VHCB AmeriCorps
Member Handbook

The VHCB AmeriCorps Program

Section 2
The Vermont Housing and Conservation Board is an independent, state-supported funding agency which provides grants, loans, and technical assistance to nonprofit organizations, municipalities and state agencies for the development of perpetually affordable housing and for the conservation of important agricultural land, recreational land, natural areas and historic properties in Vermont.

**History**

The pace and pattern of development in Vermont in the mid-1980’s was threatening historic settlement patterns and the rural character of the state. Housing prices were rapidly rising beyond the reach of Vermonters, development pressure on the state’s valuable agricultural and natural lands was escalating at a record pace, and historic properties and downtowns were being abandoned for suburban, sprawl development. In 1986, a coalition of affordable housing, conservation, and historic preservation advocates concerned with this rapid change in the character of the Vermont landscape approached the state legislature with a plan to form a unique agency to review and fund projects addressing a range of community needs. The Legislature responded, passing the Vermont Housing and Conservation Trust Fund Act, enacted in June 1987, and capitalized with $3 million.

The statute dictated the makeup of the nine-member Board: five citizen-members appointed by the Governor, (to include an advocate for low income Vermonters and a farmer), the Commissioners of the state agencies of Agriculture, Housing and Community Development, and Natural Resources, and the Executive Director of the Vermont Housing Finance Agency. In July 1987, the Board held its first meeting.

In September 1987, then Governor Madeleine Kunin established a Commission on Vermont's Future, charged with the mission of assessing the concerns of Vermont citizens on the issue of growth, establishing guidelines for growth, and suggesting mechanisms to help plan for Vermont's future. Through a process of public hearings at which thousands of Vermonters spoke about their concerns, the Commission gathered public input to create their report, issued in January 1988, *Guidelines for Growth*. In 1988 Vermont had a budget surplus, and upon the recommendation of the Governor's Commission on Vermont's Future, the legislature appropriated $20 million to the Vermont Housing and Conservation Trust Fund.

The Vermont Housing and Conservation Board was up and running, and momentum was building. With the new source of state funding, housing and conservation nonprofits were able to conceive and carry out projects within communities around the state that had not previously been possible. VHCB funds closed a critical gap in the financing of affordable housing projects and brought new conservation funds to the table, initiating a new era in the conservation of Vermont's agricultural lands and natural areas.
Today

Now in its 30th year, VHCB remains the forerunner in the nation in pioneering this comprehensive approach to affordable housing and community development linked with land conservation and historic preservation. The results have been impressive. With a cadre of nonprofit organizations working at the local level to identify and develop important projects in each community, the effects of 30 years of investment are discernible in every part of the state. VHCB has supported reinvestment in older housing in small town and village centers, revitalizing downtown neighborhoods where residents can walk to services, and rebuilding a sense of community while spurring other private investment. The conservation of Vermont’s open and wild lands preserves the landscape that is such an integral part of the state’s identity, supports the agricultural economy, protects wildlife habitat, and provides public access to the state’s waterways and woodlands.

Impact

Since its inception, the Board has awarded nearly $274 million to nonprofit housing and conservation organizations, towns, municipalities and state agencies to develop nearly 1,500 projects in 220 towns. This investment has directly leveraged approximately $1 billion from other private and public sources and resulted in the creation of more than 11,300 affordable homes, the conservation of 390,740 acres of agricultural and recreational lands and natural areas, and the restoration of 59 historic community buildings for public use. Many VHCB housing awards have supported housing in buildings eligible, nominated or listed on the State or National Register of Historic Places. Historic barns and farmhouses and archeological sites are located on many farms conserved with VHCB funding.
$274 million in state funds invested by VHCB have allowed project partners (non-profit organizations, towns, municipalities and state agencies) to leverage an additional $1 billion from federal programs, foundations, private capital and other charitable donations.

**Invested in:**
- 11,300 homes & apartments;
- 620 farms; more than 146,000 acres of agricultural land conserved;
- 255,000 acres conserved for public recreation and natural areas;
- 59 historic buildings restored for community use

**Housing Investment includes:**
- 1,000 homes for homeowners including 100 homes with Habitat for Humanity
- Preserved 1,790 units of federally subsidized at-risk housing
- 46 mobile home parks for over 1,900 families
- 2,924 homes for individuals with special needs including frail elders, battered women, youth-at-risk, ex-offenders, persons with chronic mental illness and individuals with mobility impairments.
- 1,605 homes made accessible in partnership with the Vermont Center for Independent Living.

**Land for Public Recreation includes:**
- Support for Green Mountain Club’s protection of the Long Trail, now 95% complete.
- Investment in various trail systems: the Catamount Trail (north-south 300 mile cross country ski trail); Cross Vermont Trail (east-west trail through 17 towns);
- East Montpelier Trail system; Windmill Hill Pinnacle Association conservation of more than 1820 acres to create a 14-mile ridgeline trail and wildlife reserve between Rockingham and Putney.
- Protection of Champion Lands – 133,000 acres for public recreation and wildlife.
- Significant nature preserves with The Nature Conservancy: High Pond Preserve, Hubbardton; Bald Mountain, West Haven; Black Mountain, Dummerston; Wilmarth Woods, Addison; Shelburne Pond; North Pawlet Hills; White River Ledges

**Historic Buildings for Public Use include:**
- Farm Barn and Breeding barn at Shelburne Farms
- Monitor Barn – Vermont Youth Conservation Corps headquarters
- Brookfield, Jamaica, Ira, Pawlet, Brighton and West Rutland Town Halls
- Latchis Theater, Brattleboro; Paramount Theater, Rutland; Flynn Theater, Burlington
- Firehouse Arts Gallery, Burlington
- Morrisville River Arts and Lamoille Grange Hall
- Old Labor Hall, Barre
- G.R.A.C.E. Old Firehouse, Hardwick

**OTHER PROGRAMS**
In addition to VHCB funding programs for housing development and land conservation, a number of supplemental programs supported with state and federal funds provide services and capacity to improve housing and conservation opportunities for Vermon ters and to assist farmers with economic development:

**Farm and Forest Viability Program** More than 400 farmers have participated in the Farm Viability Program, developed in collaboration with the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets in 2003 to provide farmers with business planning and technical assistance.

**VHCB AmeriCorps** VHCB has administered $4.7 million in federal funds to place more than 400 AmeriCorps members with housing and nonprofit organizations statewide, providing community service, developing leadership skills and civic engagement.

**Healthy Homes and Lead Paint Hazard Abatement Program** More than 2,000 homes made lead-safe. The program provides financial and technical assistance to income-eligible landlords and home owners to reduce the risk of lead poisoning caused by lead-based paint hazards. Free trainings are provided in essential maintenance practices required by Vermont’s Lead Paint law. $19.6 million administered since 1994.

A new HUD grant will allow for development of the Healthy Homes Program to address additional health and safety issues beyond lead paint. Healthy Homes will add to existing rehabilitation programs, providing assistance to correct building issues that contribute to unhealthy living conditions like mold, moisture and pest infestation, and particularly affect vulnerable groups, such as children with asthma and the elderly.

**HOME Program** Increases the affordability of rental housing with federal funds; $61.4 million administered since 1992.
VHCB AmeriCorps Program

What is the Vermont Housing & Conservation Board AmeriCorps Program?
The Vermont Housing & Conservation Board (VHCB) AmeriCorps Program is a national service project that places AmeriCorps members with affordable housing, land conservation and environmental education organizations statewide. Members increase the capacity and effectiveness of the organization where they serve while gaining leadership skills and connecting with the mission and goals of a community based nonprofit organization.

VHCB AmeriCorps Mission

Since 1997, the VHCB AmeriCorps Program has been serving Vermont communities, cultivating leaders, and inspiring collaborative solutions to expand housing opportunities and steward our natural resources. Serving on the front lines of community-based organizations, VHCB AmeriCorps members energize, engage, and empower Vermonters to address unmet needs at a local level, collectively creating positive change statewide. Through a grassroots approach, we believe we can bring Vermonters together, incite a spirit of active citizenship and build a healthy future for Vermont.

What do VHCB AmeriCorps members do?

Housing Members

- Help homeless individuals and families find suitable housing, build life skills, develop résumés, access job training programs and obtain services.
- Assist first-time homebuyers to learn about budgeting and prequalify for low-interest mortgage loans at Vermont’s Homeownership Centers.
- Recruit volunteers, provide community outreach, make referrals, and provide direct services, information and technical assistance.
- Repair, make accessible and weatherize homes
- Provide residential services to low-income, elderly, and/or disabled individuals to help them maintain and remain in healthy, safe, affordable housing.

Conservation Members

- Provide environmental education and service opportunities for school-age youth.
- Educate groups about responsible hiking and camping practices.
- Increase public land access for individuals with emphasis on disadvantaged populations, and engage individuals in outdoor recreational activities.
- Recruit volunteers and raise awareness about conservation issues.
- Participate in natural area inventories, extract invasive plants and implement weed management plans.
- Perform trail maintenance, restoration and improvement.
- Co-develop, coordinate, and teach summer day camps and natural history programs.
Create mailings, contact the media, produce newsletters, create and maintain database records and websites, organize special events.

Educate residents and housing groups on energy conserving measures

**Other Areas**

Connect individuals living in low-income housing units with better food access and nutrition education

Serve with towns and cities to create energy committees or increase the capacity of existing committees.

Help Host Sites research the needs of its clients/community to deliver better services

**What else should I know?**

You decide which sponsoring organization you would like to apply to, and by signing on, you are making an 11 month commitment to service. Throughout the term, you will serve closely with your supervisor in the host site organization.

The VHCB AmeriCorps Program is committed to member development and will work with members to ensure they are having a positive yet challenging experience during their term of service.
VHCB AmeriCorps 2019-20 Performance Goals

CNCS Approved Primary Performance Measures

**Housing Placement Services**

2,500 economically disadvantaged individuals, including homeless and near-homeless will have greater access to safe, affordable housing opportunities through housing placement and accessibility services provided by ACMs. Services will include housing identification, applications assistance, referrals, back rent and security deposit disbursements, and home sharing coordination.

450 economically disadvantaged individuals, including homeless and near-homeless, will transition into safe, affordable housing as a result of ACM services.

**Living Independently and Residential Services**

ACM's will provide companionship, resource facilitation, food access, transportation, volunteer matching, and housing support to 500 individuals, including 150 individuals who are Homebound, Older Adults, and/or living with a disability.

75 individuals who are Homebound, Older Adults, and/or living with a disability will report increased social support due to member’s services.

**Food Access and Nutritional Services**

ACM’s will implement community gardens, provide emergency food, deliver meals, support food pantries, and provide nutritional services and education to 2000 individuals.

**Improving Lands and Habitats through Environmental Stewardship**

ACM's will implement invasive species management, trail maintenance, boundary marking, easement monitoring, and tree planting/maintenance on 11,000 acres of parks and public lands. 3,000 acres of land will be assessed as improved according to the entities land management plan.

**Environmental, Energy, and Outdoor Education**
ACMs will deliver education on environmentally-conscious practices and outdoor recreation, including but not limited to sustainable energy and other natural resources, sustainable agriculture, and public land access and recreational opportunities to 900 individuals resulting in greater knowledge and appreciation for the natural environment and how people can help conserve energy and care for natural eco-systems. Education will be delivered through school programs, public programs, day camps, home visits, and service learning projects. Only Individuals surveyed for behavior changes may be counted.

As a result, 500 Individuals will report a change in behavior or intention to change behavior toward more environmentally-conscious practices.

### Additional Secondary Program Performance Measures

#### Financial Literacy Services

ACMs will provide financial literacy services including credit repair education and counseling, household budgeting, foreclosure prevention/intervention, home ownership education, outreach, and development and distribution of educational materials to at least 250 economically disadvantaged individuals. 50 individuals will demonstrate improved financial literacy knowledge.

#### Housing Units Made Available

ACMs will develop, repair, or otherwise make available 150 affordable housing units for low income individuals and families, including older adults and people with disabilities. 100 economically disadvantaged individuals, including homeless and near-homeless will remain in, transition into, or diminish risk of losing safe, affordable housing as a result of ACM services.

#### Energy Efficiency

ACMs will improve energy efficiency and reduce carbon emissions of 100 housing units and structures through weatherization, retrofits and other energy efficiency measures.

#### Volunteer Mobilization

VHCB AC members will recruit, train, supervise, evaluate and recognize 1000 community volunteers so that these volunteer efforts help to further the missions of VHCB AC's sponsoring organizations.
Members will recruit at least 700 volunteers, and will manage at least 800 volunteers. The volunteers mobilized by VHCB AmeriCorps members will serve the equivalent of 5 full-time employees/10,400 hours of volunteer service at member host sites.

**Capacity Building**

In addition to volunteer mobilization, members involved in capacity building activities will expand the scale, reach, efficiency, or effectiveness of services, programs and their organizations. Activities may also leverage resources for programs and/or organizations so that lasting positive outcomes for the beneficiary populations are achieved. Members will provide capacity building services for at least 25 organizations, will raise $5,000 worth of In-Kind or cash goods to support projects, and will improve 25 systems used by host sites such as information gathering, data tracking, organization outreach, community engagement, and internal communications. Note: AmeriCorps members may raise resources directly in support of sponsors’ program services but may not raise funds for an organization's general operating expenses or endowment.

**Member Development**

100% of VHCB AmeriCorps Members will participate in VHCB AmeriCorps Member Development Initiatives which includes member training, program initiatives, and service learning. Upon successful completion of their AmeriCorps term, all graduating members will report improvement in at least 3 life skills needed to better secure employment and become productive, engaged community members.
Benefits of Service

In addition to having an opportunity to do meaningful, challenging service and gain real-world experience, there are many tangible benefits as well, including:

- Living allowance: $20,400 for full-time service; $10,800 for half-time; $5,400 for quarter-time
- AmeriCorps Education Award to be used for existing student loans or for future education in the next seven years.
- Health Insurance: Covers major medical, hospitalization and prescriptions.
- Travel Reimbursement: Non-commuting travel is paid for service related activities.
- School Loan Forbearance: Deferment on federally subsidized school loans.
- Training Opportunities: In addition to an overnight Orientation, members have numerous training opportunities over the course of the year. Trainings may include Communicating through Conflict; Cultural Competency; Financial Literacy; Working with the Media; Poverty Issues; Volunteer Recruitment; Leadership; a Ropes Course and others. Additionally, members will attend a 2-day National Service Conference, a Team Retreat, several Group Service Days and a Closing Ceremony.
- Networking Opportunities: VHCB AmeriCorps is dedicated to offering its members a wide range of experiences and community engagement opportunities.
VHCB AmeriCorps Host Site Map

1. Poultney
   - Green Mountain College
   - The Nature Conservancy SLCV
   - Poultney-Mettowee NRCD

2. Vergennes
   - Addison County Community Land Trust
   - John Graham Emergency Shelter

3. Burlington
   - Vermont Energy Investment Corporation
   - Catamount Trails Association
   - Champlain Housing Trust
   - Committee on Temporary Shelter
   - Pathways Vermont
   - Winooski Valley Park District

4. West Rutland
   - NeighborWorks of Western VT

5. Richmond
   - Vermont Land Trust

6. Huntington
   - Audubon Vermont

7. Stowe
   - Stowe Land Trust

8. Waterbury
   - Green Mountain Club

9. Montpelier
   - The Nature Conservancy
   - Cross Vermont Trail Association
   - North Branch Nature Center
   - Vermont Energy and Climate Action Network

10. Barre
    - Central Vermont Council on Aging
    - Good Samaritan Haven
    - Homeshare Now

11. Randolph
    - Randolph Area Community Development Corp.

12. Quechee
    - Vermont Institute of Natural Sciences

13. White River Junction
    - Upper Valley Haven
    - COVER Home Repair
    - Twin Pines Housing Trust

14. Brattleboro
    - Groundworks Collaborative
    - Windham & Windsor Housing Trust
Alphabet Soup (VHCB AmeriCorps Acronyms)

ACM – AmeriCorps Member

CHT - Champlain Housing Trust

CNCS - Corporation for National and Community Service

COTS - Committee on Temporary Shelter

COVER – Corps of Volunteers Effecting Repair (COVER Home Repair)

CTA – Catamount Trails Association

CVOEO – Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity

FWC – Franklin Watershed Committee

GMC—Green Mountain Club

HOC—Homeownership Center

ISP – Independent Service Project

NBNC – North Branch Nature Center

NWWVT - NeighborWorks of Western VT (a.k.a. Rutland West Neighborhood Housing Services)

RAHC- Regional Affordable Housing Corporation

RCHC—Rutland County Housing Coalition

TNC—The Nature Conservancy (of Vermont)

VINS—Vermont Institute of Natural Science

VHCB—Vermont Housing & Conservation Board

VNRC- Vermont Natural Resources Council

WVPD—Winooski Valley Park District
## 2019 – 2020 VHCB AmeriCorps Trainings & Events Calendar

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<th>Date/ Location:</th>
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| **September 9th - 11th:**  
Windridge, Roxbury | New Member Orientation  
Introduction to VHCB AmeriCorps (rules, responsibilities, team building); Service Project; and Swearing-In Ceremony |
| **September 30th:**  
Burlington | Orientation II and Team-Building  
Progress Report Training; Team-building and problem-solving skills Activities. |
| **October 10th:**  
Barre | VHCB Conference  
Members will attend this training on how to make the most of your time throughout the service year. |
| **November 8th:**  
Central VT | Gender Equity in the Workplace  
Members and Supervisors will attend this training *MEMBERS & SUPERVISORS* |
| **December 4th – 6th:**  
Stoweflake, Stowe | VT AmeriCorps Launch Conference (sponsored by SerVermont)  
Members from around the state gather to kick off AmeriCorps Service with networking and various workshops |
| **January 20th:**  
TBD | MLK Day  
“A Day on, not a day off” in homage to the service legacy of MLK Jr |
| **February 3rd:**  
Billings Farm, Woodstock | Winter Gathering  
Reflect on service, civic engagement, mid-year celebration |
| **March TBD:**  
Statewide | AmeriCorps Week  
Events celebrating the impact AmeriCorps members and Alums have had throughout their communities. |
| **March TBD:**  
TBD | Defining and Understanding Our Intercultural Competence  
Identify how cultural differences impact work and respond effectively as leaders. |
| **April 7th:**  
Statewide | National Service Day of Recognition - Optional  
Local Leaders and Officials recognize AmeriCorps Service. |
| **April 16th:**  
NEK | Networking and Self-Advocacy  
How to build your network and learn to ask for what you want. |
| **May 13th – 14th:**  
Common Ground, Starksboro | VT Nat’l Service Conference (sponsored by SerVermont)  
Statewide AmeriCorps networking, various workshops |
June TBD: VHCB Service Day
TBD Service projects with VHCB staff

July TBD: Closing Ceremony
TBD Reflect/celebrate your service, skill building for Life after AmeriCorps

Policies on Training Attendance:

- Members are expected to attend all trainings listed above (with the exception of those marked optional), and agree to do so in the Member Agreement.

- Other training days will possibly be made available as ‘optional.’ ACM’s must communicate with supervisors about upcoming trainings and are required to obtain permission from them to attend “optional” trainings.

- Members may also be sent to trainings by their sponsoring sites

- Members may not spend more than 20% of their service/training hours in training

- Members who are unable to attend training due to circumstances out of the member’s control (i.e. illness, being away, family emergency, etc.) must notify program staff in writing as soon as possible.

- Members may not miss a training to put in regular hours at their site. If a member misses a training day and claims hours for service at the host site, these hours will not be approved.
Independent Service Project (ISP)

All Full and Half-Time Members are required to complete an Independent Service Project (ISP) outside of their regular host site. Members are required to perform a minimum of 15 and maximum of 30 hours for ISP. The following guidelines apply to ISP projects:

1. ISP hours may not be served at the member’s host site. Hours should be served with another community organization or in some cases may be carried out independently by the member with host site or other entity sponsorship.
2. The member has the option of (1) creating and implementing their own community project or (2) serving the hours with an organization in a general capacity that will aid the organization’s mission. All of the 15-30 hours should be allotted to either one project or one organization, though projects may involve multiple community organizations/entities.
3. The member must gain approval from VHCB AmeriCorps in advance. Requests should be submitted via email to the AmeriCorps Leader.
4. The project/organization must be based in Vermont.
5. At the completion of the ISP hours, the member will submit the ISP Report which will include:
   - documentation of the hours served approved by a representative of the organization
   - a written report and reflection
6. Members may collaborate in pairs or teams to complete ISP hours.
7. ISP hours may be carried out in member’s off time, or during regularly scheduled onsite hours with prior approval from the supervisor.
8. All ISP activities must fall within AmeriCorps regulations and guidelines.
9. A total of 20 miles per member will be allowed for reimbursement for all ISP travel.

Peer Site Visits

VHCB AmeriCorps allows members to claim mileage and service hours for up to two peer site visits - visits to other VHCB Host Site Organizations. The member should schedule site visits with the member at the organization. Site Visits must be pre-approved by both the visiting member’s supervisor and by the supervisor at the site being visited. Site Visits are not required, but VHCB AmeriCorps encourages members to take advantage of this opportunity.

With the direct Supervisors approval, the member may claim hours for additional peer site visits, but may not claim mileage with VHCB AmeriCorps.
BOOK CLUB

The VHCB AC Book Club is designed to give members the opportunity to gain a greater knowledge of their service through reading, while gaining training hours toward their service term.

- Each book review may be worth up to a total of 10 training hours.
- Full-time members may complete up to 6 book reviews, half-timers 3, and quarter-timers 1.
- Members are limited to one review per month.
- All books must be educational and relevant to member service.

After reading the book, members should submit a review using the 'Book Review Form' to gain hours. On VHCB AC’s website, under the ‘Current Members’ tab, you will find a list of pre-approved books. These books may be selected without further approval for a review. If you would like to choose a book that is not on the list, please submit a request to VHCB AmeriCorps staff for approval prior to reviewing the book.

R.A.R.E. Opportunity

The VHCB AmeriCorps Regional AmeriCorps Recruitment Envoy (R.A.R.E) Opportunity initiative is designed to engage members in community events, activities, and outreach that promote outside individuals to participate in AmeriCorps Programs. Such activities may include (but not limited to):

- attending college or career fairs
- tabling at community events or public spaces
- presenting to school or community groups
- publishing articles or writing op-ed pieces about the members service
- assisting individuals with filling out an AmeriCorps application
- one-on-one meetings with persons interested in knowing more about AmeriCorps
- encouraging friends and family to consider serving in AmeriCorps
- speaking with volunteer groups you serve with about your AmeriCorps Service
- etc.

Some R.A.R.E. Opportunity hours may occur as part of a member’s regular duties. Members may claim up to 15 service hours for R.A.R.E Opportunity Hours outside of their regular service. Participation in R.A.R.E. Opportunity is optional for members, but highly encouraged by the program. Member’s that participate for a minimum of 15 hours will receive a prize!
Who to Contact

Program Staff

Francis Sharpstene  802.828.3253  francis@vhcb.org  Program Director

Contact Francis for: Any and all issues that arise with your host site and/or supervisor that require guidance or resolve; contract questions, concerns or amendments; requesting extended time off; if you will miss a training or event; and payroll questions

Ashley Swasey  802.828.3249  ashley@vhcb.org  Program Coordinator

Contact Erin Riley for: paperwork and reporting questions; assistance with timesheets; mileage requests; income or benefits verification (i.e. 3squares) anything else in Francis’ absence.

Open Door Policy

VHCB AmeriCorps maintains an open door policy. This means members may contact the person they feel most comfortable addressing. In some cases, the issue may need to be shared and/or handled with other staff members. In this case, the person you originally addressed may still continue to serve as your point of contact. It is our belief that members should feel comfortable and safe approaching program staff on all matters.

Supervisor

Your Direct Supervisor is the first in line at your site. Your supervisor should be contacted for all questions and needs that pertain to:

- Daily scheduling and time off. (Program staff should also be contacted for time off equaling one week or more)
- On-site service duties and tasks
- Issues related to direct service
- Training needs related to service