

Graduate Internship Opportunity

SUMMER 2026

Project Title

Plastic Reduction Campaign Research and Applied Analysis in Greater Victoria

Organization

Surfrider Foundation Canada

About the Opportunity – Sustainability Scholars Program Info

These 250-hour internships are offered in partnership with community organizations and provide UVic graduate students from any discipline with opportunities to gain applied sustainability research experience. Scholars work under the guidance of a partner mentor and contribute to projects with real community impact.

The 2026 pay rate is approximately \$34.72/hour. To apply, visit the [Sustainability Scholars Program website](#) and review the application guide to confirm eligibility and required materials. Applications close at 11:59 pm PT on Sunday, February 1, 2026. Questions? Contact Laurel Currie: sustainability-scholars@uvic.ca.

Project Background

Plastic pollution remains one of the most persistent and preventable environmental challenges in Greater Victoria. Each year, thousands of kilograms of plastic waste, from single-use items at community events to plastic water bottle usage to microplastics released through outdoor dry cutting of PVC piping, enter local storm drains, creeks, and ultimately the Salish Sea. These plastics break down into smaller fragments that contaminate marine ecosystems, threaten wildlife, degrade culturally significant shorelines, and require substantial public resources to manage. Despite growing awareness, the region still lacks consistent standards, best practices, and policy supports to prevent these materials from entering the environment in the first place.

Surfrider Foundation Canada, a leading grassroots marine conservation organization, has identified event plastic waste, plastic water bottles and PVC microplastics as emerging priority issues in Greater Victoria. The local chapter and head office volunteers in the region have documented recurring debris from marathons and festivals, plastic water bottles at beach cleanups along with rising concerns about construction-related plastic pollution caused by dry cutting PVC in residential neighbourhoods. These issues directly affect Surfrider's mission to protect and enjoy the world's oceans, waves, and beaches, and they represent tangible opportunities for upstream, community-driven solutions.

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This project aligns with broader sustainability strategies at the municipal, regional, and national levels, including the City of Victoria's Zero Waste Strategy, the CRD's Integrated Solid Waste and Resource Management Plan, and Canada's commitments under the Ocean Plastics Charter. By generating research, recommendations, and practical tools, the project will fill critical knowledge gaps and support policy innovation, pollution prevention, and community stewardship. Collectively, this work strengthens regional climate resilience, advances circular economy goals, and builds pathways for scalable plastic reduction efforts across British Columbia.

Through this internship, the Sustainability Scholar will contribute applied research, policy analysis, and evidence-based recommendations to support Surfrider's plastic reduction campaigns and municipal advocacy efforts in Greater Victoria.

Project Description

The purpose of this project is to reduce plastic pollution in Greater Victoria by addressing three major sources of preventable waste: plastic generated by community events, microplastics created through outdoor dry cutting of PVC piping, and single-use plastic water bottles. Working alongside Surfrider Foundation Canada, the Scholar will help develop upstream solutions that prevent these materials from entering local waterways and the Salish Sea. The project's core objectives are to:

1. **Assess** the scale and impacts of plastic pollution from events, PVC cutting, and plastic water bottle use in Greater Victoria (and potentially other sources of plastic pollution that can be addressed through local government interventions).
2. **Identify** gaps in existing policies, industry practices, and municipal standards, and associated solutions to address these gaps.
3. **Engage** event organizers, contractors, businesses, and residents to understand barriers and opportunities for change and weave this into research and applied analysis.
4. **Develop** actionable tools, such as best-practice guidelines, policy recommendations, and public education materials, to support immediate implementation of more sustainable practices.
5. **Support** research-informed campaign activities aimed at advancing plastic reduction bylaws with the CRD and local governments within Greater Victoria.

Intended outcomes include a research report informing municipal decision-making, practical toolkits for industry and community partners, strengthened collaboration with local governments and stakeholders, and increased public awareness around pollution prevention. Collectively, this work will advance long-term plastic reduction efforts and support healthier marine and urban ecosystems across Greater Victoria.

Project Scope

The Scholar's work will focus on assessing and reducing three interconnected sources of plastic pollution in Greater Victoria: event-related waste, PVC microplastics from outdoor cutting, and single-use plastic water bottles. The project integrates research, mapping, policy

analysis, community engagement, and applied analysis that informs Surfrider's ongoing campaign activities.

Main Activities

- **Literature & policy review:** Examine municipal bylaws, construction standards, event permitting requirements, and regional zero-waste strategies to identify gaps and opportunities.
- **Field assessments:** Document waste streams at community events, and observe or map sites where PVC cutting may release microplastics into storm drains and waterways.
- **Stakeholder engagement:** Interview or survey event organizers, contractors, businesses, municipal staff, and residents to understand current practices and barriers to change.
- **Campaign applied analysis:** Support Surfrider activists by documenting, analyzing, and synthesizing insights from on-the-ground campaign activities, including public outreach, citizen-science data collection, tabling at events, and advocacy meetings. Findings will feed back into the Scholar's research, analysis, and final recommendations.
- **Co-development of solutions:** Help produce best-practice guidelines, policy recommendations, and community education tools tailored to local users.
- **Reporting & knowledge mobilization:** Prepare a final report outlining findings, recommendations, and toolkits for municipalities, industry partners, and the public.

Guiding Research Questions

- What policies, standards, and practices exist to address plastic litter from events, PVC dust from outdoor dry cutting, and plastic water bottles, and where are the gaps?
- What feasible, community-supported solutions can reduce these pollution streams, including local government policy solutions?
- How can municipalities, contractors, and event organizers implement upstream prevention strategies? This scope ensures the Scholar contributes both research depth and meaningful on-the-ground action.

Deliverables

The primary deliverable (due August 15, 2026) for this project will be a comprehensive final report, prepared by the Scholar under the guidance of Surfrider staff, that synthesizes the Scholar's objectives, findings, analysis, and recommendations. The report will include:

- **An assessment of plastic pollution sources** related to community events, outdoor dry cutting of PVC, and single-use plastic water bottles in Greater Victoria.
- **A review of existing policies and practices**, identifying gaps, risks, and opportunities for upstream intervention.
- **Stakeholder insights** gathered through interviews, surveys, and field observations.
- **Actionable recommendations** for municipalities, industry partners, and event organizers.
- **A set of draft toolkits and educational materials** that Surfrider can implement immediately, for example, event waste-reduction guidelines, contractor best practices for PVC handling, and public outreach content.

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- **A summary of campaign activities**, documenting community engagement, public education, and support provided to Surfrider on plastic campaigns. Where appropriate, the final report and supporting materials will be archived in the UVic Library for broader public access and future research use.

Time Commitment + Timeline

This project will be completed between May 1 and August 15, 2026, requiring approximately 250 hours of work. The Scholar's activities will be organized around key phases to ensure steady progress and timely completion of deliverables.

May 1 – May 31

- Project orientation with Surfrider staff and volunteers
- Initial literature, policy, and background research
- Development of research tools
- Early field observations and preliminary stakeholder outreach

June 1 – July 15

- Active data collection, including event waste assessments, PVC cutting observations, and community engagement
- Stakeholder interviews and surveys
- Analysis of findings and identification of policy/practice gaps
- Observation of and research support for on-the-ground campaign activities during peak community event season

July 16 – August 10

- Synthesis of research findings
- Development of recommendations, best-practice toolkits, and campaign materials
- Drafting of the final report

August 11 – August 15

- Final revisions and submission of deliverables
- Knowledge-sharing with Surfrider staff and volunteers
- Optional participation in a public presentation coordinated with UVic

This schedule ensures meaningful engagement throughout the summer while providing flexibility for event-based and field-based work.

Required / Preferred Skills and Experience

- Excellent research and writing skills
- Demonstrated interest in sustainability
- Experience conducting stakeholder engagement events, including facilitation skills, is an asset
- Excellent public speaking and presentation skills
- Community engagement experience
- Ability to work independently
- Deadline oriented
- Project management and organizational skills
- Demonstrated interest or experience in policy, advocacy, and/or community-based campaigning

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- Criminal Record Check [note that the project partner is responsible for reimbursing the successful candidate's reasonable expenses to get a criminal record check done]

Additional Information

The most suitable candidate is someone who can be a self-starter; they can take direction and run with it. We do not have the capacity to provide heavy supervision, so candidates that have strong project management and time management skills is necessary. Ideally, candidates will also have experience with policy, civic engagement, advocacy, and/or campaigning. If they have experience with plastic reduction work, that's a massive bonus! All travel will be in Victoria.