

A Bonnie Addition to Upcoming FFA Program

November 07, 2022

Get acquainted with Bonnie Waninger, who joined VLCT in late October 2022 to fill the new role of Federal Funding Assistance Coordinator.

What will you be working on at VLCT? What most excites you about working in this position?

As Coordinator for VLCT's Federal Funding Assistance Program, I'll help municipalities sift through the 367 programs funded through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA). Municipalities can call me when they need to build a funding package for a project, want coaching for grant writing or management, need to navigate through state and federal regulations or requirements, or need tools and training that will increase their ability to access grants.

I love the creativity of piecing together complex puzzles. For projects, puzzle pieces can fit together in multiple ways depending on the municipality's goal, skills of staff and volunteers, partnerships available, the requirements of funders, etc. Another way to think of a potential project is as a flexible dough waiting to be shaped and baked into a design that meets the municipality's needs.

What interested you in working for VLCT? Do you have any background in municipal government?

Working at VLCT allows me to continue helping local governments to achieve their goals. My first Vermont job was Recreation Director for the Town of Jericho. I have worked for regional planning commissions for 25 years, helping municipalities achieve their goals and adapt to

changing state and federal direction. During that time, I've watched municipalities struggle with staff and volunteer capacity, a challenge that has been exacerbated by the pandemic.

VLCT interested me because its organizational culture really focuses on serving its municipal members. It used the pandemic to consider changes that would benefit its members.

Accessing state and federal grants was a high priority for members.

Tell us a little bit about yourself: your interests, a fun fact about you, etc.

I live in Richmond with my husband, daughter, and an excitable rescue schnoodle who likes conversing with the coyotes each evening. We have an oversized and continually expanding garden, and every summer and fall we preserve much of our own food. This year, I canned homemade soups for the first time. We use them as "fast food" for the first night when we travel and camp.

I love trying to be creative. I sew the costumes my daughter dreams up two weeks before Halloween each year. Luckily, they've all been versions of cats and canines! I spend a month every fall and spring designing and making cookies or cupcakes that match the storyline of a local dance studio's performance theme.

I was a Peace Corps volunteer in the Dominican Republic in the early 1990s.

What do you want members to know about your work? Are there any common misconceptions or misunderstandings about what you do?

VLCT's Federal Funding Assistance Program builds on its successful ARPA and government finance assistance to municipalities. Municipalities can call or email me when they have questions about federal funding access and management.

If you had an unlimited budget, what would you most want to focus on in your work?

I'd love to help municipalities work together more via sharing resources and cooperative efforts.

How are you committed to justice, diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging in your work?

I'm committed to helping municipalities take one action step when inclusion seems too big and complex. One step might be determining what "disadvantaged" means for the community, augmenting the municipality's public engagement strategies, or considering where the municipality's public investments have been made in the past five years.