



VetsWork

Program Overview

AMERICORPS OVERVIEW

[AmeriCorps](#) is a national service program that engages more than 75,000 Americans in intensive service each year at nonprofits, schools, public agencies, community, and faith-based groups across the country. All VetsWork Interns are enrolled as AmeriCorps members for the duration of the program. AmeriCorps is a great way for military veterans to continue participating in national service.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The [Mt. Adams Institute \(MAI\)](#) is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to strengthen the connection between people and the natural world through education, service learning and career development. VetsWork is an AmeriCorps program of the Mt. Adams Institute. It serves as a career development program for military veterans interested in careers in public lands and natural resources management. VetsWork participants engage in internships at federal, state or local natural resource organizations that blend hands-on experience with professional development. As a result, VetsWork participants increase their employment opportunities while supporting the work of public lands / natural resource management agencies.

While the Mt. Adams Institute cannot guarantee a job at the end of the internship, many participants do go on to employment with their Partnering Organization. Many variables increase the chances of employment with the Partnering Organization. Some of these are in the control of participants (proactively seeking training and opportunities, educational background, ability to relocate, etc...) and others are not (lack of open positions, etc...) This outcome will heavily depend on how pro-active the participant is in seeking training, projects, and networking opportunities.

PARTNERING ORGANIZATIONS

Interns are placed with [Partnering Organizations](#) such as the U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, NOAA and the King Conservation District. VetsWork 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 careers through connections to the natural world.

MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS

- U.S. military veterans
- Ages 21 and older
- Must have an honorable discharge (general under honorable discharge considered on a case-by-case basis)
- Ability to commit to 45-week program

DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION

MAI staff, Project Supervisors and Interns are made up of individuals with varying backgrounds, experiences, beliefs, values, communication styles and goals. We welcome each Intern to bring their full and total self with them into our program, including their varying levels of knowledge about racial equity, social justice, community service, and environmental stewardship. As a predominantly white organization, MAI recognizes that along with the learning, we must also continually center and uplift the voices and experiences of those who are historically underrepresented – both within our program and out in the community. We are committed to creating a place in which to share our differences and dialogue in a climate of equity, inclusion, mutual respect, trust and professionalism.

COMMITMENT

Joining VetsWork is not just a commitment to a 45-week term of service; it is a commitment to join a local and National Service movement dedicated to making a difference in the community. Interns will need to support the goals of AmeriCorps, MAI and the Project Partners by being a positive ambassador and upholding all values and policies. The health of the VetsWork program is dependent on your participation and commitment for the full duration of the program.

CHALLENGE

VetsWork is designed to promote individual growth through challenge and opportunity. We recognize that both challenges and opportunities show up differently for different people. We prioritize supporting Interns as they lean into their growth edges without putting folks at risk. No matter what your level of experience, we ask that you come to this program expecting and seeking the opportunity to grow and learn.

COVID-19

Mt. Adams Institute (MAI) is committed to the health and safety of its staff, Interns, board, Partnering Organizations and community members. With the spread of COVID-19, a respiratory disease caused by SARS-Co V-2 virus, MAI must remain committed to its responsibility to help mitigate the outbreak and keep all MAI associates safe. Everyone involved with our program must be willing to respond to COVID-19 restrictions as they arise. Interns will be required to follow the policies at their service site. This includes any changes that are implemented throughout the course of the program. These policies may include masking/social distancing mandates; remote/virtual work; altered field duties and other restrictions determined necessary to keep site staff, partners and the public safe. Accepting a position means accepting the current requirements and any updates to those requirements while enrolled in the program.

During the service site interviews, it is important to inquire and understand each site's current requirements.

COMMUNICATION

Effective service requires thorough communication. We expect Interns who join VetsWork to work to communicate effectively with other Interns, MAI staff, Project Supervisors and community stakeholders. We believe that strong, positive communication will help us:

- Build stronger relationships across differences.
- Be more equitable and culturally responsive
- Improve programmatically to meet the changing needs of the region.
- Explore solutions to resolve issues
- Share the challenges and celebrations of the service we do.
- Promote professionalism.

POSITIONS

VetsWork internships are created as entry-level opportunities (duties can include cleaning pit toilets, garbage collection, data entry, mowing, cleaning fish raceways, etc...). Interns should be prepared to take on all types of tasks. Applicants do not need to have previous experience in natural resource / public land management or a college degree to take part in the program, but because VetsWork is a unique program offering positions nationally, acceptance into the program is competitive and these elements are considered during the application / interview process.

All VetsWork positions are created specifically for the program. Interns do not displace or eliminate existing jobs within Partnering Organizations. MAI Partners are seeking individuals who will expand the agency's ability to meet project goals. VetsWork Interns help to get project work done, and in turn are able to build their resume, network and experience the inner workings of natural resources agencies.

Although, there is no guarantee of employment at the end of the internship, that is a primary goal for many participants. Approximately 80% of VetsWork (and VetsWork Fire) Interns who complete the full 45 weeks of the program are offered employment (full-time, part-time, or seasonal.) Interns sign on to complete the work of their specific position, but will have opportunities to take part in project work outside of their prescribed position description.

MAI Staff asks that all applicants consider the specific duties and requirements of a position to make sure they are fully capable (with reasonable accommodations) to take on the physical elements of a position. If the position is office oriented be sure that you can comfortably sit at a desk for periods of time. If the position requires extensive hiking be sure that you are fully capable of doing this. While VetsWork is not a therapeutic program (physically or mentally), MAI provides an added layer of support and will work to connect Interns to needed resources.

SCHEDULE

VetsWork Internships are full-time (average of 40 hours per week). Some weeks Interns may log more than 40 hours, and the following weeks' schedule could reflect fewer hours to balance this. Overall, the VetsWork AmeriCorps commitment is 1700 hours over the course of 45 weeks. Forty hours per week for 45 weeks equals 1800 hours, so there is flexibility built into the schedule. This will allow for sick /personal days within the schedule.

Intern schedules will typically be Monday through Friday, but positions often have weekend or evening components. Applicants should discuss the specific work schedule for each position with MAI Recruitment Staff and Partnering Organization staff before accepting a position. Interns will coordinate and communicate with Project Supervisors to set up a calendar that balances the schedule needs of the project site, MAI events and requirements, and a healthy work/life balance.

While MAI strives to notify Interns and their supervisors ahead of time regarding schedule changes, we also recommend that Interns approach their service term with flexibility.

SITE LOCATIONS

There are two VetsWork cohorts:

- Pacific Northwest - includes positions in California, Oregon, Washington and Alaska.
- Southeast / Central - includes positions in Missouri, Michigan, Georgia, South Carolina, Puerto Rico, Texas, Florida, Mississippi, and Alabama. (Subject to change.)

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

HOUSING

Some sites have low cost or free housing, but not all. Housing options vary according to our Partnering Organization's capacity. Federal housing does not allow alcohol, drugs or firearms, and pets are not allowed. Specific details about housing can be found on each position description and should be discussed in your interviews with Site Supervisors. Some things to discuss in the interview are:

- Single bedroom or shared or bunkhouse
- Internet availability
- Distance to services (grocery stores, medical offices, recreation opportunities, etc...)
- Proximity to service site
- Laundry options
- Cost

TRANSPORTATION

Interns are responsible for their own transportation to and from their service site. In most cases, service site vehicles will be available for work related travel. Some sites require a personal vehicle for work purposes. If this is the case, it is outlined in the position description. We recommend you discuss the expectations and mileage reimbursement policies during your interview.

PAPERWORK

As a federally funded program, our Interns are required to document their service and submit necessary paperwork. Interns will complete monthly timesheets, and a final evaluation. Our expectation is that all paperwork will be completed

correctly and turned in on time. Our staff is available to answer questions and provide the necessary direction and support.

EVALUATION

We value constructive feedback and strive for continuous improvement within all aspects of our program. Our improvement process relies heavily on input from our Interns, Project Supervisors and community stakeholders. As a result, Interns will be asked to provide feedback for many aspects of our program. In addition, each Intern will participate in two formal performance evaluations during their term of service. These evaluations are designed to provide constructive feedback to the Intern regarding his/her performance. Interns are responsible for collecting the information necessary to report on their project site accomplishments.

IDENTIFIERS

All Interns are issued AmeriCorps gear consisting of a t-shirt, fleece, buttons and pins. Interns will use their own discretion as to which type of identifier is appropriate for the project situation and site.

CRIMINAL BACKGROUND CHECKS

All positions (Staff and Interns) with MAI, AmeriCorps Program are required to complete a National Service Criminal History Check (NSCHC) that is compliant with CNCS standards. Enrollment and retention with our program are conditional upon receipt of a satisfactory criminal history report from the following: National Sex Offender Public Website (NSOPW), State of Residence, State of Service and FBI criminal identification systems. These checks are conducted at no cost to the applicant. MAI uses the following providers to obtain these checks:

- Fieldprint - Conducts FBI criminal identification fingerprint checks.
- Truescreen - Conducts State of Service, State of Residence, and National Sex Offender Public Website (NSOPW) checks.

MAI will share the results within the program, as appropriate, to make final hiring decisions. Staff and Interns have the right to review the factual accuracy of the result before action is taken to exclude them from a position.

CELL COVERAGE

Many of our positions are in remote locations. Your carrier may not be accessible at your site. Check with your supervisor to learn the best carrier for your service area.

EQUIPMENT

The service site will provide the equipment needed for Interns to perform their duties. The exceptions are personal clothing including, but not limited to, work boots, rain gear, warm clothing, gloves, etc. It is important to check with the service site during your interview about local weather conditions and personal equipment they feel may be necessary.

PRIOR SERVICE EXPERIENCE

Interns may have previously served in an AmeriCorps program. While AmeriCorps has the same guidelines nationwide, each program can be very different. It is important to approach each term of AmeriCorps with an open mind.

AmeriCorps Interns can enroll in multiple terms of service that add up to the value of two full-time education awards. In other words, you can blend summer, part-time and full-time service positions and receive awards as long as the combined service terms don't exceed two full education awards. (You can also serve without receiving an Education Award up to a maximum number of terms outlined below.)

In blending summer, part-time, and full-time terms, you can serve a maximum:

- 4 with AmeriCorps State and National (includes MAI's positions)
- 5 one-year terms with VISTA
- 2 with NCCC

It is the applicant's responsibility to indicate on their application whether they have had previous terms with AmeriCorps. Misinformation or omission of information may result in disqualification and/or termination.

POSITION FUNDING & PARTNER CONTRACTS

All positions are contingent on funding from AmeriCorps and MAI Partners as well as finalization of contracts/agreements.

Program Benefits

| Service Term | Living Allowance | Education Award | Leave | Term Dates |
|---------------------|-------------------------|-----------------|---------|--|
| 1700 hrs (45-weeks) | \$22,500 (\$500 weekly) | \$6,495 | 100 hrs | <u>Alaska/PNW Region</u> – 02/06/2023 – 12/15/2023 <u>Central/SE Region</u> – 03/06/2023 – 01/12/2024 |

SERVICE TERM

As a VetsWork AmeriCorps Intern you will be required to serve a minimum of 1700 hours over 45 weeks. Interns are required to successfully complete all of their specific program requirements and serve the entire term of service.

LIVING ALLOWANCE

Mt. Adams Institute (MAI) Interns receive a living allowance paid over 45 weeks. Deductions, such as FICA and federal and state taxes (when applicable), will be withheld each month.

The living allowance is distributed by direct deposit to the Intern's bank/credit union. This living allowance is dispensed in monthly installments on the 10th of the month. If either date falls on a weekend or holiday the living allowance is deposited on the first business day following the weekend or holiday.

LIFE ON THE LIVING ALLOWANCE

Life on the AmeriCorps living allowance has inherent challenges, and for some people can be quite stressful. We encourage applicants to consider their finances and their ability to support their basic needs prior to accepting a position.

It is very important that Interns consider, in advance, if this financial situation will prevent them from accessing a positive and meaningful service experience with MAI. We welcome your questions, thoughts or concerns at any time during the recruitment process.

[Here is an interactive budget worksheet](#) you can use as a resource to determine if this program is financially feasible for you.

EDUCATION AWARD

The Segal AmeriCorps Education Award is a benefit AmeriCorps Interns receive upon successful completion of their term of service. The education award can be used to pay for "cost of attendance" fees at federally recognized schools and/or repay qualifying student loans. The education award is subject to federal taxes in the calendar year that it is used.

For more information, please read the [Education Award FAQ](#) on the AmeriCorps website.

FORBEARANCE

VetsWork Interns are eligible for temporary postponement of the repayment of qualified student loans through an action called forbearance. While in forbearance, payments do not need to be made on loans, but they will continue to accrue interest. When the term of service is successfully completed, Interns must request that the National Service Trust pay the interest that accrued during the service period.

Loan providers are required to allow AmeriCorps Interns loans forbearance while serving. Once enrolled, Interns can easily and quickly request the forbearance on-line through the MyAmeriCorps website. When the term of service is complete, loans will automatically revert to repayment status.

AmeriCorps cannot approve or disapprove forbearance requests; it can only verify your status as enrolled in a national service position. If a loan is in default, or in forbearance more than 3 times, it may not be eligible for this forbearance. **It is important to check with your loan provider to make sure your loan applies.**

APPRENTICESHIP

VetsWork Interns eligible for GI Bill® benefits may select to participate in our apprenticeship program registered with the Department of Labor (DOL). Dual enrollment in these programs provides Interns with an opportunity to receive assistance with housing and supply costs in addition to the AmeriCorps living stipend.

Apprenticeship GI Bill® educational benefits include a Monthly Housing Allowance (MHA) and supply stipend paid by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Interns can access up to approximately \$2,400 per month. Actual benefits vary by individuals' qualified benefits. To view your benefit estimates, search for "Corporation for National and Community Service" (Washington, DC) using the GI Bill® [Comparison Tool](#).

SKILLBRIDGE

The Department of Defense (DoD) SkillBridge program is an opportunity for active-duty service members to gain valuable civilian work experience through specific industry training, apprenticeships, or internships during the last 180 days of service. SkillBridge connects service members with industry partners in real-world job experiences.

Interns are still paid by their service branch during the SkillBridge portion of the experience. Once that portion is over, MAI will begin to pay you at the normal rate of the other participants. It is important to understand what this amount is going to be BEFORE you commit to the program. It is likely to be less than your service pay.

If Interns are interested, they will need to contact their installation SkillBridge point of contact and inform them of their interest in participating. They must apply and get accepted and then gain approval from their unit Commander and complete a SkillBridge MOU that is signed by both MAI and the unit Commander. More details can be found at www.dodskillbridge.usalearning.gov

LEAVE

Flexibility is built into the calendar to accommodate holidays, sick and personal leave. Interns are responsible for communicating time off needs with their supervisor. Living allowances will be paid during personal leave, but service hours will not be earned during this time. This is based on a 40-hour average service week.

SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (SNAP)

Formerly and commonly known as the Food Stamp Program, SNAP is a food assistance program that is provided by each state. AmeriCorps Interns may be eligible for assistance, but MAI cannot guarantee it. MAI will provide a letter of appointment at Orientation confirming the AmeriCorps living allowance is not counted towards the wage calculation. Interns will be responsible for signing up for the program on their own time, if they choose. Application materials are located at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap>.

HEALTH INSURANCE

All Interns need to be covered by health insurance, either through MAI or with an existing plan, while serving with AmeriCorps. MAI provides health insurance coverage, through [The Corps Network](#) that meets the Affordable Care Act minimums and is provided to Interns who are not currently covered by health insurance. If Interns choose to take MAI Medical Coverage, they will receive information on how to access insurance, submit medical claims and search for providers. Other information about the plan:

- MAI will pay the monthly premium and Interns will be responsible for all other charges.

- Health coverage begins the first day of service and ends the last day of the month in which the Intern serves.
- The plan covers Interns only (not spouses or dependents) and does not include vision and dental.
- If an Intern has an existing plan and chooses to waive MAI medical coverage, they must provide proof of coverage.

CHILDCARE ALLOWANCE

The AmeriCorps Child Care Benefit Program is available for qualified, active, full-time AmeriCorps Interns who need the benefit to serve. Childcare allowance is provided through [GAP Solutions](#) and to be eligible you must be: 1) a full-time, active Intern; 2) the parent or full-time guardian of a child under 13 years of age who resides with the Intern; and 3) meet the [family income guidelines](#). Childcare benefits are paid directly to qualified childcare providers for all or part of the Intern's childcare costs.

Professional Development

INTERN ORIENTATION & TRAINING

Interns are required to attend orientation at the start of their service term. Orientation is coordinated by MAI staff and focuses on building relationships, learning program elements, risk management, and gaining skills to be successful. Interns are also required to attend a professional development training during their service term.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

MAI is committed to providing Interns with opportunities to develop both personally and professionally during their service year. Professional Development hours are defined as the hours spent on activities that support an Intern's growth and development within MAI's professional development goals. Interns participate in a Professional Development Program with the following goals:

- **Managing workflow to support health/wellness** - Identify and implement strategies that create efficiency and productivity at work while supporting personal physical and mental health and well-being.
- **Diversity, Equity & Inclusion** - Increase awareness and understanding around practices of diversity, equity, and inclusion, in an effort to strengthen communities, workplace and self.
- **Career development/transition** – Provide resources that increase skills that directly relate to career development, job-seeking, and overall confidence in securing future employment.
- **Public lands Careers** - Develop an understanding of public lands management and the employment opportunities that exist within the natural resources field.
- **Community service** - Promote a lifelong ethic of service by connecting with community organizations to support their goals to be safer, stronger, and healthier.

Interns can expect to spend up to 20% of their service year in activities involving training and development. MAI will provide formal development opportunities as part of the program and interns are encouraged to work with their Site Supervisor to examine their individual development goals for site specific opportunities. MAI provides resources, assistance, and connections for Interns who seek to develop specific skills and a \$50 training fund is available to support that development. Professional Development will be explained in more detail during the Intern's Pre-Service Orientation.

Prohibited Activities

Federal law and the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) policy prohibit AmeriCorps Programs and Interns from engaging in certain activities while using Corporation funds or on Corporation time. Interns are not prohibited from engaging in any of these activities in their personal capacities and on their own time. If there is any question about whether a certain activity is permissible, please contact the Program Director. Examples of prohibited activities include, but are not limited to:

- a. Attempting to influence legislation;
- b. Organizing or engaging in protests, petitions, boycotts or strikes;
- c. Assisting, promoting or deterring union organizing;
- d. Impairing existing contracts for services or collective bargaining agreements;
- e. Engaging in partisan political activities, or other activities designed to influence the outcome of an election to any public office;
- f. Participating in, or endorsing, events or activities that are likely to include advocacy for or against political parties, political platforms, political candidates, proposed legislation or elected officials;
- g. Engaging in religious instruction, conducting worship services, providing instruction as part of a program that includes mandatory religious instruction or worship, constructing or operating facilities devoted to religious instruction or worship, maintaining facilities primarily or inherently devoted to religious instruction or worship, or engaging in any form of religious proselytization;
- h. Providing a direct benefit to:
 - i. a business organized for profit;
 - ii. a labor union;
 - iii. a partisan political organization;
 - iv. a non-profit organization that fails to comply with the restrictions contained in Section 501c(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 except that nothing in this section shall be construed to prevent Interns from engaging in advocacy activities undertaken on their own initiative; and
 - v. an organization engaged in the religious activities described in paragraph (g) of this section, unless Corporation assistance is not used to support the religious activities;
- i. Conducting a voter registration drive or using Corporation funds to conduct a voter registration drive;
- j. Providing abortion services or referrals for receipt of such services; and
- k. Such activities as the Corporation may prohibit.

Thank You

Thank you for considering an internship with Mt. Adams Institute’s VetsWork Program. We appreciate your service and welcome the opportunity to work with you as you explore and create career opportunities in the natural resource and public land management fields. We strive to be as transparent and informative about the program elements as possible so that all potential applicants feel empowered to decide if VetsWork truly is the “right fit”. MAI and Partnering Organization staff are looking for a full commitment to the 45 weeks of the program, and we ask that you review the provided information fully and critically. Mt. Adams Institute Staff values relationship building and open communication; we are available to discuss any issues or concerns at any point during the application process. Do not hesitate to call / email / text.

We look forward to working with you.

Katie

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Katie Schmidt

Mt. Adams Institute

Recruitment Coordinator

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www.mtadamsinstitute.org

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