WA State Department of Veterans Affairs
Counseling and Wellness Programs
Veterans Conservation Corps
Internship Program

"In healing nature, you heal yourself."
-John Beal

"Serving Those Who Served"

VCC History

The VCC was grown from the efforts of John Beal, a U.S. Marine Corps veteran of the Vietnam War. After service, John found his purpose in life by restoring Hamm Creek and fighting for the restoration of the Duwamish River, both located in South Seattle. He advocated for the creation of a program that offered opportunities for veterans to engage in environmental conservation in their communities as a way to heal from the physical and mental challenges that may result from military service. The Veterans Conservation Corps was established by the Washington legislature in 2005 (**RCW 43.60A.150**), and the VCC Internship Program was formally established in 2016.

VCC Program Mission

Serve those who served by providing veterans with self-directed connections to the lands, waters, and communities in WA State.

The VCC provides opportunities for veterans to do meaningful work in conserving and restoring natural ecosystems with our environmental conservation and agricultural community partner organizations. We support veterans in establishing and maintaining healthy reciprocal relationships with nature and their community so that through their own efforts they may increase their self-efficacy and resiliency and realize a positive shift in their mental, emotional, and physical well-being. To further support their efforts, VCC interns receive training and resources on veteran-related topics that empower them to address and overcome any challenges that they may experience in their transition from the military.

Desired Outcomes for VCC Interns

- Veterans take the initiative to create a self-directed internship experience
- Given the opportunity to do meaningful work in conserving and restoring natural ecosystems and seeing the results of their efforts, veterans acknowledge and understand their own self-efficacy, resiliency, and ability to overcome their own personal challenges
- Veterans establish and maintain healthy reciprocal relationships with nature and their community
- Veterans realize a positive shift in their mental, emotional, and physical well-being
- Veterans acquire skills and experiences that may help them in finding meaningful employment

VCC Program Responsibilities

- Prior to Internship Start:
  - Complete and submit all required documentation to WDVA Contracts Office to initiate and finalize internship program contract between WDVA and partner organization
  - Finalize internship position descriptions and advertise to VCC networks
  - Recruitment of internship applicants and selection of applicants for interviews
  - Coordinate and conduct first round of applicant interviews
  - Coordinate and schedule second round of applicant interviews with partner organization
  - Conduct background and reference checks on potential interns
  - Inform interns of acceptance into internship
  - Ensure VCC administrative paperwork is complete prior to internship start date

- During Internship:
  - Conduct VCC intern orientation
  - Provide intern support and assistance in resolving any intern issues/concerns
  - Connect interns to veteran resources, benefits, and communities
  - Advocate for and support intern well-being
  - Conduct internship mid-term evaluation with intern and partner organization staff

- At Completion of Internship:
  - Conduct internship final evaluation with intern and partner organization staff
  - Ensure intern completion of end of internship surveys, final report, and list of accomplishments

Partner Organization Responsibilities

- Prior to Internship Start:
  - Collaborate with VCC Program to draft an internship position description
  - Collaborate with VCC Program to create and finalize a contract with WDVA
  - Advertise final internship position description to partner organization's networks
  - Coordinate with VCC Program to conduct second round of intern applicant interviews
  - Select intern applicant for internship after second interviews are complete and inform VCC Program of intern selection
  - Ensure internal organization administration applicable to onboarding the VCC intern is complete prior to internship start date
  - Review VCC Attendance Policy and determine if makeup hours will be required, and if required, determine how interns will be able to make up any hours they miss during their internship

- During Internship:

    - Conduct internal organization orientation for the VCC intern as applicable
    - Provide opportunities for meaningful work that encourages intern self-efficacy and motivates interns to learn and experience as much as possible about the partner organization's mission and work
    - Provide intern with professional mentorship and networking opportunities
    - Coordinate training and professional development opportunities for interns
    - Provide a flexible work schedule, within reason and if possible, that allows interns the time and space to address any challenges that may arise during their internship
    - Ensure intern adheres to the VCC Attendance Policy
    - Assist in resolving any immediate intern issues/concerns within scope of daily work
    - Maintain communications with VCC Program regarding any intern issues that require WDVA support and/or veteran resources
    - Provide intern with proper equipment and safety gear required for internship duties, if applicable
    - Provide mileage reimbursement to intern for travel to and from project sites, if applicable

- At Completion of Internship:
    - Submit to VCC Program a summary report of intern accomplishments
    - Complete a VCC Program Community Partner Survey

VCC Intern Responsibilities

- Prior to Internship Start:

    - Submit to the VCC Program all documentation and information required to enroll in the VCC Internship Program

- During Internship:

    - Attend VCC intern orientation
    - Adhere to the VCC Attendance Policy
    - Adhere to expectations/requirements of internship position description
    - Remain in direct communication with site supervisor and VCC Program
    - Attend and actively engage in all required VCC and host organization trainings
    - Be proactive in seeking professional and/or personal development opportunities
    - Focus on personal growth and experiencing opportunities unique to the internship
    - Focus on personal connection with their local community and natural environment

- At Completion of Internship:

    - Complete end of internship surveys
    - Submit list of internship accomplishments and final internship report

Intern Check-Ins with VCC Program

- Standard for All Interns:
  - VCC Orientation
  - Midterm Review
  - Final Review

- Need-based:
  - When mediation is required beyond interactions between intern and partner organization staff for any issues that may arise during internship
  - To provide resources as requested by intern (professional/personal development, veterans benefits and resources, etc.)
  - Check-ins requested by intern for accountability in achieving goals established at orientation

Optional Intern Training

- Suicide Awareness & Prevention Training
- Veteran Peer Support Training
- Posttraumatic Growth Training
- Dependable Strengths Workshop
- Environmental conservation conferences/symposiums/workshops
- Business Planning Workshop
- Whole Farm Planning and Agricultural Entrepreneurship Courses
- Other trainings/certifications as available and desired by intern

Internship Stipend

The VCC provides interns a stipend to assist with living expenses incurred while participating in the internship program. This stipend is paid directly to the intern from the WA State Department of Veterans Affairs.

- Full-time internship (40 hours/week): $3,200/month
- Part-time internship (20 hours/week): $1,600/month

Each calendar month is divided into two participation periods: 1-15 and 16-30/31. The biweekly stipend payment dates are the 10th and 25th of each month, and the stipend for each 2-week participation period is paid on the payment date following the end of the participation period.

Please note that the first stipend payment is mailed in the form of a physical check to the address on record, and then all subsequent payments will be electronically direct deposited if a direct deposit form is submitted.

Internship Position Classification & Benefits

VCC interns will not receive wages and will not be an employee of either the WDVA or the internship host organization.

Employer taxes associated with the internship stipend, to include Medicare, Social Security, and L&I benefits for medical care with regard to on-the-job injuries, are covered by the WDVA. The WDVA is a self-insured agency, thus any L&I claims required for interns who experience an on-the-job injury during their internship will be filed by the WDVA. Please ensure injuries incurred by interns while performing internship duties are promptly reported to the VCC Program.

Partner Organization Participation Fee

The VCC will invoice a one-time participation fee to the partner organization for each veteran placed in a VCC internship. The fee is $100 per month, or part thereof, for a full-time internship and $50 per month for a part-time internship. The full participation fee amount will be invoiced within the first month after the start of each internship.

For example, a 6-month full-time internship term will require a participation fee of $600, and a 9-month part-time internship term will require a participation fee of $450.

Internship Term Limit

- Each intern may complete a maximum total of 24 internship months
    - Internship terms do not need to be consecutive
    - Interns may participate in internships with different host organizations
    - Internships may be extended beyond original term length, as long as the extension does not exceed the intern's maximum total of 24 internship months

Contracting & Intern Enrollment Timeline

Events/Deliverables	Responsible Personnel
Partnership contract template and/or intern position description (scope of work) template emailed to Partner Organization (PO) staff for review and edit	VCC Program
Internship position description emailed to VCC Program for review and edit	PO Staff
Contract documents and internship position description submitted to WDVA Contracts Department for review and processing	VCC Program
Contract emailed to PO Staff for review, edits as applicable, and approval	WDVA Contracts Department
Return via email the signed and approved contract to WDVA Contracts Department	PO Staff
Final approved contract emailed to VCC Program Manager and PO Staff for records keeping	WDVA Contracts Department
Advertise internship position description to internal/external networks, social media platforms, etc. for recruitment	VCC Program and PO Staff
Email correspondence with intern applicants to answer questions/address any issues regarding internship and internship application process	VCC Program
• Coordinate and conduct first round of intern applicant interviews • Email each applicant's resume, cover letter, and 1st interview notes to PO Staff for review	VCC Program
• Review first round internship applications • Select intern applicants for second round interviews and inform VCC Program of selections	PO Staff
• Coordinate and facilitate second round of interviews with PO Staff and selected intern applicants	VCC Program
After interview process is complete, select intern applicant for enrollment into VCC Program and communicate selection to VCC Program	PO Staff
• Conduct background check for selected intern • Conduct reference check for selected intern • Consult with PO Staff regarding results of background and reference checks as applicable	VCC Program
After successful completion of background and reference checks, intern will be notified of selection for enrollment into VCC Internship Program	VCC Program
• VCC Orientation with intern (includes completion of HR/Payroll paperwork and initial VCC Program surveys)	VCC Program
First Day of Internship	Intern and PO staff

Veterans Conservation Corps Team

Peter Schmidt
Director, WDVA Counseling and Wellness Programs
Email: peter.schmidt@dva.wa.gov
Mobile: (360) 725-2220

Melissa Rhault
Program Manager, WDVA Counseling and Wellness Programs
Email: melissa.rhault@dva.wa.gov
Mobile: (360) 515-6983

Kim Pham
Program Manager, Veterans Conservation Corps
Email: Kim@dva.wa.gov
Mobile: (360) 870-0729

Jennifer Minich
Administrative Assistant, VCC & Veterans Services
Email: jennifer.minich@dva.wa.gov
Office: (360) 725-2185
Mobile: (360) 554-8269

Jeffrey Fletcher
Fiscal Specialist, WDVA Counseling and Wellness Programs
Email: jeffreyf@dva.wa.gov
Office: (360) 725-2158

Michael Quesnel
Data Specialist, WDVA Counseling and Wellness Programs
Email: michael.quesnel@dva.wa.gov
Office: (360) 485-1859

VCC Headquarters

WA State Department of Veterans Affairs Central Office
1102 Quince St. SE
P.O. Box 41155
Olympia, WA 98504-1155

VCC Websites

ww.dva.wa.gov/vcc
www.facebook.com/VeteransConservationCorps
www.instagram.com/VeteransConservationCorps