

VIMS SUMMER CAMP 2026

Frequently Asked Questions

The following is a list of Frequently Asked Questions about the VIMS 2026 Summer camp programs.

- How much do the summer camps cost?**

All of the summer camps are free.

- Why is there a lottery system as opposed to signing up first come, first serve?**

The lottery system was implemented in 2010 to make the application process fairer for all students, schools, and families. Everyone has equal time to find out about the camps and get their applications turned in by the March 15th deadline.

- What are the times of the camps?**

All camps will run from 9am-4pm Monday through Friday. Parents can drop off starting at 8:45am, but no earlier. We ask that parents are on time for afternoon pick up. Estuary Explorers is a residential camp which will take place from Sunday afternoon through Friday morning, and students will spend the entire week at the VIMS Eastern Shore Lab.

- Where do the camps take place?**

Coastal Counselors, Bay Buddies, and Chesapeake Champions are held at the Virginia Institute of Marine Science in Gloucester Point, VA. Estuary Explorers is held on the Eastern Shore of Virginia at the VIMS campus in Wachapreague, VA.

- Can I sign up my student for the same camp, two years in a row?**

No.

- What does it mean by low-income family? Why are you asking for that information?**

In an effort to include students from a variety of backgrounds and experiences in the VIMS summer camp programs, we have reserved some camp slots for students from low-income families. If you have questions about whether you qualify, feel free to email Sarah Nuss at mcguire@vims.edu.

- Which camps are day camps and which are overnight?**

Coastal Counselors, Bay Buddies, and Chesapeake Champions are day camps and Estuary Explorers is a residential camp.

- **I have multiple students in the same age group. Is it possible to sign up all of my students for the same camp?**

You may apply for as many students as you would like for a camp. However, each individual student must be selected by either the lottery system (for grades 3-4) or application process (for grades 5-12) in order to be able to attend the camp. That is, if one of your students is selected for a spot in the camp, it does NOT guarantee that their sibling/friend also has a spot.
- **My high school student is graduating this year, but is still interested in applying for a Coastal Counselor position. Are they eligible?**

Yes. Students may apply to be a Coastal Counselor if they are entering high school next year through those that have just graduated in 2026.
- **I have students in different age groups. Can my 7th grader attend the 4th grade camp so that they can attend camp in the same week?**

No. All students must apply for the camp designated for their own age group.
- **Why did you get rid of the Sea Squirts camp?**

Due to changes in funding availability, and requests of the donors, we have moved our focus to older students this year. We apologize for any disappointment this causes, but we hope you will check back next year and apply as your students gets older.
- **When I turn in my application, does that guarantee my student a spot in the camp?**

No. Turning in an application does NOT guarantee your student a spot in the camp. For the Bay Buddies camp, the application enters your student into a lottery for camp spots. For the Coastal Counselors, Chesapeake Champions, and Estuary Explorers camps, the essay will be used by a review panel to select students for the camp. By March 27th you will receive an email notifying you if your student was selected (either through the lottery system or application process) for a spot in the camp. Coastal Counselors will be notified by March 27th if they are selected for an interview.
- **When will I know if my student is selected for camp?**

All students will be notified by March 27th if they were selected for camp.
- **Is the statement of interest required?**

Yes. For Coastal Counselors, Chesapeake Champions and Estuary Explorers there are Statement of Interest essay questions that must also be answered and attached to the application form. The responses to the questions must EACH be 100 words for Chesapeake Champions, and 200 EACH for Estuary Explorers and the Coastal Counselors. This is the primary way that we select students for these camps so please encourage your student to spend some time working on their essays.

If an accommodation is needed for the written portion, please email Matthew Thayer at mlthayer@vims.edu

- **How are Coastal Counselors selected for camp positions?**

High school students must apply and be selected for the Coastal Counselor positions. To be selected, students must first complete an application by the camp deadline (March 15th), including responses to the essay questions. From the applications, a review panel will select applicants to move onto the next round which are interviews. Applicants that are selected for interviews can do so in person or via Zoom. Interviews are approximately 10 minutes, and allow the VIMS educators to meet the student in person. Students will be notified by March 27th if they were selected for an interview.

- **Who is leading the camps? Have all staff completed a background check?**

All education staff (and interns) working with the students during day camps have completed a background check. There are three full-time staff that will be in attendance during the camps, Sarah Nuss, Matthew Thayer and Ellanah Daniel. All are seasoned full-time educators at the Virginia Institute of Marine Science. Sarah has been leading camps at VIMS for the past 20 years, Matthew has been leading field education programs at VIMS for 9 years and Ellanah Daniel has been leading field education programs at VIMS for 1 year. We will also take on an education intern, typically a college student who is interested in marine science education. They receive training and guidance from the full-time staff prior to camp beginning and also are required to do a background check prior to camp starting.

Lastly, Coastal Counselors (high school students) will volunteer during the camps.

- **We do not live in the Gloucester area. Are we still eligible to apply for camp?**

Yes. While we do accept a certain percentage of campers from the Gloucester/Mathews region, we also accept applications from students out of the area, and even out of state. We accept a certain percentage of local students because our funding comes from private donors that wish to give back to the local community.

- **For Estuary Explorers, do you provide transportation to the Eastern Shore?**

No. The parent/guardian will be responsible for dropping off the student on the first day of camp (Sunday, August 2nd) and picking them up on the last day of camp (Friday, August 7th) at the VIMS Eastern Shore campus in Wachapreague, VA. Camp drop off will be in late afternoon (exact time TBD) and camp pick up will be Friday mid-morning (exact time TBD). This allows our staff time to clean the dorms before we have to be checked out.

We will provide transportation while on the Eastern Shore, as we travel to various field sites.

- **Is housing/lodging provided for the Coastal Counselor positions?**

No. We are unable to provide housing for Junior Counselors both during their Coastal Counselors two-day training and the week that they volunteer with one of the other camps.