- Participate in special projects, based on the member's interests; for example, serving on the Vermont Agricultural Water Quality Partnership Communications Sub-committee.

The CWIP team is currently a 14-person team, with four sub teams. The ECO AmeriCorps member provides significant capacity for communications across the team, as well as within the sub teams.

Examples:

- Clean Water Conversations is a free monthly public presentation series on a variety of clean water-related topics hosted by CWIP. We would not have the capacity to execute these outreach events if not for ECO AmeriCorps members.

- The ECO AmeriCorps member creates Vermont Clean Water Initiative Annual Performance Report plain language one-pagers. These documents make the information presented in the report more accessible to the public by explaining key concepts from the report in an approachable way.

- During the 2023 – 2024 service year, the CWIP sub team focused on the new American Rescue Plan Act-funded 3-Acre Permit Obtainment Assistance (POA) Program relied on our ECO AmeriCorps member's capacity to develop an 8-month outreach plan. The plan includes a suite of outreach materials informing the public about the technical and financial assistance DEC can provide to eligible 3-acre sites seeking to obtain Three-Acre Permit coverage. The ECO AmeriCorps member provides substantial capacity to support CWIP in addressing emergent communications priorities related to new and revised clean water technical and financial assistance programs.

- Maintain and improve education, outreach, and engagement on clean water projects to the public
- Develop a new science communications skill set
- Engage in justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion initiatives

#### Essential Functions:

One essential part of CWIP's mission is to communicate the impact of efforts occurring throughout the state in the field of clean water. While staff mainly focus on funding, tracking, and accounting for this work, the successes are not always communicated in a manner that is accessible to a public audience. This position would greatly enhance communication efforts, making clean water data and reports easier to access and understand. Clean Water Conversations is an outreach program that CWIP would not have the capacity to execute if not for AmeriCorps members. The Conversations are well attended and receive positive feedback.

- Interest in learning and collaborating in water quality improvement efforts
- Interest in learning about and incorporating JEDI principles into service
- Strong written and verbal communication skills; interest and willingness to improve these skills
- Experience and interest in writing and designing communications for the public (i.e., social media, e-newsletters, and web)
- Ability to communicate effectively and professionally with a range of audiences
- Team player
- Strong organizational and time management skills
- Strong attention to detail
- Self-motivated
- Ability to serve a majority of the time in an office environment, as well as perform occasional site visits
- Proficiency in Microsoft Office suite
- Ability to collect and analyze data using various applications and software

Lastly, this service-position would allow an AmeriCorps member to expand the efficiency and effectiveness of our reporting procedures through assisting with continuous improvement efforts and gain useful skills in the process. This is of great need in a time where we have increased workloads with limited capacity. The member would collaborate with CWIP staff and our partners to develop new and exciting approaches to track and communicate the state's clean water efforts and progress toward meeting TMDLs.

#### Secondary Functions:

- Experience, coursework, and strong interest in water quality or natural resources; environmental sciences or studies background
- Experience or interest in data analysis
- Ability to manage multiple projects

- Familiar with Microsoft Teams and ability to effectively host a Teams meeting
- Familiar with online graphic design tools

Desired Qualifications:

- Ability to adapt to changing priorities
- Experience with communications, for example, comfortable with facilitating and giving presentations or writing content for and designing Facebook and Instagram posts
- Experience with data management and analysis

What initiatives has your organization undertaken to support diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice (DEIJ)?

Since 2020, CWIP has focused on increasing our JEDI competencies at the program level, starting with a draft JEDI workplan with the following goals: 1) to make this work transformative and not transactional, 2) to encourage humility and foster a learning and iterative approach, 3) to focus on process and improved engagement rather than a final product, and 4) to maintain a catalogue of opportunities to routinely revisit and advance when feasible. The CWIP team has recurring weekly staff meetings; one meeting per month is dedicated to discussion around JEDI. CWIP is currently working implement a strategic plan. Our strategic plan groupwork resulted in seven core strategies. We plan to integrate JEDI as a cross cutting theme across all our strategies. One of the strategies is JEDI-specific, “Increase integration of justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (JEDI) principles into clean water funding and reporting processes.” The following actions are a work in progress but thus far we plan to:

- Utilize continuous improvement and an adaptive mindset to integrate JEDI tools and resources into clean water funding processes.
- Develop and designate program’s staff capacity, either through existing staff or new hires, in leading and piloting JEDI initiatives within CWIP.
- Identify and prioritize projects or initiatives within CWIP that have opportunities to incorporate or support JEDI goals, leveraging the team’s expertise and relationships.
- Leverage our data tracking expertise to establish and track JEDI-focused metrics.
- Use coalition building skills and technical expertise to find common ground and momentum with JEDI initiatives.
- Use our strong team dynamic to have hard conversations with internal and external folks on JEDI issues.
- Establish and implement best practices for community engagement as part of the clean water project process, including to improve environmental justice considerations in community engagement.
- Advocate with leadership to evaluate institutional systems, including power and gender dynamics, that influence staff retention and identify tools to make meaningful improvements to the workplan and organization.

- Improve hiring practices to recruit more diverse staff and service members by emphasizing “soft skills” and improving advertising or new and open positions.

### How is climate resiliency part of the work your organization does?

The CWIP team funds, tracks, and reports on priority projects to restore, protect, and enhance Vermont’s waters, and communicates progress toward meeting water quality restoration targets outlined in the Total Maximum Daily Loads (or TMDLs). CWIP also coordinates funding, tracking, and reporting of clean water efforts for federal and state partners. Clean water project implementation is an important piece of climate resilience work. Clean water projects provide co-benefits like increased flood resilience, improved carbon sequestration, better soil health, and improved habitat function and biodiversity. In addition to achieving water quality goals, Vermont’s work to improve water quality directly supports climate adaptation and flood mitigation, which will increase the state’s resilience to future climate related stressors.

### Networking Opportunities

The member will collaborate with numerous staff at DEC who have a wealth of knowledge across the environmental field. If they are interested in a particular study area, they may have the opportunity to help other DEC staff with their field duties or other small projects. For example, they could take a day to collect water samples with the Lakes and Ponds Program, they could help count insects collected by Monitoring and Assessment Program staff, or perhaps help with aquatic invasive species removal. They will also be reaching out to and interacting with our partners (watershed groups, municipalities, and other environmental organizations in Vermont). There are many opportunities to network. The member’s efforts towards implementing the Clean Water Conversations present a great opportunity to network with clean water partners within DEC, sister departments and agencies, and external clean water partners. Supervisors will help to foster networking based on the member’s interest.

### Misc.

I (Lauren) have experience building and launching an internship program from the ground up at a watershed organization in Vermont. I was responsible for interviewing, selecting, and supervising our first intern. The organization also had ECO AmeriCorps members, whom I helped guide in the areas of communications and fieldwork. As a Program Manager at the Howard Center, I managed a caseload of 13 clients and their 15 support staff. As a Vermont Housing and Conservation Board AmeriCorps alumni, I am familiar with the service experience. In December 2022, I took over supervision of CWIP’s current ECO AmeriCorps member. I have substantial professional experience in science communications, which is a core focus area of CWIP’s service member. I understand the expectations for the ECO AmeriCorps program and, alongside CWIP team members, will strive to provide the member with an impactful learning experience, collaborate with the member to gain new skills, and explore their passions. I will also provide the member with substantial support, dedication, and mentorship to meet their service goals. I am invested in the projects that the ECO AmeriCorps member will perform – I will be available to review tasks and work products, answer questions, and provide constructive feedback. If I am not available, several other members of our program will be available to give guidance to the member.

- The position may require boots and rain gear for site visits. All other tools and technical equipment will be provided.



- A reliable vehicle is not expected.
- This service-position is largely desk-based. There will be some opportunities for site visits.

I (Lauren) am happy to help with all the above-listed community connections, as well as any other links that are integral to making the member's experience positive and welcoming. The CWIP team is dedicated to creating a supportive, connected experience for the member.

Minimum Qualifications:

- Be a US citizen, a national, or legal permanent resident alien of the U.S.;
- Be at least 18 years of age upon entering the Pre-Service Orientation (there is no upper age limit);
- Be a high school graduate or have a GED certificate or be willing to work towards their GED as part of their service-year successful completion requirement. A member cannot have dropped out of high school to join AmeriCorps. If a member has a documented medical reason/professional opinion why they cannot finish high school, they might be eligible; call in this case;
- Has not been convicted of murder or sexual assault and is willing to undergo a National Service Criminal History Check;
- Must submit to Agency of Human Services checks, i.e. Adult Abuse and Child Abuse Prevention;
- Be committed to the ECO AmeriCorps program, and its ethic of service and personal and professional development of its participants;
- Have the ability and enthusiasm to drive to, attend, and participate in required trainings and events, and be prepared to drive up to 2-3 hours each way

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Position begins September 17th 2024 and ends August 15th 2025

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