



# AmeriCorps

## 2023-24 ECO AmeriCorps

Accessibility and Education Assistant

Environmental Careers and Opportunities (ECO) AmeriCorps is an AmeriCorps program within the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation (VTDEC). ECO AmeriCorps is funded in part by an AmeriCorps state grant provided through SerVermont from the Corporation for National & Community Service. Service sites will provide meaningful service opportunities, regular supervision with oversight of service hours and timesheets, office space and office equipment, orientation to the worksite, additional training (as needed) and mileage reimbursement. The 2023-2024 program will begin mid-September 2023 and end in August 2024.

### **To be considered, service sites must:**

- Demonstrate a commitment to DEIJ principles and provide a pathway for involvement at the host site and program level.
- Be a non-profit, municipality, state agency, tribal government, or educational institution.
- Provide a position description showcasing activities that are appropriate to the mission of ECO AmeriCorps.
- Provide a work environment that is ADA compliant, drug-free, and carries supplies and equipment necessary for members to perform their duties.
- Be able to provide the cash match and mileage reimbursement at the federal General Services Administration (GSA) rate for service-related travel for the member.
- Attend a supervisor orientation and be available for a minimum of two subsequent site visits and check-ins from ECO AmeriCorps staff.
- Clarify any additional responsibilities to the member according to your organization's policies.
- Notify ECO AmeriCorps staff about conflicts or other issues as they arise.

### **Other Requirements and Responsibilities:**

- Confirm member selection, on-site training, member supervision and support throughout term of service, other forms and documentation as required by AmeriCorps, mileage reimbursement for service-related travel.
- Main supervisor must attend AmeriCorps supervisor orientation (or make special arrangements).

### **Host Site cost based on # of full-time employees:**

*Full-Time (1,700 hours over 11 months)*

- 0-3 \$8,000
- 4-10 \$9,000
- >10 \$10,500

*Half-Time (900 hours over 6 months)*

- \$5,250 regardless of size

*Quarter-Time (450 hours over 3 months)*

- \$2,625 regardless of size

For more information about the host site application:

- Visit the ECO Website for supporting documents: [www.ecoamericorps.org](http://www.ecoamericorps.org)
- Or contact Program Supervisor, Dustin Bowman, [dustin.bowman@vermont.gov](mailto:dustin.bowman@vermont.gov), 802-461-5222

*The Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation is sponsoring AmeriCorps positions through its AmeriCorps Program. The State of Vermont is an Equal Opportunity Employer. Positions are open to all applicants without regard to race color, national origin, ethnicity, disability, age, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, political affiliation, veteran's status, religion, or creed.*

Name of Organization or Municipality:

Birds of Vermont Museum

Address of Organization or Municipality:

900 Sherman Hollow Road / Huntington, VT 05462

Primary Supervisor Name and Title:

Erin Talmage, Executive Director

Primary Supervisor's email:

[erin@birdsofvermont.org](mailto:erin@birdsofvermont.org)

Primary Supervisor's phone #:

802-434-2167

Please provide a brief description of your role at your site:

The ECO Americorps member will be closely supported by Erin Talmage, Executive Director, and Allison Gergely, Museum Educator.

Erin's role as Executive Director includes fiduciary management; staff and volunteer coordination; property management; and other managerial and staffing duties. She takes a leadership role in EDI and accessibility, community engagement, records and data, and wildlife conservation at the museum.

Allison Gergely is responsible for senior outreach programs, seasonal traveling exhibits. She takes a lead role with visitor, youth, and adult programming and informal science education for all visitors.

The Museum operates with a small staff, necessitating considerable overlap in duties. Each of us need to be able to step in to almost every role including, but not limited to, educational and arts programming; volunteer and intern management; exhibit development; managing and ordering for gift shop; facilities, trail and garden maintenance; donor relations and fundraising; and publicity, outreach, and science communications.

Which hosting category are you applying to?

Quarter-Time (May-August)

What is the title of the position you are requesting?

Accessibility and Education Assistant

Describe your proposed service project.

*[Note: performance measures are based on improved acres of public land, improved miles of waterways or trails, number of Vermonters provided environmental stewardship education or training, and number of members placed in green jobs after completing their AmeriCorps service. Capacity- building activities are allowed. Please describe any projected impact.]*

This service position will support the Birds of Vermont Museum and the overall birding community by increasing the overall birdability<sup>[1]</sup> of the museum. The service member will promote bird conservation by expanding the reach of the museum to a larger group of constituents.

The project entails assessing accessibility of our existing trails and interpretative materials, and to support and provide excellent informal education for the public about Vermont wildlife, especially birds. The Service Member should springboard off existing trails, signs, and exhibits to suggest, design, change and/or create accessible exhibits and interactive experiences for indoors and outdoors. The Museum's priorities here start with trail accessibility, e.g., tactile maps/signs, remediation and rerouting that addresses rough or uneven surfaces, hand rails, etc.

1 - to ensure the birding community and the outdoors are welcoming, inclusive, safe and accessible for everybody - definition from birdability.org

What data collection tools will the member use to record the impacts of their service activity?

The member will document proposed and installed changes to trails, exhibits and experiences. The member may document educational experience they assist with or provide. The member may use illustrations, written material, photographic material, diagrams, and/or program outlines, etc., as needed. Documentation may show plans or events, e.g. showing people using newly developed and/or changed trails, exhibits, and experiences.

Such documentation may be used for further planning, grant applications, publication in press releases, blog or newsletter, articles, and so on. If useful and/or appropriate, this documentation of proposed and enacted birdability improvements may be useful for the member's future portfolio.

Please provide any additional information (data, statistics, reports, etc.) that demonstrates the compelling need for the proposed position:

Bird conservation requires engaging people with the wonders of birds. This involves providing opportunities for introducing both avian natural history and local bird species to people yet to engage with birds as well as supporting people with an existing interest. One of the Bird of Vermont Museum's goals is to increase the number of people we introduce and support by becoming more welcoming and inclusive.

According to the CDC, 1 in 4 people in the United States have a disability: functional, mobility, and/or cognitive. On the conservation side, the American Bird Conservancy reports bird conservation helps promote more sustainable agriculture, supports sustainable development, increases biodiversity, and can "improve livelihoods, create economic opportunities, and restore degraded ecosystems at a landscape level." For conservation to succeed and for the museum to meet its goals, we need to include all people and to make it possible for any and every person to engage with birds in a positive way. Therefore, we need to increase birdability.

Over the past few years a great deal has been done to address the need for "birdability." The birding community is working to make birding a more inclusive activity for people with physical disabilities, including low vision, limited hearing, and mobility issues. Birdability also endeavors to include people with other physical challenges and mental illnesses.

The Museum's mission is to provide education, to nurture an appreciation of the environment, and to study birds and their habitats using wood carvings and other museum resources. By having a more welcoming and engaging environment for a more diverse audience and community, we will improve and expand the museum's impact in conservation. This increases protection of Vermont's birds. Improving birdability is implicitly required by our mission. And to do so, we need additional people, including Americorps service members, to collaborate and move towards this.

What initiatives does your organization take to support diversity, equity, inclusion, and environmental justice (DEIJ)? Please include any historical data or details for on-going strategic plans, partnerships, and projects, as relevant.

The Birds of Vermont Museum has made the following commitment: "The Birds of Vermont Museum welcomes all visitors. The museum collection salutes the diversity of all life. We actively strive to serve people from different backgrounds and experiences, to increase access, to elevate diverse artistic and scientific voices, and to support a community that values inclusivity, respect, and diversity. We are learning, assessing our assumptions, and working to broaden the birding community."

This statement is part of our Equality, Inclusion, and Diversity document, written by the staff and board in 2020 and 2021. The full guidance is on our website, <https://birdsofvermont.org/more/edi-commitment/>

We have so far made progress in the elevation of diverse voices and have recently drafted a guide that covers accessible design of indoor exhibit labels and signs. Our next step is improving "infrastructure", implementing "birdability" in our outdoor spaces and trails.

Outline how DEIJ principles can be incorporated into your organization's work moving forward. (Provide examples of any trainings, workshops, projects, partnerships, etc.)

The staff has attended a variety of workshops in the last few years including ones put on by the Peace and Justice Center and birdability.org. We have many internal conversations about our language, ways to become more welcoming, and drafting a land acknowledgment. We frequently review each other's work, suggest ways in which we can change our approaches, offerings, or our language, and we strive to ensure that each and every one of our volunteers and interns has opportunities to grow with us.

Describe specific challenges that your organization has faced while integrating DEIJ Principles.

A significant challenge has been finding time to attend workshops and make the consequent changes that are helpful. Our next goal is to start volunteer training to share some of the teachings.

How will the ECO member be included or supported in on-going or future DEIJ work at the organization, if they so choose?

The ECO member will be invited and encouraged to attend any workshop that is available. We will share our commitment and action items with them

We will also encourage the member to attend birdability workshops. We find there is considerable overlap between some DEIJ principles and birdability.

Does the supervisor have adequate time and leadership experience to manage an ECO member? Please explain how:

Yes. Both Erin Talmage and Allison Gergely have decades of experience supervising staff, interns, and volunteers at the Birds of Vermont Museum. In addition, they both have experience supervising from previous employment.

Each staff person expects to spend one or more hours per week in direct and indirect supervision of the service member. They will frequently be collaborating with the member on specific projects or portions of, and checking in several times during a day as needed during independent portions.

Will the member have access to networking opportunities in this position? Please explain:

Yes. We will invite and encourage the members to attend natural history and/or art workshops, nature walks, and other related programs both at the museum or from partnering organizations.

We are also partnering with Bridget Butler, the Bird Diva, to place the museum on the birdability map. The member will be invited to participate in every meeting on the subject of accessibility.

The member will be invited to attend any internal committee meetings with staff and Board of Trustee members, as well as our quarterly board meeting. These meetings will allow the member to witness how nonprofits are run and the importance of a Board of Directors, as well as make personal connections.

Does your organization currently host or plan to host an AmeriCorps member from another program? If yes, briefly describe the duties of this other position.

No

Please list any clothing/equipment the member will need that you cannot provide (e.g., hiking boots, waders, raingear, etc.). Is a reliable vehicle expected? As the host site, you are responsible for providing all tools and technical equipment needed for the position (e.g., computer, phone, GPS, etc.).

Hiking boots, work boots, rain gear

Is there someone in your organization's network that might be interested in mentoring your ECO service member? \*Note, 1-2 hours per month, not required

Maybe

Are you willing to search with program staff over the summer to help your ECO member secure affordable and safe housing?

Yes

Many of our members are not from Vermont and are seeking a sense of community away from home. In what ways would you be willing to help them establish community connections? (Housing, peer networks, affinity spaces, local resources, fun places to go)

The Birds of Vermont Museum is a tourist attraction. Part of all staff and volunteer' roles are to give recommendations to tourists on places to visit: restaurants, breweries, museums, etc.. We are happy to share our knowledge with the member.

Part of their service includes communicating with Museum visitors. Close to fifty percent of our visitors are from Vermont and the member is likely to meet and interact with a high percentage of these visitors.

By attending bird walks and other bird-related community events, service members will have ample opportunities to meet and connect with a great number of people in the Vermont birding community.

The Birds of Vermont Museum is a neighbor of Audubon Vermont. We would be happy to explore additional opportunities to collaborate, and bring the members from both organizations together.

In addition, the museum has many ties with the art and the woodcarving community. Due to our existing programming the member will have opportunities to converse with local artists and carvers.

Provide approximate impact numbers (e.g. miles of rivers treated) in each focus area.

Water Quality and Trail Improvement - Please project Impact Numbers on miles of river/stream/trail treated and/or improved.

Trails: 3.2 miles

Land Conservation and Remediation - Please project impact numbers on acres of public parks or other public, publicly managed or tribal lands improved.

Acres of mixed forest affected: 102

Community Engagement Outreach and Education - Please project number of individuals receiving environmental stewardship education or training.

1000 : The Birds of Vermont Museum has approximately 4000 visitors a year, it is likely the member will converse with approximately a quarter of them. This is informal environmental education; the service member may also deliver programs, and their efforts with respect to birdability will last longer than their service period.

Sponsoring Organization's Mission:

The Birds of Vermont Museum's mission is to provide education, to nurture an appreciation of the environment, and to study birds and their habitats using woodcarvings and other museum resources.

#### ABOUT THE MUSEUM:

The Birds of Vermont Museum houses an indoor collection of over 500 life-size wood carvings grouped into 5 main "galleries". The building also hosts an annual art show, includes a workshop and craft area, offers bird study resources, and has an observation window. Visitors pay a fee to enter the museum building.

The outdoor areas are free to the public from dawn to dusk all year, every day. The Museum grounds are 107 acres comprising a variety of habitats that support diverse birds. The property has 3.2 miles of trails, a pollinator sanctuary, picnic areas, and an accessible treehouse.

About 4000 people visit the museum. In addition we host special events, lead bird/nature walks, and do outreach programs in our local community.

#### Goals for the ECO AmeriCorps Position:

Approximately half of the member's overall service will be dedicated to birdability improvements

Expand our outdoor recreation offerings by building accessible trails and additional interpretive materials

Assess Museum property for birdability and other trail improvements

Add suitable trails areas to a birdability map

Provide lists of and/or complete outdoor birdability improvement tasks for/with staff/volunteers/contractors : e.g., widen trails, build benches, create signage

Approximately half of the member's service will be dedicated to informal science education by helping visitors and supporting their experiences

Provide excellent informal educational interactions with visitors, e.g., talking to people about birds, identifying birds at the bird feeder, supporting and sharing curiosity, identifying appropriate opportunities for them to experience and support birds

Completing shared daily and weekly tasks with staff, including feeding birds, garden maintenance, etc.

Support visitor experiences by preparing for and assisting with programs and special events; providing carving demonstrations; assisting at the front desk; and other general Museum duties

The service focus will change with the season; see below.

Essential Functions. Functions that applicant must be able to perform. These may be listed in bullet form:

Accessibility Assistant portion

\* Attend workshops and create partnership with others to increase awareness of birdability and ways to increase accessibility for birders.

\* Assess museum property for accessibility, in cooperation with staff

- \* Assess, with staff, accessibility within the museum exhibits
- \* Contribute to an overall task list based on above assessments
- \* Improve outdoor accessibility including but not limited to trail remediation or route planning; building benches, kiosks, and/or signs (in teams with staff or skilled volunteers)

#### Education Assistant portion

- \* Provide excellent and educational conservation-oriented experiences for visitors to the Birds of Vermont Museum
- \* Talk to visitors about the birds and conservation issues facing birds in ways that are age- and experience-appropriate
- \* Assist in gift shop, including but not limited to : supporting local artists' bringing items to shop; recommending books and other items that create and maintain a shop that offers diverse voices, images, stories; talking to visitors about bird-friendly coffee and conservation consequences; operating a square POS system
- \* Assist with school, senior, and other group educational programs
- \* Assist with special events

What are the secondary functions? These are projects or tasks that may be accomplished as time allows or applicant's interests evolve.

- \* Assess internal exhibits for accessibility, building off an existing guidance document
- \* Develop, make improved interpretive signage with respect to accessibility
- \* Draft lists of and/or complete indoor birdability improvement tasks for staff/volunteers/contractors
- \* Assist the Executive Director in fundraising and grantwriting to support accessibility projects
- \* Design, with staff /volunteer/partners, accessible exhibits suitable for indoor, outdoor, and/or offsite usage
- \* Produce, e.g., by woodcarving or sculpting, items for touchable exhibits or collaborate with volunteers or partners to fabricate
- \* Assist outreach programs as needed
- \* Participate in community science projects such as iNaturalist and Feederwatch

We would love to find a service member interested in learning woodcarving (or developing their skills further). The museum is equipped with a carving workshop and staff and community partners. The museum has the capability to instruct a member to learn the basic skills needed to carve using both power tools and traditional hand tools. In addition, the museum hosts carving classes. The member would be invited to attend as many carving classes as their interest and schedule allows. Additional carving classes are often available in nearby towns if the member is interested.

Desired Qualifications:



- \* Interest and ability to speak to a wide range of people about bird conservation
- \* Interest in learning about Vermont's native flora and fauna
- \* Experience with public speaking to a variety of age groups
- \* Interest in increasing opportunities for underserved population to have access the outdoors
- \* Able or willing to learn to use tools such as those used in woodcarving, trail construction, sign production, and/or light carpentry projects

#### 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

Service Conditions (will the position be largely outside, office based, hybrid or seasonally/project dependent, in schools, etc.) \*

This service project will change with the season and is both indoors and outdoors.

The Birds of Vermont Museum is open 5 days a week from May 1 - Oct 31. During these six months 80% of the service member's time will be focused on informal education, including visitor services as above. The other 20% will be dedicated to Accessibility/Birdability goals.

During the "by-appointment" season (Nov 1 - April 30) the museum continues to have events, visitors, bird/nature walks, and outreach programs. During this period, the conservation education portion of services will shift to approximately 20%, while the time for accessibility goals will increase to 80%.

The accessibility projects will be both outdoors and indoors; and any related improvements will often be outdoors. The educational component that involves programs may be outdoors, depending on the programs being given.

Will the member have access to "vulnerable populations"? This includes youth, elderly and individuals with disabilities.

Yes

Time Requirements:

Quarter time: will need to complete a minimum of 450 total service hours, serving approximately 40 hours/week over the course of 3 months from May 1, 2024 - August 9, 2024

#### Orientation and Training:

ECO will provide members with orientation at the beginning of the service term. Host sites are expected to provide additional on-boarding training as well. Throughout the service term, ECO will provide in-person and virtual trainings to members on a variety of topics.

#### Benefits:

- Education award of \$1,824 (pre-tax) upon successful completion of service
- \$6,088 Living Allowance, paid bi-weekly
- Training
- Childcare assistance, if eligible
- Health Coverage
- Access to AmeriCorps Alumni Network
- Student loan forbearance and interest payments, if eligible

#### Evaluation and Reporting:

Mid and final performance reviews, quarterly reports, weekly timesheets, and end of service survey.  
Thank you for your interest in AmeriCorps!