



# AmeriCorps

## 2023-24 ECO AmeriCorps

### Agricultural Water Quality Outreach and Verification Specialist

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:

Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets

Address of Organization or Municipality:

116 State St, Montpelier VT 05620

Primary Supervisor Name and Title:

Sonia Howlett, Agricultural Water Quality Program Coordinator

Primary Supervisor's email:

[Sonia.Howlett@vermont.gov](mailto:Sonia.Howlett@vermont.gov)

Primary Supervisor's phone #:

802-522-4655

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

In my position, I coordinate educational and outreach programs for agricultural water quality topics and deliver technical and financial assistance programs to farmers in Vermont. I also participate actively in VAAFM's Agency-wide Inclusion, Diversity, Equity & Action (IDEA) steering group and enjoy spearheading team-building activities and process improvements within the Water Quality Division, as well as connecting with external partners.

Our team at VAAFM collaborates with the Vermont Agricultural Water Quality Partnership, working closely with organizations such as USDA NRCS, DEC, FSA, UVM Extension, VACD, and Conservation Districts. Our

team also works with VAAFM engineering, inspection, and enforcement staff within the Water Quality Division, and with other VAAFM Divisions such as Agricultural Development to support communication and support to farms and the public.

Which hosting category are you applying to?

Full-Time (September-August)

What is the title of the position you are requesting?

Agricultural Water Quality Outreach and Verification Specialist

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.]*

The ECO AmeriCorps service member would assist the Vermont agricultural community in reducing non-point runoff from agricultural operations. The ECO AmeriCorps service member would primarily support the Water Quality Division of the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets by providing statewide education and outreach, individualized conservation practice verification on farms, and tracking of best management practice implementation. Outcomes associated with this work are education and training of the agricultural community in environmental stewardship and environmentally-conscious practices, and resulting implementation of conservation practices or intent to implement conservation practices.

I speak more to each of these individual project areas in the “position description” portion of the application, but essentially the ECO member would communicate with a variety of statewide stakeholders, including farmers, internal staff, and partner organizations through a variety of media (events, factsheets, newspaper articles, email, phone, newsletters, possibly even social media) to educate these individuals and organizations about the benefit of various best management techniques that improve soil health and water quality, and the resources available to support these individuals and organizations implement these techniques. Examples of this include teaching 400+ students through Lake Lessons (alongside many other ECO members, specifically those serving in Franklin County), writing Agriview articles that reach 6000+ subscribers each time, sending emails to farm email lists that can number up to 800 recipients, and/or posting on Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets social media platforms which have 3,000-17K followers per platform

In addition, the ECO member would individually visit farm operations to see these techniques in action, to verify the implementation of these practices on the landscape, and to provide individual outreach to the visited farms. Typically, ECO members work directly with at least 20 farms in this manner. Finally, the ECO member would assist program staff in geospatial tracking of conservation practice implementation across the state, thus supporting the general agricultural community to continue to monitor and tell the story of their conservation improvements over the past 8 years.

The VAAFM Water Quality division is a dynamic, flexible team that takes pride in our collaborative approach and tends to tailor our respective tasks to our individual skillsets and interests. The ECO service member will be encouraged to develop an individualized service plan specific to their learning and professional goals. Members are encouraged to follow their interests and to take advantage of their service year to spend a lot of time learning and connecting with a variety of stakeholders, from farmers, to State

and federal employees, to staff at local and regional agricultural and conservation quasi-governmental agencies and nonprofits. If any of this learning or these connections excite them, the member will be supported to take on collaborative, creative or independent service projects that may extend beyond projects described above.

Historically, we have a strong track record of supporting ECO AmeriCorps service members to enter the green workforce. For example, in the past three years, one member was hired to stay on with the Water Quality division at AAFM, one went on to work full time with a Natural Resources Conservation District (one of the partner organizations we work with closely), and the third is taking a GIS position that will build on the geospatial data skills she developed with the Agency.

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

In the past, “how much” data collection (EN3 Number of individuals receiving education or training in environmental stewardship and/or environmentally-conscious practices) has primarily occurred via the member recording service notes in Microsoft OneNote or in personal notebooks. The “how good” aspects of a service member’s activities (EN3.1 Number of individuals with increased knowledge of environmental stewardship and/or environmentally-conscious practices and EN3.2 Number of individuals reporting a change in behavior or the intent to change behavior to better protect the environment) have been recorded via surveys the member has sent out via Microsoft Forms or Survey Monkey. For the remainder of this year and for next year, I would like to work with the service member to set up an Excel tracking sheet and/or Word Document that is more closely responsive to the ECO National Performance Measures and quarterly report needs.

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

In many watershed modeling efforts related to water quality impacts, including the Lake Champlain Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL), agriculture is a major land use sector contributing to water quality degradation as well as a land use sector with the largest opportunity to make measurable changes in water quality by reducing runoff from agricultural fields and cropland.

The Lake Champlain TMDL in particular modeled agriculture as contributing as much as 41% of the phosphorus runoff impacting water quality in the lake, and calculated required total phosphorus reductions for the agricultural sector alone at 143 metric tons per year, out of a total reduction of 213 metric tons per year across all land use sectors.

The efforts to make substantive changes to water quality in Vermont rely on adoption of conservation farming techniques and sustained agricultural management techniques, conservation cropping methods, and improved nutrient application systems on all sizes and types of farms.

This proposed position would support this statewide need by educating farmers and landowners on impacts of their land management to water quality, the benefits of conservation, and the resources available to them to support meaningful change; and by field verifying and geospatial tracking of implemented conservation practices, such that phosphorus reductions can be assigned towards meeting TMDLs in Vermont.

Education, technical assistance, and tracking are all critical pieces to promoting and enabling the agricultural community to make changes and in understanding conservation efforts, successes, and gaps.

The ECO member would learn about, enhance and support the continuation of these programs designed to achieve the improvement and protection of water quality.

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 Vermont Agency of Agriculture Food and Markets (VAAFM) supports and encourages progress towards increased diversity, equity, inclusion and environmental justice. VAAFM has formed a working group called IDEA (Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accountability). Everyone from VAAFM is welcome to engage in this working group and participate in the IDEA meetings, and I participate actively in the internal leadership of this group. The ECO member would be supported to engage as deeply with this work as they chose to.

To date, the IDEA working group has been broadly supported by AAFM as a whole and has:

- Met as a group to create space for learning and sharing about these important issues,
- Received VAAFM leadership's financial and managerial support to contract an independent consultant (MMG Earth) to facilitate an internal and external Racial Equity and Belonging Audit, which we collaborated with MMG Earth on throughout the year.

\* MMG Earth's Racial Equity and Belonging Audit culminated in a Racial Equity and Belonging Report and a series of community decision-making sessions and action planning sessions that led to the co-creation of a Racial Equity Action Plan.

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

Going forward, the IDEA group (which I continue to be an active member of) plans to continue to unpack the Racial Equity and Belonging Report and to make steps to put into place the Racial Equity Action Plan. We would highly value contributions that our prospective ECO member would bring to this area. We are in the early stages of the Action Plan, which is driven by the Government Alliance on Race and Equity's theory of change (Normalize, Organize, Operationalize). I imagine that a significant part of the next year will be spent on creating internal discussions across the Agency and at different scales to, in the words of the Action Plan, help people establish racial equity as a key value and to build staff and organizational capacity, skill and competencies through training, with efforts from there to implement new, more equitable tools for decision-making, measurement, and accountability. We remain in contact with the Vermont Office of Racial Equity as this work goes forward.

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

1) Sphere of Influence, root causes, & prioritization – one of the main challenges we have been facing is grappling with the concept that only some injustices that exist within our system are within our ability to change or to influence, and that others lie outside of our control. We have spent a lot of effort trying to understand which elements of our work would benefit most urgently from a DEIJ lens and how we as individuals and as members of an institution with complex dynamics of power and authority can most effectively make change.

2) Historic wrongs – the Agency of Agriculture and State government in general have perpetrated harm against individuals in our organization and who our organization was supposed to serve. This has occurred all the way from long-term employees of color's traumatic experiences of past bigotry all the way to an organization-wide history of service delivery to primarily white and privileged communities. As a result, we are starting this work in a space where many feel pain and distrust of the organization and our ability to create meaningful change.

3) Apathy/"not my project" – the IDEA group has not encountered outward resistance towards our work so far, but I see a smaller-scale challenge in that many colleagues don't value this work as deeply as I feel they ought to. There seems to be a sense that if someone else is doing DEIJ work, then it's getting done, and that the rest of the organization doesn't need to worry about it unless they choose to. This attitude runs counter to the fact that widespread learning and buy-in is necessary to institute institutional change, and that everyone has a stake in this work.

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

As alluded to in the question on DEIJ work in the organization moving forward, I imagine that there will be internal and external training opportunities developed or sought out for all Agency of Agriculture staff over the coming year, which I would strongly support the ECO member to engage with. The ECO member would also be invited to participate actively in the IDEA working group meetings, which meet bi-weekly or monthly, and to take on projects related to that work as much or as little as they chose. I would also readily support any other independent or collaborative DEIJ-related projects that the ECO member proposed, outside of the IDEA group and framework.

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

My current position at VAAFM provides the time and opportunity to supervise an ECO member, and this use of my time is supported by my supervisor (an ex-ECO supervisor) and broader team. I supervised an ECO in 2022/2023 and am excited about the opportunity to work alongside another ECO member who is ready to grow their experience, knowledge, and network within the natural resource community. Collaboration with colleagues and partners has always been an integral part of my job at AAFM and one of the elements I most enjoy. I feel very equipped with the tools and support to lead and support an ECO member in their personal career development and in the successful delivery of water quality work.

My previous experiences as an outdoor educator and group leader at Shelburne Farms in Shelburne VT, Chewonki Foundation in Wiscasset ME, and Princeton University Outdoor Action in Princeton NJ have also given me a breadth of experience teaching and mentoring others, developing and delivering educational materials, and identifying natural resource concerns and solutions. I also have several years of experience coordinating and working with colleagues, partners, farmers, landowners and the public to implement conservation practices, and am excited for the opportunity to pass on that knowledge to an ECO member.

In addition, not only will the ECO member receive support from me directly as their supervisor, but will also be supported and provided opportunity to collaborate with multiple members of our water quality division. We are a very team-oriented group, focusing on everyone's strengths, interests, and expertise to keep projects moving, as well as remain creative and adaptable to the needs of our constituents and partners. ECO members serving with the Water Quality division have historically been strongly supported, both professional and personally, by this wider network within our organization.

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

Very much so. As the State, we are key players in a network of agricultural conservation and water quality organizations across Vermont, and collaborate extensively with organizations in the Vermont Agricultural Water Quality Partnership which include the following agencies and organizations:

United States Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

Vermont Association of Conservation Districts (VACD) and Natural Resources Conservation Districts (NRCDS)

United States Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS)

University of Vermont Cooperative Extension (UVM Extension)

United States Department of Agriculture, Farm Service Agency (FSA)

Vermont Agency of Natural Resources, Department of Environmental Conservation (VANR- DEC)

Lake Champlain Basin Program (LCBP)

Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB)

In addition to these partners, the member will engage extensively with conservation organizations that work to improve water quality through stakeholder meetings, water quality conferences, and more. Typically, our ECO members have the opportunity to attend or present/table at such networking events at least twice a month throughout the duration of the winter conference season. An important, heavily-supported part of their orientation is also reaching out to members of AAFM's professional network, to familiarize themselves with key players and to broaden their own professional mycelia.

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.).

The member should possess clothing that will allow for field work in a variety of weather conditions, including rain gear, warm clothes, and appropriate gear for tick safety. A modest stipend is available from AAFM for purchase of rubber boots.

All tools and technical equipment is provided, including the option for use of a Fleet vehicle. Our office building in Montpelier is accessible by public transit from Burlington and other parts of the I-89 corridor. Therefore, a personal vehicle is helpful but not necessary.

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)

This is one of my most important goals as an ECO supervisor. It hasn't been too long since I myself was moving between jobs and housing situations, and I consider community connections and life outside of work absolutely essential to both personal and professional happiness, so I want to do the best I can to support our ECO members find a sense of community. This year I coordinated within AAFM to help our ECO member find housing (the place she ended up at is an apartment maintained by the friend of one of our engineers!), and we also crowd-sourced inside of our team for a list of recommendations on local events, resources, and activities. As a person and as a supervisor I gain a lot of satisfaction from making connections between people and resources and do so with enthusiasm. Also, as events come up that look fun, we all pass the info around.

Finally, our own 10-person Montpelier team is a close-knit group. We gather in the office in person weekly, email/chat frequently, and organize monthly team-building experiences, such as disc golf, snowshoe walks, and maple sugar tastings. I know professional community is no replacement for personal community, but I do think that having a robust professional community is something that has deeply benefitted the mental health of ECO members serving with AAFM.

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.

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

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

600+

Sponsoring Organization's Mission:

The Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets (VAAFM) facilitates, supports and encourages the growth and viability of agriculture in Vermont while protecting the working landscape, human health, animal health, plant health, consumers and the environment.

Goals for the ECO AmeriCorps Position:

The ECO AmeriCorps service member would assist the Vermont agricultural community in reducing non-point runoff from agricultural operations. The ECO AmeriCorps service member would primarily support the Water Quality Division of the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets by providing statewide



education and outreach, individualized conservation practice verification on farms, and tracking of best management practice implementation.

Education and outreach service opportunities include coordinating and developing targeted educational programs for the agricultural community, the general public, and agricultural service providers to help educate farmers and landowners about the impacts of their land management on water quality and the benefits of conservation. Outreach efforts may include the development or creation of new educational materials and coordination with a variety of partners to publish and share news, resources, and educational materials with the farm community. ECO AmeriCorps members serving with VAAFM are also always encouraged to coordinate with colleagues to identify, attend, learn from, and deliver outreach at agricultural and water-quality-related events across the state.

Verification and documentation of conservation practices may include scheduling and coordination with team members, farmers and landowners to gather information and field verify practice implementation, including field visits to farms during the field season. Field visits to farms are opportunities for the ECO member to share educational materials with the farmer and engage in conversations around water and soil conservation, as well as learn about Vermont agricultural systems.

Best management practice tracking will be involved with this service activity including use of the Multi-Partner Agricultural Conservation Practice Tracking and Planning Geospatial Database or Partner Database. Field verifying and geospatial tracking of implemented conservation practices provides ECO service members an opportunity to learn and develop mapping skills and helps ensure that phosphorus reductions can be assigned towards meeting TMDLs in Vermont.

The VAAFM Water Quality division is a dynamic, flexible team. Depending on the interests of the service member, they will be encouraged to develop an individualized work plan specific to their learning and professional goals. Members are encouraged to take advantage of their service year to spend a lot of time learning and connecting with a variety of stakeholders, from farmers, to State and federal employees, to staff at local and regional agricultural and conservation quasi-governmental agencies and nonprofits. If any of this learning or these connections excite them, the member will be supported to take on collaborative, creative or independent service projects that extend beyond the day-to-day scope of the work of the majority of the Water Quality Division at VAAFM.

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

- Engage in conversations around land stewardship and water quality with partner organizations, farmers, landowners, and other agricultural service providers. Educate these audiences about resources available to them for conservation improvements.
- Design a workplan that meets individual's service and learning goals.
- Manage time effectively to bring projects to conclusion.
- Learn new skills and explore information in a variety of forms: listen to other perspectives, engage, and ask questions.
- Learn to use and/or use the Partner Database, ArcGIS or similar programs to map farms and conservation installation.

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

- Create or design engaging and effective written, verbal, visual, video, or social media-based outreach materials
- Identify a variety of farm equipment and its uses in relation to conservation goals. Explore, document, and encourage use of said equipment on farms.
- Identify farm field management techniques based on existing crop residue or visual inspection of field, as well as identification of crop or plant species composition. Explore, document, and encourage use of said management techniques on farms.
- Identify potential or actual resource concerns on the landscape whether occurring as a result of management or natural processes, develop realistic solutions, and engage with landowners and operators to discuss mechanisms to abate those resource concerns.

#### Desired Qualifications:

Bachelor or associates degree in the field of agriculture, land use planning, environmental science/studies, natural resources management, forestry, environmental policy or a related field OR 2-4 years of work experience in those fields.

Interest in water quality, agriculture, and environmental studies/science/policy and the ability to communicate effectively in both written and verbal form.

Experience with computer programs such as Microsoft Excel, Word, Power Point, and Adobe Acrobat.

#### 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 position will be primarily office-based, with seasonal opportunities for farm visits and likely bi-weekly to monthly attendance at partner events. The Water Quality Division of the Agency of Agriculture, Food

and Markets is performing our office-based work on a hybrid basis, with the team aiming to spend at least one day a week together in the Montpelier office and the remainder of our time mostly remote.

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

Yes

#### Time Requirements:

Full time: will need to complete a minimum of 1700 service hours, serving approximately 40 hours/week over the course of the 11-month service term, September 13, 2023 - 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 \$6,895 (pre-tax) upon successful completion of service
- \$23,000 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