2026 Commonwealth Coastal & Marine Policy Fellowship

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

HAMPTON ROADS PDC

PROJECT TITLE:
Regional Resilience Planning and Policy Development and Implementation

HOST AGENCY & PROGRAM:
Hampton Roads Planning District Commission, Water Resources Department

LOCATION:
Chesapeake, VA

NAME OF HOST OFFICE MENTORS
Whitney Katchmark
Principal Water Resources Engineer

Ben McFarlane
Chief Resilience Officer

OVERVIEW OF AGENCY:
The Hampton Roads Planning District Commission (HRPDC) is the state-enabled, locally-created regional planning agency for southeastern Virginia. It is comprised of seventeen member local governments, including ten independent cities, six counties, and one town. The role of the HRPDC is to serve as a forum for local officials to discuss regional issues and provide technical assistance to local governments to help them meet regulatory requirements and achieve policy goals. The HRPDC staff (approximately sixteen technical staff) works with local governments and the commission on many issues, including water resources, housing, economics, emergency management, planning, and environmental education, primarily through various regional committees along with the HRPDC board. The HRPDC Water Resources Department includes programs that address coastal resources, drinking water/wastewater, resiliency, stormwater management, and water supply planning. The HRPDC Coastal Resiliency Program works with locality staff through the Coastal Resiliency Committee on policy and technical issues related to sea level rise, flooding, and climate adaptation.

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POTENTIAL FELLOWSHIP PROJECT:
The HRPDC's Coastal Resiliency Program provides technical assistance and advisory services to HRPDC's member localities and the HRPDC board on policy, analysis, and other needs related to sea level rise, recurrent flooding, and climate adaptation. The Fellow will support the Coastal Resiliency Program's work on two efforts, while also supporting and participating in the program's ongoing coordination activities with local and regional partners.

In FY26, the HRPDC intends to begin developing a regional infrastructure coordination and readiness framework. The framework will be the HRPDC's first effort to prioritize flood mitigation projects across the region. This effort will establish eligibility requirements, scoring criteria, and weighting factors to evaluate and prioritize regional investments in resilience infrastructure, complementing existing processes already in place that prioritize regional transportation investments. Work on this framework will involve close coordination with local governments, regional partners, and state and federal agencies. The Fellow will support this initiative through research (e.g., identifying and evaluating other state and local programs for evaluating, prioritizing, funding, and implementing projects), analysis (such as applying proposed factors to proposed local and regional projects), and attending and participating in meetings.

In January 2025, the HRPDC adopted regional resilient guidelines for stormwater management. In FY26, the HRPDC will be considering updates to these guidelines to incorporate new NOAA precipitation atlas products as well as expanding the guidelines to address floodplain management recommendations, such as freeboard requirements or future floodplain mapping. The Fellow will support this initiative through case study analysis and policy development. Examples of potential tasks include evaluating options for how to apply the two new NOAA Atlas 15 products and conducting case studies on local and regional floodplain management policies.

In addition to these efforts, the Fellow will participate in the Water Resources Department's regular regional meetings (Regional Environmental Committee, Coastal Resiliency Committee, HRPDC board meetings) and other activities.