



Virginia Conservation Assistance Program (VCAP)

A financial assistance program for residential-scale stormwater management

Overview

The Virginia Conservation Assistance Program (VCAP) is a cost-share program for the installation of stormwater management practices. VCAP was started in 2016 as a sister-program to the Virginia Agricultural Cost Share Program (VACS) to treat runoff from residences, businesses, schools, and places of worship.

VCAP addresses three resource concerns: erosion, poor ground cover, and excess runoff. These resource concerns are evidence of a water quality issue. The resource concerns contribute to non-point source pollutant loads to waterways--most critically, nitrogen, phosphorus and sediment.



Basic Practices

- Conservation Landscaping
- Meadows (CL-1)
- Tree Plantings (CL-2)
- Mulched Beds (CL-3)
- Filter Strips (CL-4)
- Riparian Buffers (CL-5)
- Impermeable Surface Removal (ISR)
- Rainwater Harvesting (RWH)



Infiltration Practices

- Rain Gardens (RG)
- Dry Wells (DW)
- Permeable Pavers (PP)
- Vegetated Stormwater Conveyance
 - Dry Swale (VSC-DS), Wet Swale (VSC-WS), Step-Pool Conveyance (VSC-SPC)
- Bioretention (BR)
- Infiltration (IF)



Unique or Constrained Practices

- Living Shorelines
- Green Roof
- Constructed Wetlands

VCAP Practices and Specifications

VCAP has a suite of 12 practices, listed left.

Selecting the appropriate practice for a location depends on the landowner's needs, the resource concern, and characteristics of the site (area available to the practice, contributing drainage area, soil characteristics). Practice specifications are outlined in the VCAP Manual, available on the Association's website.

Cost-share rates are dependent on the practice. Most practices are limited to 80% of eligible costs up to a practice cap. Caps range from \$7,000 for conservation landscaping and up to \$30,000 for highly engineered practices like living shorelines and bioretention basins.

Some practices have a per-unit cost share rate. For example, rainwater harvesting is calculated as a \$4 per gallon treated, up to a 1" storm for the contributing drainage area. All practices are reported to the Department of Environmental Quality for crediting towards the WIP III Goals.

Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation District's Responsibility

The Association of Soil and Water Conservation District's is a non-profit association of the 47 soil and water conservation districts in Virginia. The Association is a voluntary, nongovernmental association that supports districts in their work with natural resource conservation and education.

The Association is the managing entity for VCAP. The Association applies for grants to support VCAP, manages those grants, distributes cost-share and technical assistance funding to districts on a per-contract basis, and provides programmatic support with input from districts. The Association is supported by a Steering Committee and a Technical Advisory Committee.

All reporting for VCAP is managed by the Association. In addition to grant reporting, the Association submits all tracking information on VCAP practices to the Department of Environmental to allow for pollution reduction crediting towards the Chesapeake Bay TMDL and WIP goals.

Steering Committee

The Steering Committee is comprised of one representative from up to six districts, with support from two Association employees (the VCAP Coordinator and Assistant Coordinator). The Steering Committee's purpose is to provide programmatic and technical oversight for VCAP to ensure that the program provides water quality benefits while remaining accessible to participants. The Steering Committee meets monthly to review applications for compliance with practice specifications. Steering Committee meetings are open to the public to attend, and they are typically virtual. Contact the Association for information about these meetings.

Technical Advisory Committee

VCAP has a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) that provides expert input on available best management practices. The TAC is comprised of district staff, directors, partner organizations, and field experts (stormwater engineers, shoreline management experts, and native plant and landscaping designers). The TAC meets on an as-needed basis, at least once a year.

Financial Management

All cost-share funds for VCAP are held by the Association and distributed to districts on an as-needed basis—an important distinction from the VACS cost-share process. Because all cost-share funds are held at the Association level, funding is available to participants on a first-come, first-served basis. Districts do not receive allocations of VCAP cost share, districts are not obligated to spend a certain amount of VCAP cost share, and district technical assistance funding is not tied to VCAP output. Instead, districts receive a flat technical assistance payment per contract paid out, currently \$1200.

VCAP cost share must pass through district accounting. Monthly, the Steering Committee reviews payment requests to confirm project installation meets specifications. After payment requests are approved, the Association disburses funds to the district for cost share and technical assistance payment. The district must pass the cost-share funding to the participant. This system allows VCAP contracts to be under the purview of the Office of the Attorney General, although the grants are originally held by the Association.

Cost-share funding is considered taxable income. Districts must issue a 1099 to VCAP participants each calendar year, to be issued before January 31.

VCAP was originally funded by grants from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and the Department of Environmental Quality. In recent years, most of the cost-share funding has been from Department of Conservation and Recreation grants with operational support from the Department of Environmental Quality.

District Responsibility

Districts are responsible for local implementation of VCAP under the direction of their Board.

It is the responsibility of the district to retain VCAP contracts and associated records. Contracts that are paid out on or after July 1, 2022, without all required signatures will result in the repayment of the VCAP cost share and associated technical assistance to the Association, at the discretion of the Steering Committee. VCAP contracts are reviewed as part of financial audits conducted by the Department of Conservation and Recreation.

It is important to note that the Steering Committee is reviewing applications for compliance with technical specifications. It is not required for district boards to review VCAP applications for technical compliance. However, some districts have developed their own technical review committees comprised of directors and staff. This district-level attention can be

meaningful to support engagement around VCAP, prioritize local goals, and for providing local guidance on practice design and installation. At a minimum, district boards should be aware of the number, practice type, and cost-share requests when signing contracts.

Innovative Strategies Available to Districts

Districts may develop their own secondary criteria to delineate when and how site visits and applications are accepted. Districts can also develop MOUs with neighboring districts and partner organizations to administer VCAP.

Creative funding structures and partnerships are part of how VCAP has continued to grow. Below are three examples of creative partnerships available to districts that can allow VCAP to be provided to residents:

Partnership Strategies to Broaden VCAP Availability

Inter-district Partnership	Non-Profit Partnership	Locality Partnership
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• MOU between two districts• A district can offer to conduct VCAP site visits, develop VCAP applications, retain contracts, and process cost-share payments <i>on behalf of another district</i>.• Provides a community service while allowing districts to best use their own skills and time.• All or part of the technical assistance payment is retained at the district providing the field and application work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• MOU between a district and a non-profit partner• Partner conducts site visits, constructs applications, communicates with applicant.• District processes applications, retains contracts, and disburses cost-share.• Partner receives all or part of associated technical assistance payment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• MOU between a district and a locality• Type 1: provides VCAP to a locality not currently served by a district (e.g., City of Hampton).• Type 2: offer a VCAP-like program using locality funding (e.g., ACAP, Albemarle County's local funding program)<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If using locality funding, often prioritizes specific water quality goals, practices, or socioeconomic groups.• Often uses the VCAP manual as guidance, with local adaptations.

Resources

All documents associated with VCAP are housed on the Association website, accessible at www.vaswcd.org/vcap.

For questions concerning practice specifications, please see the latest edition of the *VCAP Implementation and Design Manual* available at the Association website.