

Our **Future** Depends on the Quality of Our Decision-Making

The challenges government leaders face today—in such areas as health, climate, and security—are unprecedented in their scope, complexity and urgency, but all too often, decision-makers lack access to the accurate, impartial scientific and technical information needed for them to act decisively and wisely. The obstacle: a critical shortage of scientists and engineers with the necessary training to be effective policy advisors.

Although many young scientists and engineers are eager to take a more active role in policymaking, the opportunities to gain the skills and experience to make meaningful contributions are limited during their graduate and postgraduate careers.

The Virginia Academy of Science, Engineering, and Medicine created the Commonwealth of Virginia Engineering and Science (COVES) Fellowship program to help bridge that gap. **By offering to host a fellow, your office can help ensure that Virginia, in the face of the many challenges it confronts, has the capacity to formulate policies that are firmly based in science.**

A Proven Approach

The COVES Fellowship program enables young researchers to spend 12 weeks each summer serving as science and technology advisors in legislative offices and executive agencies as well as with prominent Virginia companies and nonprofits.

In 2020, George Mason University, the University of Virginia, Virginia Commonwealth University, Virginia Tech, and the College of William & Mary supported fellows. In addition, the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative, established by Mark Zuckerberg and his wife, Priscilla Chan, provided funding for a fellowship at one of Virginia's historically black colleges and universities.

The COVES Fellowship is modeled after successful programs at the federal level developed by such organizations as the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine and the American Association for the Advancement of Science. States like California, Missouri, and Idaho have created similar programs.

“Having a fellow at the PhD level brings a whole additional level of knowledge and expertise. That exceeded my expectations.”

—Virginia Secretary of Natural Resources Office



“This experience gave me confidence in my ability to pursue a career outside of the traditional route for a PhD student, academia.”

—Erin Robartes, University of Virginia
Host Office: Office of the Secretary of Natural Resources





“Although undertaking a fellowship of this nature remotely was unexpected and at times challenging, I am grateful for the invaluable experience I gained. The COVES Fellowship gave me a unique opportunity to apply my scientific knowledge in a direct and impactful way.”

—Sandra Yankah

Virginia Commonwealth University
Host Office: Department of Health—
Office of Health Equity

“The opportunity to work with a PhD candidate from a technical field, particularly without having to fund the position, was of great interest and assistance during a critical effort to complete the Master Planning Framework”.

—Virginia Secretary of Natural Resources
Office

Key Components

The COVES Fellowship program was carefully designed to ensure that both fellows and host offices gain maximum benefit from the experience:

- Fellows are current graduate students and postdoctoral researchers from participating universities and are selected based on career interests, desire to learn, and scientific integrity.
- They are matched with host offices based on mutual interests and the offices’ need for assistance researching, drafting, and revising policies.
- The program begins with a science policy bootcamp and orientation, which introduces fellows to the fundamentals of science policy and communication as well governance and policy-making in the Commonwealth of Virginia.
- In addition to their work in policy offices, COVES Fellows are paired with a mentor from the Virginia Academy and will participate in academy briefings, committee meetings, and the annual summit.
- Fellows receive a summer stipend of \$8,500.

Making a Worthwhile Contribution

Virginia’s part-time legislators research and draft new legislation during the summer. As a result, the fellows’ participation with groups helping to shape policy is particularly useful.

The COVES Fellowship program has already had an impact. During its first year, COVES fellows served in the Office of the Secretary of Natural Resources, the Department of Conservation and Recreation, and the Department of Health, the Office of State Senator Ghazal Hasmi, the Virginia Biotechnology Association, and the Public Policy Department of Dominion Energy.

The host offices were so impressed by the caliber of work fellows did that they asked four of the initial six fellows to join them for continuing part-time work, and several have received full-time offers.

To find out more, please contact info@vasem.org.

About VASEM

The Virginia Academy of Science, Engineering and Medicine is source of independent, impartial expertise on the science and technology policy challenges facing Virginia. It is composed of elected members of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, as well as other Virginians who are leaders in these fields. Through its nonpartisan network of experts, the Virginia Academy provides rigorous analytical, technical, and scientific support to inform policy decisions critical to the future of the Commonwealth.

vasem.org/covesfellowship