DISTRICT GUIDE TO VCAP
This guide is meant to be a visual overview of the VCAP process to assist new District staff, Directors, or partners in learning about the program. All technical specifications and policy requirements can be found in the VCAP Manual.

Visit www.vaswcd.org/vcap to learn more.
Nonpoint source pollution is the leading cause of water quality problems. Rainfall or snowmelt pick up and carry away natural and human-made pollutants, depositing them into waterways. Roads, parking lots, sidewalks, homes, offices, etc. replace natural landscapes. Rainfall that once soaked into vegetated ground instead becomes stormwater runoff, and carries pollutants into our watersheds.

VCAP BMPs can help reduce the quantity of stormwater that leaves your property and improve the quality. VCAP offers an opportunity to do your part to improve your watershed.

**WHAT IS VCAP?**
The Virginia Conservation Assistance Program (VCAP) is a stormwater management cost-share program that provides financial incentives and technical and educational assistance to property owners installing Best Management Practices (BMPs) in Virginia's participating Soil & Water Conservation Districts.

If interested, contact your local SWCD to learn which BMPs your property may be eligible to apply for to address natural resource and stormwater concerns on your property.

**WHY DO VIRGINIA’S WATERS NEED IMPROVING?**
Nonpoint source pollution is the leading cause of water quality problems. Rainfall or snowmelt pick up and carry away natural and human-made pollutants, depositing them into waterways.

**HOW VCAP CAN HELP:**
- Restore problem areas on properties*
- Treat stormwater runoff
- Stabilize drainage areas
- Conserve water within a landscape
- Control & minimize erosion
- Promote wildlife habitat
- Re-vegetate bare slopes
- Improve riparian buffer areas

*Eligible property owners include residential homeowners, private properties, HOA, public spaces, places of worship, etc. State or federally funded properties are not eligible. VCAP is intended to treat structures at least 3 years old.

**ELIGIBLE PRACTICES:**
- Conservation Landscaping
- Permeable Pavement
- Impervious Surface Removal
- Rain Garden
- Rainwater Harvesting
- Living Shoreline
- Dry Well
- Bioretention
- Vegetated Stormwater Conveyance
- Green Roof
- Infiltration
- Constructed Wetlands

Most practices are eligible for 75% reimbursement, with set caps.
The VCAP process may look slightly different at every district, but should generally follow these basic steps:

1. **CONNECT**
   - Local SWCD connects with a property owner to discuss interest and program eligibility. Some districts utilize a "site visit request form" to streamline this process.

2. **SITE ASSESSMENT**
   - SWCD staff perform a site visit to determine which practice could be the best fit and if the project meets the minimum ranking score.

3. **DESIGN PLAN**
   - Property owner creates a design plan that includes details on construction, materials, operation and maintenance, and an itemized total cost. The district and applicant should work together to get all required forms completed and complied in a single PDF.

4. **APPLICATION REVIEW**
   - Completed applications will be approved by the local SWCD Board and submitted to the steering committee. Upon approval, installation may begin.

5. **INSTALLATION**
   - After approval from the Steering Committee, project installation may begin. Applicants have until June 1st of the calendar year following approval to complete. It may be helpful to schedule a pre-construction meeting with SWCD staff, property owners, and contractors to discuss design specifications. A certified engineered design may be required.

6. **REIMBURSEMENT**
   - SWCD staff will inspect the project after installation. A payment request will be submitted to the steering committee for approval. A check will be sent to the district for the approved reimbursement amount and TA dollars for the district.
VCAP targets **primarily residential homeowners**, but other properties are eligible to apply as well, including:

- Homeowner Associations
- Schools
- Places of Worship
- Parks or other other locally owned spaces
- Private or commercial spaces
- Non-profits

This includes urban, suburban, or rural land **not directly involved with agriculture production**.

State or federally-owned properties are not eligible.

A BMP may NOT be installed on new or active construction sites. A developed site must be at least three years old to submit an application.

VCAP practices are NOT intended to meet any local, state, or federal regulatory requirements.

All practices must be maintained for **10 years**.

Read section 1.2 Program Scope and Eligibility in the **VCAP Manual** to learn more.
Conservation Landscaping
Rainwater Harvesting
Vegetated Stormwater Conveyance
Green Roof
Living Shoreline
Bioretention
Permeable Pavers
Dry Well
Rain Garden
Infiltration

Most practices are eligible for up to 75% financial reimbursement, with set caps.

*Impervious Surface Removal and Constructed Wetlands also available
An important step in the VCAP process is meeting face-to-face with landowners to get a deeper understanding of the resource concerns on site. The main objective of a site visit is to give technical recommendations to help address landowner concerns. This includes evaluating which (if any) BMP would be most effective in improving the resource concern on site and giving the property owner clear next steps to take to improve their property. **At the end of the day, it is the property owner’s project.**

Just as essential as the technical recommendation, is your communication both during and after the site visit. Refer to this [Site Visit Skills Training](#) to learn about communication skills to utilize during a site visit, how to successfully follow-up afterwards, and more.

**Documentation** is also an important part of a site visit. Taking detailed notes and photographs while on site will help you save time in the future, when preparing an application. The [VCAP Site Assessment Checklist](#) can be used to guide you through what kind of information to collect while out on a site visit.

Some Districts have successfully implemented a **site visit request form** into their VCAP process. This cuts down on time explaining program guidelines and procedures, streamlines collection of information, and allows the District to be more informed of a resource concern before visiting the site. Reach out to maura.christian@vaswcd.org for examples.
Accurately identifying a resource concern while out on a site visit is an essential first step in determining if VCAP could be the right solution. To qualify for VCAP, a site must be experiencing either erosion, poor vegetation cover, or excess runoff. This is to ensure VCAP funds projects with water quality benefits. Consideration should be given to variables such as land usage, drainage paths, shade vs. sun, etc. that could contribute to the resource concern.

Use the *VCAP Resource Concern Guideline Charts* to assist your resource concern identification and corresponding BMP recommendation. The charts outline visual and physical indicators to look out for each resource concern and further breaks down recommendations based on runoff source.

Priority on the ranking sheet is given to the treatment of resources concerns within close proximity to stormwater conveyances such as storm drain, water bodies, or ditches, as well as the treatment of or mitigation of runoff towards a critical slope.

**Resource Concerns**

- **Erosion/Deposition:** The loss of topsoil, rill and gullyng of slopes, and the deposition of sediments
- **Poor Vegetative Cover:** Groundcover with less than 90% cover due to shade, pH, poor drainage, compaction, or fertility
- **Land cover that contributes to Excess Runoff:** Impervious surfaces and compacted or poorly managed lawns causing an increase in volume and rate of runoff.

View this *training video* on Identifying Resource Concerns
Putting Together an Application

- After determining eligibility, identifying a resource concern, and selecting a BMP type, applicants should collect the necessary project proposal materials as outlined in the Application Checklist with guidance from the district. Required VCAP Forms can be found on the VCAP website.
  - The district should ensure projects meet specifications outlined in the VCAP Manual.
  - The ranking score must meet a minimum of 65 points, and should be taken into account when determining project eligibility.
- Completed applications should be submitted to the VCAP Coordinator and Assistant Coordinator in a single PDF document.
  - W9 Tax forms should be collected from applicants and held at the district. They do not need to be included in the submitted application.
- **Local district board approval** is necessary for each application. An application commits the district to a 10 year maintenance commitment, pending project approval and completion.
  - The Steering Committee provides a technical review of all applications; it is not necessary for local boards to perform technical reviews.
- Once approval is given by the Steering Committee, installation may begin.
- Be sure the applicant and/or contractor plan to take photos during the installation process.

**Example Applications:**
- Conservation Landscaping #1, #2
- Rain Garden #1, #2, #3
- Dry Well
- Living Shoreline
- Permeable Pavement #1, #2

Districts may choose to develop specific criteria for their District, delineating how and when applications will be accepted.
The VCAP Ranking Spreadsheet, or Form 6, is required to be submitted as a part of the VCAP Application package. The ranking score plays an important role in determining the order in which funds are able to be allocated for.

The Ranking Spreadsheet can be downloaded on the VCAP website.

Watch this short video that explains how to fill out the VCAP Ranking Spreadsheet.

District staff should fill out the ranking sheet. Please only enter a "1" for Yes, or "0" for No in the yellow, input column. The project size and/or treatment area should be inputted in the "Treatment" and "Installed Area" row. The spreadsheet will compute the ranking score automatically at the bottom if filled out correctly, and it will take into account variables such as cost effectiveness, pollutant reduction efficiency, and ability of the BMP to address the resource concern.

It is recommended to fill out the Ranking Spreadsheet early on in the process to see if a potential project meets the minimum ranking score of 65. Low rank could inform design changes if applicant is motivated to alter their proposal. Applications with a ranking score below 65 will not be accepted for review. Districts may implement policy (similar to secondary considerations for VACS program) to only submit for review applications that have a minimum score higher than the 65 minimum set by VCAP.

More details can be found on the Ranking Sheet Instruction Guide, or on the actual ranking spreadsheet, by hovering over the red triangles in the first Ranking Criteria column.
After the completed BMP has been inspected by the District and certification of practice installation is made, a payment request should be submitted to the VCAP Coordinator and Assistant Coordinator in a single PDF document. Required documents to be included are listed on the VCAP Payment Request Checklist.

Please note any changes in design since the approved application in the payment request package if necessary. As a reminder, cost share is never guaranteed if the project is not installed as approved. Additional cost-share may be requested by submitting the Form 7, Cost-Share Adjustment Request. Final decision on the approval of additional cost-share is made by the steering committee.

Photos taken throughout the installation process are extremely helpful for both the district and steering committee in determining BMP viability. Please ensure applicants plan to have photographs taken during installation.

Each district is responsible for making cost-share payments to landowners upon completion and approved installation of all BMPs. These expenditures will be repaid to the district by VASWCD via VCAP grant funds. Each district will also receive a one-time Technical Assistance payment of $500.00 per practice. See section 1.4 District Responsibilities in the VCAP Manual for more information on VCAP funds.

As a reminder, districts should not pay participants before final payment request approval from the Steering Committee. All received funds are considered local funds and should be treated as taxable income. All policies that landowner's will be liable for are laid out in the Form 3, Landowner Agreement, which should be included in the payment request package.

The Request for Payment Form, one of the required forms to be submitted with the Payment Request package.
Participants are required to maintain VCAP BMPs for **10 years**, with the lifespan start-date beginning on January 1st of the calendar year following payment request approval. Property owner's must complete a [Landowner Agreement, or Form 3](#) that outlines the basic maintenance agreement and liabilities VCAP participants agree to.

**Site-specific operation and maintenance plans should be developed and included in the application package.** This should include routine maintenance such as removal of debris, weeds, etc. Non-routine maintenance should also be planned for, such as broken structural components or other major repairs that may be necessary. Refer to the Operation and Maintenance section of each BMP type in the Manual, or the [Virginia Stormwater BMP Clearinghouse](#) for more specifications.

In order to ensure BMPs are maintained and viable through the lifespan requirement, Districts are required to perform periodic **Spot Checks**:

- A random twenty five percent (25%) of all active contracts should be spot-checked annually using the provided [Spot Check Forms](#).

- It is important for the district to maintain proper documentation of the project from the initial site visit, inspection of the completed BMP, and spot checks. The District should keep all photographs and inspection forms on file AND submit all completed Spot Check Forms to the VCAP Coordinator & Assistant Coordinator.

If a BMP is found to not meet the required specifications or is destroyed, notification of **corrective action** from the District will be necessary. More details on corrective action, repayment, and hardship exemptions can be found in [Section 1.8 of the VCAP Manual](#).

Refer to the recording of [this VCAP Training](#) to learn maintenance specification for each BMP type.