

VetsWork Environment

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)



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What is VetsWork Environment?

VetsWork Environment is an AmeriCorps program of the Mt. Adams Institute. It focuses on connecting U.S. military veterans with federal, state, and local public land management and natural resource agencies to:

1. Support the transition of veterans from a military career to a civilian career
2. Address the unmet needs of our nation's public lands / natural resource management agencies and organizations.

VetsWork is a 45-week (10.5 month) internship program in which participants learn new skills, gain knowledge and build professional contacts within the public lands / natural resources management / environmental career field. Internship partners include U.S. Forest Service (USFS), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), conservation districts and regional non-profits.

The goal of VetsWork is to help participants increase their opportunity to secure permanent jobs and assist potential employers seeking qualified veteran candidates.

What is the Mt. Adams Institute?

[Mt. Adams Institute](#) (MAI) is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization with the mission to strengthen the connection between people and the natural world through education, service learning, career development and research. MAI is headquartered in Trout Lake, Washington and currently operates in 10 states across the country.

What is AmeriCorps?

[AmeriCorps](#) is a national volunteer service program that engages more than 75,000 Americans a year, in service that supports nonprofits, schools, public agencies, and community and faith-based groups across the country. Since founded in 1994, more than 900,000 AmeriCorps Members have contributed more than 1.2 billion hours in service across America while tackling pressing problems and mobilizing millions of volunteers.

AmeriCorps assists Members by providing pathways for people entering the workforce. AmeriCorps places thousands of people into intensive service positions where they learn valuable work skills, earn a modest living stipend and money for education, and develop an appreciation for volunteerism and community service.

All VetsWork participants are enrolled as AmeriCorps Members for the duration of the program.

What Agencies/Organizations Partner with VetsWork?

Interns are placed at [Partnering Organizations](#) such as, the U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, NOAA and the King Conservation District. VetsWork Environment positions focus on a wide variety of public lands management careers. Most day-to-day supervision and mentorship for participants comes from these on-site partners. MAI plays a support role through human resource functions, connection to resources, career development support and finding meaning in your career through your connections to the natural world.

Who Can Apply for a VetsWork Internship?

Applicants must:

- Be a U.S. Military Veteran (Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, National Guard, Army Reserve, or NOAA Corps)
- Have a DD 214 (with honorable discharge)
- 21 years or older.

A General Under Honorable (GUH) designation will be considered on a case-by-case basis. If you have GUH status, be prepared to discuss this with recruitment staff.

Why is this Program Just for Veterans?

VetsWork was established to support military veterans as they transition into the civilian world. MAI recognized that there was a need to provide transition services that addressed some of the barriers that veterans have faced in securing employment in the civilian sector. MAI does offer a general population program (ages 21-30.) Please visit our [Public Lands Stewards](#) program.

Is the Internship Full-Time?

Yes. VetsWork Interns will serve an average of 40 hours per week. Individual positions might vary in how and when that time is spread throughout the week. Some interns may serve four 10-hour days; others will have scheduled hours on weekends; and still others may work 7 days straight and then have 5 days off. All positions have time built in for personal/sick leave.

How Long is the Internship?

VetsWork is a 10.5 month program (45 weeks). Interns must complete a minimum of 1700 hours service during that time. This averages out to be 40 hours per week, plus personal/sick leave.

Do Interns Get Paid?

Interns earn a modest living stipend of \$375/week (**paid monthly** & pre-tax amount). The actual amount is dependent on the number of weeks of service in each month. Months with four weeks of service = \$1,500 (pre-tax); five weeks = \$1,875 (pre-tax). Stipends are deposited directly into Interns' bank accounts on the 10th of each month. Applicants are highly encouraged to actively work with a budget to make sure that participating in the program is financially feasible.

Can I use my G.I. Bill benefits?

Yes, VetsWork is an apprenticeship program approved by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Department of Labor. Interns with G.I. Bill benefits may be able to dual enroll as an apprentice and access their Monthly Housing Allowance (MHA) of approximately \$2,400 per month. Actual amounts vary by individuals' available benefits.

Can I Access Vocational Rehabilitation (VocRehab) Assistance?

Vocational Rehabilitation does **not** generally line up with the VetsWork program model, and **very** few applicants have had success accessing these benefits while in the VetsWork program. MAI staff encourages the use of the previously described apprenticeship program using G.I. Bill benefits. Please speak with our staff if you have further questions.

What Other Benefits Are There?

In addition to the living stipend, VetsWork Interns earn an education award of \$6,345 (upon satisfactory completion of the program), health insurance, child-care assistance, qualification to apply for food stamps and student loan forbearance. Many positions also offer free or reduced agency housing or an additional housing stipend. Please read each position's benefits section to find out if and what type of housing options are available. Check out our current positions on our [website](#).

VetsWork is a career development program designed to help Interns navigate a career in the natural resource and public land management fields. The internship provides opportunities to build professional networks, experience a desired

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career path, and understand hiring practices. Training will address position specific skills and certifications as well as developing resumes and other application materials.

What Will I be Doing?

VetsWork internships represent a variety of positions offered through the natural resource/public land management field and will vary according to the specific needs of each agency / organization. Interns can expect to spend at least 80% of their time in service activities and on the job training. Service activities may include recreation site maintenance, volunteer coordination, restoration work, invasive species removal, education and outreach, facility improvement, forestry projects, trail maintenance or emergency dispatch. Up to 20% of an intern's time is spent on activities focused on an intern's growth and development in the field. These include MAI's week-long orientation, community service projects, professional development trainings, sharing experiences with other Interns and self-directed learning.

What Positions are Available?

VetsWork internships cover the spectrum of job types available in the public lands / natural resources management / environmental sector. Some positions involve serving outside every day on trails, wilderness or forestry projects; others are more office situated and can involve writing, communication, project management, education or volunteer coordination. It is important to understand that VetsWork Internships are entry-level, and as a part of normal position description duties activities **may** include tasks such as: mowing, weed-eating, toilet cleaning, fence-repair, and other "less than glamorous tasks".

For the most up-to-date open positions, please visit our [website](#) or contact our Recruitment Coordinator, Katie Schmidt, at: katie@mtadamsinstitute.org or (503) 504-5994 Monday-Friday 9a-4p Pacific.

VetsWork positions are posted in mid-September. Applications are accepted until positions are filled, but keep in mind that interviews will be offered starting in mid-October and many positions can fill 2-3 months before the program start date in early February or early March.

How Do I Apply?

Email the following documents to Katie Schmidt at katie@mtadamsinstitute.org:

- [Resume](#)
- [Cover Letter](#) (One for each position applying to).
- [Three Professional References](#) (military, civilian, or academic) – Information to include: Name, Title, Relation to you, Email & Phone Number.
- [Supplemental Questions](#):
 - What is your motivation for applying to VetsWork?
 - What are you hoping to get out of this experience?
- [DD 214 – \(with Honorable Discharge\)](#):
 - "General Under Honorable Conditions" discharge are considered on a case-by-case basis
 - Must be long form "Member 4 copy" (has 30 total boxes of information).
 - If you do not have a copy of your DD 214; order a copy from the [National Archives](#).

Can I Apply to More Than One Position?

Yes, submit a separate cover letter for each position that you are interested in applying to. [Macslis](#) has great information on creating cover letters, resumes, etc...

What is the Interview Process?

- MAI screens application materials, conducts pre-interviews, and recommends qualified applicants for Service Site interviews.
- Service Sites interview candidates, conduct reference checks and recommends placement.
- If position is offered, additional paperwork will be required.

Where are the Positions Located?

There are two VetsWork cohorts:

- Pacific Northwest - includes positions in Oregon, Washington and Alaska.
- Southeast / Central - includes positions in Illinois, Missouri, Michigan, Georgia, North Carolina, Virginia, and Tennessee.

Some positions are in the heart of major cities and suburban communities, while others are situated in very remote, rural locations.

For the most up-to-date service locations see our [website](#).

Where Would I live?

Housing options differ for each position and depend on what service sites provide. Options available could be:

- Free or reduced cost, on-site options.
- Additional stipend to fully cover or help cover housing costs.
- No assistance and the full cost must be borne by the Intern.

Participants are ultimately responsible for securing housing and should ask about the options during their interviews. Housing details for each position can be located in the position descriptions on our [website](#).

I Don't Live Near the Position Location, Would I Have to Relocate?

Yes, many participants relocate to take part in the VetsWork program. This can be an added challenge that requires adequate research and planning. We encourage applicants who are considering a move to make sure that the position and location are a good fit. Mt. Adams Institute is not able to offer relocation assistance, but does encourage applicants to seek out resources from other veteran serving organizations like Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), the American Legion or smaller local organizations.

I Have a Family, Can They Relocate with Me?

Yes. Families may join you, but you will likely have to seek out and pay for your own housing. Potential housing provided by specific internships sites is often very limited and most times cannot accommodate families or pets.

Many current and former VetsWork Interns with spouses and / or children have successfully participated in the program. Although it presents some more logistical challenges, these can be addressed. Childcare reimbursement is available for those who qualify. For more information, contact our Recruitment Coordinator, Katie Schmidt, at: katie@mtadamsinstitute.org or (503) 504 5994 Monday-Friday 9a-4p Pacific.

What Does the Free or Reduced-Cost Housing Look Like?

Most Forest Service / Fish & Wildlife Service housing is bunkhouse style. This means that you may share a bedroom with another Intern or FS employee and share kitchen, living room and restrooms with other bunkmates. Most bunkhouses are outfitted with basic furniture and kitchen tools. You will need to provide your own toiletries, bedding, food, etc...

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(Please discuss specifics with site supervisors during an interview as each bunkhouse is unique.) Bunkhouse housing is usually within walking distance to the service site; generally, on the same compound. Federally owned bunkhouses do not allow drugs (regardless of individual state laws), alcohol or firearms. Pets are generally **not** allowed in bunkhouses.

If your site does not offer housing, or you plan to cover the full cost of housing, then you may find your own pet / alcohol /etc... -friendly housing. If you have a certified service animal, let our recruitment staff know and be prepared to discuss options with the Site Supervisor during an interview.

What are the Physical Requirements?

Physical requirements vary with each position. Some positions require full time at a desk and others are very physically demanding, and take place outdoors in rugged wilderness. Many of the positions have components of both. If you are offered an interview with agency staff you will be asked to discuss your ability to take on the physical requirements of the position. All position descriptions on our [website](#) clearly explain the physical requirements of each position. Please speak with recruitment staff if you have questions or concerns about a specific position.

I Have a Service-Connected Disability, Can I Still Take Part in the Program?

Yes, if you can meet the requirements of the individual position (you need to be honest and realistic about your capabilities). Mt. Adams Institute and our partners will provide reasonable accommodation.

Can I Go to School or Work Another Job While in the Program?

Interns are expected to work 40 hours per week, which can make in-person classes challenging to accommodate. Several Interns have completed online classes while participating in VetsWork. Interns are allowed to take part-time jobs in their time off, but those shouldn't interfere with their VetsWork schedule.

Will I Get a Job at the End?

There is no guarantee of employment when the program is completed, but VetsWork Interns have ample opportunity to network, learn new skills and explore potential jobs during their term of service. Many service locations use the VetsWork program as a conduit to hiring. All of these factors make VetsWork Interns more likely to get hired. VetsWork Interns will take part in career development coaching and workshops during a required mid-term training with Mt. Adams Institute Staff. Intern experiences vary in scope and opportunity, but each individual participant is encouraged to proactively seek out opportunities that will enhance a resume, and help to become a more desirable applicant. 80% of the Interns that have successfully completed our program, have been offered employment as a direct result of their internship.

I Have Been Convicted of a Crime, Can I Still Take Part in the Program?

Yes. The only automatic disqualifiers are a murder charge/conviction and any required registration on the National Sex Offender Registry. Participation in the VetsWork program is contingent upon passing a state and federal background check as well as a name-based search in the National Sex Offender Registry.

A prior criminal record could impact your selection, but it will not immediately disqualify you. If you fail to disclose any infraction (even minor ones) and it shows up on your criminal background check, you can be immediately disqualified. It is better to be forthright with this information from the beginning of the application process. Don't hesitate to contact MAI recruitment staff if you would like to discuss your particular situation.

I am Active in the National Guard/Reserves, Can I Take Part in the Program?

Generally, the Reserves of the U.S. Army, U.S. Navy, U.S. Air Force, U.S. Marine Corps, U.S. Coast Guard, the Army National Guard, and the Air National Guard require reservists to serve one weekend a month plus 12 to 15 days a year (hereafter referred to as the two-week active-duty service). If Interns have a choice of when to fulfill their annual two-week active-duty requirement, they should do so when it will not disrupt their AmeriCorps service. In instances where the dates of active duty are inflexible and conflict with AmeriCorps service, Interns will be granted a leave of absence for the two-week period of active-duty service in the Reserves.

Interns may not receive time-off for additional Reserves-related service beyond the two-week active-duty service. No AmeriCorps service credit is earned for the once-a-month weekend service in the Reserves. Interns will receive credit for AmeriCorps service hours during their two weeks of active-duty service in the Reserves if it occurs during their AmeriCorps service. The Intern would receive credit for the number of hours he or she would have served during that period had there been no interruption. For example, if a full-time Intern is signed up to serve 30 hours of AmeriCorps service one week and 40 hours of AmeriCorps service on the following week, they would receive 70 hours of AmeriCorps service credit for the two weeks of active-duty service regardless of the actual number of hours served in the Reserves.

Interns will continue to receive the living stipend for the two-week period of active duty.

I'm Interested in a Position, What Steps Can I Take to Prepare Myself?

Many VetsWork positions are located in very remote locations. This is especially true of VetsWork positions in Alaska (some locations are only accessible by plane or boat), but even if a position is in an urban or suburban area, applicants are encouraged to research about the local offerings. Some things to consider are:

- Accessibility to medical facilities, grocery stores, and other personal services. A vehicle may be required to access services and off-time recreation (in some locations a plane / boat trip will be necessary.)
- Airport locations
- Reliable internet
- Weather (& daylight in Alaska) conditions
- Community / social activities.

Many of these questions can also be answered by Site Supervisors during an interview. Applicants should research locations and have specific questions to ask during interviews. Other resources to consider are: local Facebook groups, Chambers of Commerce and town or county websites. In some cases, Mt. Adams Institute staff can connect applicants with current or former Interns serving at a specific location.

If you have any other questions or concerns, do not hesitate to contact our recruitment staff at (503) 504 5994 Monday-Friday 9a-4p Pacific.