Sustainability Fellowship
The Cost of Climate Change Adaptation in Vermont
SolaVida.org
Burlington VT

About the 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:
SolaVida is a non-profit organization whose mission is to draw new constituencies into the crucial push for a deeper and faster response to the challenges of global warming. Given the scope of this unprecedented challenge to our shared environment, we need far more action by far more people. Among other projects, SolaVida created the Vermont Climate and Health Alliance (VTCHA) and divestor.org. The project described here is related to the work of VTCHA, and will leverage the relationships and partnerships of that project and other work SolaVida is engaged in.

About the Fellowship:
Greenhouse gas emissions have risen by 16% since 1990 in Vermont. Reducing those emissions will require significant public spending, and it is clear that new revenue must come into the state via some form of carbon pricing. However, even very modest carbon pricing proposals have been met with widespread resistance due to an unwillingness to support new taxes.

The reality is that current tax revenue is already being used in a variety of ways to adapt to climate driven problems. The long-range goal of this effort is to demonstrate to voters and lawmakers that they are already paying for so-called “climate adaptation” projects – although they may not be recognized as such. The goal of the Fellowship is to develop a
framework that will be used to bring that point out into the light of day. More specifically, we will look at where climate adaptation spending is happening today – leading to a roadmap that can be used as a starting point for a more comprehensive investigation.

We will also examine 1-2 spending areas in some detail to illustrate the idea. For example, we know that towns and cities across Vermont are raising funds to increase the capacity of water treatment plants to handle more frequent heavy rain events. We will examine how much is being raised across the state, and describe the tax impact of that spending on Vermonters.

**Outcomes:**
The deliverables for this project will be:
(1) “Roadmap” report on existing climate adaptation spending in VT designed to jumpstart a comprehensive follow-on study.
(2) Presentation describing the project and its conclusions to interested partners (e.g., the VT Public Interest Research Group).
(3) Submission of a “Commentary” piece summarizing the project to VTDigger (the leading source for on-line news and reporting in Vermont).

**Impact:**
The Fellow will gain an understanding of how public project investments “tell a story” about state government policy, and how a spending approach may help frame the need for more aggressive climate change and clean energy policies. The Fellow will also experience the challenges and opportunities inherent to communicating the need for radical change to voters and lawmakers, with respect to climate change and the environment. This project offers the Fellow a chance to interact with legislators, subject matter experts, advocacy organizations, and others working on climate change solutions, building a broad network in the field.

Very few Vermont voters have an appreciation for the fact that we are already using tax dollars to pay for climate change adaptation. Some lawmakers understand this conceptually, but are unable to translate the idea into action without the support of data. This challenge is not unique to Vermont. While the data may vary from state to state, the framework we will create here will be applicable across New England and the rest of the country, helping to garner support for direct and deliberate investment in climate adaptation.

Through our existing relationships with many organizations in the academic, legislative, and advocacy communities in Vermont, we are well positioned to use the project results to launch follow-on work that will take the idea to the next level.

**Desired Qualifications:**
- Undergraduate/graduate degree in public policy, economics, environmental/civil engineering, or a related field
- Experience or knowledge of public policy development as it pertains to infrastructure, especially at the state level
Experience or knowledge of climate change and clean energy policy
Passionate about climate change and protecting the environment
Ability to synthesize complex information into coherent, “big picture” strategic thinking
Awareness of (or ability to quickly come up to speed on) how climate change will impact public infrastructure
Excellent writing skills
Ability to work independently and take the initiative
Outgoing and curious, comfortable engaging with subject matter experts

**Work Location:** SolaVida/UVM, Burlington, VT.

**Mentors:** Dan Quinlan, SolaVida Founder

**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).