UNH Sustainability Fellows Program:

UNH Sustainability Fellowships pair exceptional students from across the U.S. with municipal, educational, corporate, and non-profit partners in New England to work on transformative sustainability initiatives each summer. Sustainability Fellows undertake challenging projects that are designed to create an immediate impact, offer a quality learning experience, and foster meaningful collaboration. Fellows work on-site with their mentors at partner organizations during the summer, supported by a network of Fellows, partners, alumni, and the UNH Team. Graduate students, exceptional undergraduate students, and recent graduates from any accredited college or university are eligible to apply.

A detailed description of one Fellowship follows. To learn more about the other Fellowships offered this year, and for application instructions, see: www.sustainableunh.unh.edu/sustainability-fellows.

About the Host Organization:

Burlington, Vermont is the state’s largest city with a population of 42,000 and a municipal electric department (the Burlington Electric Department, or “BED”) responsible for serving over 20,000 customers. In 2014, Burlington became the first city in the country to source 100% of its electricity from renewable generation. Building on this achievement, BED recently announced its goal to transition the city to “net zero energy” (NZE) by 2030, essentially transitioning away from fossil fuels in the thermal and transportation sectors.

BED is also an Energy Efficiency Utility (EEU) which means that BED customers pay a small monthly charge to support “Energy Efficiency” programs to help customers reduce their energy loads and save money. Energy efficiency has clearly shown to be Vermont’s least expensive future energy supply resource over time. Burlington will not likely achieve NZE without energy efficiency.

BED also serves a variety of customers. For example, in addition to homeowners, commercial property owners, a major health care facility and university, BED serves a large tenant population, most of whom are responsible for paying their own utility bills.
As such, Burlington wrestles with the challenge of the “split incentive” – i.e. when those responsible for paying energy bills (the tenant) are not the same entity as those making the capital investment decisions (the landlord or building owner). In these circumstances, the landlord may not be inclined to make the necessary upgrades to building services. As such these rental properties are more likely to be poorly insulated, with older inefficient appliances, and higher energy costs. This is particularly challenging for lower income families and results in what is referred to as a high rate of household “energy poverty” or “energy burden.”

That said, it’s important to note that there are certain rental housing situations where the split incentive doesn’t apply, including certain Section 8 housing circumstances where a reduction in energy use may actually cause the average monthly section 8 utility contribution to decrease as well.

About the Fellowship:

While many Burlingtonians have tapped into the resources, technical expertise and support offered by BED to help save electricity and reduce their monthly bills, others – including renters, first Generation customers, and low-income customers – have not been well-positioned to take advantage of these offerings. This is especially the case in the New American community, where the correlation between electricity use at home and how this translates into a monthly electric bill is perhaps a newer concept, and where the implications of “energy poverty” are perhaps most keenly felt. To help ensure that this important message is shared, and to ensure all of BED’s customers are able to take advantage of the range of information and resources the department has to offer, BED is looking to identify a Fellow with deep experience with Burlington’s New American community who can serve as a trusted advisor, information conduit, and energy coach or educator to Burlington’s New American communities. Based on this experience, this Fellow will also provide BED with invaluable insight on how to better design new programs and services to meet the needs of this demographic.

Outcomes:

1. The creation of energy efficiency education materials including information on efficiency in laundry washing, cooking and bathing. This material and information will be designed for and vetted by members of Burlington’s New American community (but be relevant and useful to many BED customers);
2. A report detailing;
   a. how Burlington’s New American population uses energy - electricity in particular - and the correlation between electricity use and monthly billing
   b. how Burlington’s most vulnerable populations experience energy poverty, and recommendations on how to address it.

Impact:

1) This Fellow will learn how to effectively communicate how electricity is used, generated, and billed;
2) This Fellow will learn about BED’s various energy efficiency services and how to communicate the benefit of these services to various customers;
3) This Fellow will learn how to create and disseminate materials that meet the needs of Burlington’s most vulnerable populations;
4) This Fellow will learn how to more successfully communicate between diverse groups of stakeholders, including energy professionals, housing associations and New American renters;
5) This Fellow will learn more about energy poverty and the connection between energy use and home finances;
6) This Project will help BED better understand the reality experienced in several Section 8 Housing scenarios and the degree to which energy reduction may actually result in housing stipend reduction thereby dis-incentivizing a household to reduce energy load;
7) This Project will allow BED to better understand the constraints and challenges faced by our New American customers and be better able to address these through strategic marketing, outreach and educational efforts.
8) Ultimately, a better understanding of the New American community’s relationship with energy will help the City of Burlington reduce overall residential energy usage, moving toward the goal of NZE by 2030.

**Desired Qualifications:**

- College-level experience
- Experience in community development and outreach
- Strong communication and listening skills and the ability to work across several languages and multi-generations
- Interest in energy, sustainability, natural resources, housing, social services and/or related topics
- Demonstrated experience working with and/or living among Burlington’s New American communities
- Ability to work independently, think creatively, and meet pressing demands and deadlines
- English speaking and writing proficiency
- Versed in Graphic Design Software
- **Special Requirement:** Because the success of this project will depend on a deep understanding of the experience of Burlington’s New American community, we are seeking a student with an existing connection to – ideally a member of – Burlington’s New American community

**Work Location:** Burlington Electric Department, 585 Pine Street, Burlington, VT

**Mentors:** Brian Reilly/Energy Services and Jennifer Green and Katie Dorey/Sustainability, BED

**Compensation:** $6500
(taxable and distributed on a two-week payroll cycle over the course of the fellowship)
Expectations:
Fellows are expected to be primarily dedicated to their assigned projects throughout the summer, and also participate in a variety of networking activities, professional development opportunities, and presentations coordinated by UNHSI. Specifically, Fellows are expected to:

- Attend a mandatory orientation at UNH prior to the start of the fellowship term, **May 26-28, 2020.** (Travel scholarships may be available for students traveling from outside New England.)
- Work full-time on-site at the partner organization, **June 1 - August 14, 2020**
- Complete 400 hours of work, including work at host site as well as UNHSI activities, between May 26 – August 14, 2020.
- Complete a fellowship project according to the work plan (with adjustments as necessary).
- Participate in weekly webinars or advisory group meetings.
- Present work at mid-term and final poster sessions at UNH on **July 10** and **August 7.** (Travel support available.)
- Engage in additional professional development, networking, and advisory activities as offered.
- Provide and receive feedback at the end of the fellowship.

Apply by February 10 at [www.sustainableunh.unh.edu/sustainability-fellows](http://www.sustainableunh.unh.edu/sustainability-fellows).

Questions may be addressed to [megan.carney@unh.edu](mailto:megan.carney@unh.edu).