

# The Pathways Program

## Student Internship Opportunities with the Soil and Plant Science Division

The Pathways Program offers students from high school through post-graduate school a clear path to job opportunities within the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). The program is one of the many ways NRCS fulfills its mission of Helping People Help the Land.

### The Internship Program

The Pathways Internship Program offers students paid opportunities to work at an NRCS office and explore a federal career in natural resources while completing their education. Students in high school, college, trade school, or other qualifying educational institutions may be eligible for the program. Ideal candidates for the program are students enrolled in college as a first- or second-year student, allowing 2–3 years in school to complete the required 640 hours of work. Internships can be either part- or full-time, and jobs will be related to the individual's academic career goals and field of study. Interns who successfully complete the program may be eligible for conversion to a permanent job with the NRCS.

### When and How to Apply

Students can get job announcements sent directly to them by setting up a profile on the USAjobs.gov website. Next, they can search jobs by typing in the keyword "Pathways" and the preferred locations. To filter the search for USDA NRCS jobs, choose Department of Agriculture from the Department filter, and Natural Resources Conservation Service from the Agency choices. Finally, save the search. Students can select preferences for job notifications through the Saved Searches option.



### Student Successes

Sarah Smith was a Pathways student in a soil scientist position every summer from 2012 through 2016. In November 2016, she was converted to a full-time soil scientist.

"As a Pathways student, I learned how skills I was developing in college and through soil judging could be used as a career. There were also a lot of opportunities to see the background work that goes into providing the public with valuable soils data, and whether it was something I could see myself doing full-time after I graduated," Sarah said. "The time spent in the Pathways Program gave me enough experience with the agency that I have been able to further my career faster than I might have without it. I have been able to go on two initial mapping details and have been promoted to a Soil Survey Office Leader position earlier than I would have predicted when I was first converted."



NRCS' Soil and Plant Science Division hires Pathways Internship positions for careers in the natural resources field. Examples of typical positions NRCS hires for are

- ♦ Soil Scientists
- ♦ Ecological Site Specialists
- ♦ Rangeland Management Specialists
- ♦ Forestry

## USAJOBS

**TIP:** Many times, positions on USAJobs are open for only 5 business days. Having a profile set up and ready, including a resume, transcripts, and other material, while also receiving job notifications through email, is crucial in finding Pathways announcements when they open and applying for them in a timely manner. When actively looking for a job, students should set their alerts to receive items "daily" versus "weekly" or "monthly," so they don't miss anything!



Scan the QR code above to watch our recruitment video!

Soil and Plant Science Division | March 2024  
*Helping People Help the Land*

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## Student Benefits

The Pathways Internship Program has many benefits for students, including:

1. Real-world experience working in multiple NRCS offices and counties.
2. Experiences working in the field with customers on unique landscapes.
3. Diverse experience to add to their resume.
4. Learning from NRCS mentors.
5. Pay and stipend toward housing provided.
6. Relationship building and network building.
7. Natural resources, hands-on skill building.
8. A truly unique, fun experience.
9. The potential for a full-time job after completion and MUCH MORE!

## Completion and Conversion

Interns may be converted to a permanent NRCS position within 120 days of successfully completing the program. To be eligible for conversion, interns must:

1. Complete at least 640 hours of work experience acquired through the Internship Program.
2. Complete their degree or certificate requirements.

3. Meet qualification standards for the position to which the intern will be converted.
4. Meet agency-specific requirements as specified in the intern's unique NRCS Participant's Agreement.
5. Perform the job successfully.

## More Information

The Pathways Program offers federal internship and employment opportunities for current students, recent graduates, and those with an advanced degree. There are three different paths available: 1) the Internship Program, 2) the Recent Graduates Program, and 3) the Presidential Management Fellows Program. For more information, visit [www.usajobs.gov/studentsandgrads](http://www.usajobs.gov/studentsandgrads).

## Student Successes

Zachary Warning was a Pathways Student in Soil Science in the Belmont, New York, Soil Survey Office from July 2019 through July 2020, during his senior year while attending the State University of New York-College of Environmental Science and Forestry.

"As a Pathways intern, I learned that in order to map soils, I needed a much more involved presence in the landscape; to dig holes, draw lines, get my hands dirty, and really challenge myself to read the landscape," said Zachary.

"At the end of the summer, to test my knowledge, I drove out with my supervisor to a piece of public land and told him what units I would assign where and how I would sketch their boundaries. It was an overwhelming success, with just a few minor differences between my sketched map and the published survey. Despite the initial mapping of our area being all but completed, the simple practice of walking through the forest, feeling the change in relief, noting the movement of water, observing the communities of plants, and taking the time to observe a clear face in a self-dug pit held within its seemingly old-fashioned tradition was the key to the essential ways of thinking required to be a skilled soil scientist. The Pathways experience was an exercise in reshaping my mind. To open the third eye on the bottom of my foot—the one that notices the subtlety of soils that makes them such a mystery to so many of us and such an exciting and dynamic career to pursue."

Zachary was converted to a full-time major land resource area soil scientist in Belmont, New York, in the same office where he interned.



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