

2026 Commonwealth Coastal & Marine Policy Fellowship

Application Deadline: May 1, 2026
Fellowship Start Date: October 1, 2026

Virginia Sea Grant (VASG) is soliciting applications for the 2026 Commonwealth Coastal & Marine Policy Fellowship. VASG is accepting applications from current graduate students who are close to completing their degree or those who recently graduated, until 5:00 p.m. EST on May 1, 2026. VASG and their partners anticipate supporting two to three post-graduate fellows starting on October 1, 2026. This announcement and guidance on how to submit your application can be found [here](#).

FELLOWSHIP DESCRIPTION

The Commonwealth Coastal & Marine Policy Fellowship is sponsored by VASG, Virginia Environmental Endowment, Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program and participating host offices. Modeled after the highly successful national Sea Grant Knauss Marine Policy Fellowship, this fellowship provides educational and professional development opportunities for post-graduates by partnering them with a host office mentor where they receive on-the-job training and hone their professional skills, while learning about the policy and management process at the state level. The program also aims to increase the capacity of the host offices by supporting fellows who are working on mission-relevant programs, and leveraging the knowledge and capacity of Virginia's academic institutions.

This year's participating host office descriptions and project descriptions are posted on the VASG website [here](#).

VIRGINIA SEA GRANT

Virginia Sea Grant is a federal-state partnership, funded by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) with matching funds from our seven university partners. Hosted at the Virginia Institute of Marine Science at William & Mary (W&M), VASG's other partner institutions include: University of Virginia, Virginia Tech, George Mason University, Old Dominion University, Virginia Commonwealth University, and Norfolk State University.

FOSTERING A SAFE AND WELCOMING COMMUNITY

VASG does not tolerate any form of misconduct, discrimination or harassment, including sexual harassment, or sexual misconduct (e.g. sexual assault within its organization, at awardee organizations, field sites, meetings, or anywhere VASG-funded research, outreach and education are conducted).

ELIGIBILITY

Graduate students close to completing their graduate, professional degree, or Ph.D. program at a Virginia university or college are eligible to apply. Recent graduates who completed their graduate, professional degree or Ph.D. program at a Virginia university or college, graduating in the fall semester 2024 or after, are also eligible. Applicants should demonstrate a strong interest and some experience in coastal or marine resource policy and management (e.g., course work, internships, independent study, etc.).

VIRGINIA SEA GRANT PARTNER UNIVERSITIES

AWARD INFORMATION

VASG anticipates supporting two to four fellows for the 2026 Commonwealth Coastal & Marine Policy Fellowship. The length of the fellowship assignment is 12 months. The start date for the fellowship is October 1, 2026. All Commonwealth Coastal & Marine Policy Fellows who are placed in a host office are employees of W&M. Each fellow receives a salary of \$58,000 for the 12-month assignment and \$5,000 for professional development, travel, and critical expenses. No health insurance benefits will be available through this position.

HOST-FELLOW RELATIONSHIP

The Commonwealth Coastal & Marine Policy Fellowship is an innovative professional training experience and educational opportunity that will benefit both fellows and the host offices. As an integral foundation of the program, the fellows and host offices must be aware and sensitive to each other's mutual responsibilities, and the goals of the fellowship program. Fellows are expected to abide by standard code of conduct policies of their host office including, but not limited to, any: personnel policy, policy regarding sexual harassment, policy regarding workplace violence, policy regarding ethical behavior, and policy regarding the acceptable use of computer resources. Fellows will honor the working protocols of the host office and contribute to useful and relevant products that meet the host office's mission.

The host office is expected to provide opportunities for involvement in substantive projects that contribute to the fellow's professional development, education, and career goals, as well as provide adequate and appropriate mentorship to the fellow. Participating host offices have pledged to maintain a professional relationship with the fellows throughout the program and abide by all code of conduct procedures and policies including, but not limited to, the policies listed above. Additionally, all host offices have agreed to: 1) deliver an orientation that introduces their mission and goals, priorities, staff, and activities; 2) provide opportunities for substantive involvement in, and contribution to their program's activities, including a focused project and work tasks for the duration of the fellowship; 3) supply a professional mentor who will help support the fellow's professional growth through their individualized professional development plan, and regularly engage with the fellow during the 12-month fellowship; and 4) provide a work space, supplies, travel expenses, etc. necessary to accomplish the fellow's tasks.

FELLOWSHIP REQUIREMENTS

In addition to work responsibilities to the host office, selected fellows will:

- Work with VASG's Competitive Research and Education Coordinator: Complete quarterly check ins, annual reporting, and other requirements.
- Collaborate with VASG's Communication Center: Assist VASG efforts to publicize their fellowship activities. Fellows are required to collaborate on communications products and share story ideas.
- Collaborate with Your Mentor: Work closely with your host office mentor, including identifying opportunities to create and execute your individual professional development plan.
- Attend VASG Events: Participate in regular meetings with VASG, including: An orientation meeting at the beginning of the fellowship; VASG-sponsored professional development activities; and an exit interview at the conclusion of the fellowship.

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www.vaseagrant.org

HOW TO APPLY

Applicants should put in an individual application for each position they are interested in. Applications must be submitted online via VASG's website (applications.vaseagrant.org) by **5:00 pm EST on May 1, 2026**.

Instructions on how to register and start a fellowship application can be found on the VASG website (<https://vaseagrant.org>).

NOTE: All letters of recommendation will be submitted by the applicant as part of the application package.

APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

All application elements must be submitted as ONE combined PDF document.

Students should submit **one application for each position** they are interested in.

Personal and Career Goal Statement (1,000 words or less)

The statement should include:

- A description of the unique skills or perspective you would bring to the fellowship and proposed host-office project, including information relating to your leadership potential, communication ability, and stakeholder engagement interests.
- An overview of your short term (1-5yrs) and long term (>5yrs) professional goals, how those goals relate to broader societal needs in the coastal and marine environment and/or communities, and how this fellowship would contribute toward those goals.
- An example of a time the candidate faced and overcame a barrier, obstacle or challenge.
- Any other pertinent information relating to the candidate's plans to move forward their interests in coastal and marine resource management and the policy process occurring at the state level.

Resume or CV (two-page maximum; using 12 point font)

- Applicants should demonstrate the diversity of their education and work experience, honors and awards, extra-curricular activities, volunteer history, and interpersonal, written, and oral communication skills.

Recommendation Letters

Two letters of recommendation from individuals who have worked with the applicant.

- At least one letter must be from a faculty member with knowledge of the student's academic and research (when applicable) performance.
- Applicants should consider someone with a different perspective (e.g., a former employer, mentor from a previous internship, someone you worked with on an outreach or policy project) for the second letter in order to give the reviewers additional information regarding your strengths and experiences.
- Each letter should not exceed two-pages single spaced.
- These letters should discuss the applicant's: self-motivation, response to setbacks, skills and involvement in teamwork, collaborative leadership skills, willingness to learn a new skill or topic, and academic performance and potential.

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- The letters should not include personal contact information or web links to external resources (e.g. Linked In, articles, blogs, etc.)
- Any letters beyond the two letters of recommendation will be disregarded by the selection panel. Letters of endorsement from members of Congress, friends, or relatives will not be accepted.
- **Letters WILL be submitted with the student's application.** Letters must be submitted by the deadline and should be addressed to Mona Behl, Director, Virginia Sea Grant. Applicants should refer their letter writers to the **"For Letter Writers"** page on the VASG Commonwealth Fellowship website.

REVIEW AND SELECTION PROCESS

VASG will review all applications to ensure that they are complete and adhere to all guidelines. Applicants will be invited to participate in a virtual interview with the fellowship selection committee, which could be composed of the funders, future potential host offices, and VASG stakeholder advisors. The committee will select finalists based upon the submitted application materials and virtual interviews. The selection criteria will be based on the applicant's academic and professional performance and potential, professional and career goals, relevant and qualifying experience, communication and professional skills, and supporting recommendations and endorsements.

The placement of the selected finalists will be based on in-person interviews with the participating host offices, and ranking of preferences by both finalists and hosts. Consequently, placement to a specific host office cannot be guaranteed. The Virginia Sea Grant Director has final discretion to select fellows based on the interview panel's recommendations, ranking provided by the host offices and finalists, diversity and balance of the award portfolio, availability of funding, and programmatic objectives, needs and priorities.

TENTATIVE TIMELINE FOR FELLOWSHIP COMPETITION

Fellowship announcement released	March 2, 2026
Applications due to VASG by 5:00pm EST	May 1, 2026
Virtual interviews	June 2026
Notification of finalists	July 2026
Selected finalists' interview with host offices	July 2026
Fellows notified of placement	July 2026
VASG Fellowship Orientation	August 2026
Fellowship begins	October 1, 2026
Fellowship ends	September 30, 2027

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