



Science to Achieve Results (STAR) Graduate Fellowship Program Frequently Asked Questions

What is the difference between the STAR Graduate Fellowship and Greater Research Opportunities Undergraduate Fellowship grants?

The STAR fellowship program is open for applications from any U.S. citizen or permanent resident alien who is currently attending or plans to attend graduate school at an accredited U.S. college or university, or in a U.S. territory. The applicant's research must be in an environmentally-related field.

There are additional restrictions for GRO fellowship applicants. Only U.S. citizens or permanent resident aliens who attend or plan to attend an accredited U.S. college or university that receives less than \$35 million in federal research and development funds may apply for this fellowship. For the purposes of this solicitation, EPA considers such institutions to be those listed in the National Science Foundation's publication, Federal Science and Engineering Support to Universities, Colleges and Nonprofit Institutions (<http://www.nsf.gov/statistics/publication-series.cfm?seriesId=21>). These universities and colleges include, but are not limited to, most Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), Native American Tribal Colleges (TCs), Native Hawaiian Serving Institutions (NHSIs), and Alaska Native Serving Institutions (ANSIs). Note that not all such institutions are eligible since some receive more than \$35 million in research and development funds. The applicant's research must be in an environmentally related field.

I have a student visa (e.g. F1, F2, etc.). Can I still apply?

No. Holders of student visas are temporary residents only and not eligible to apply for STAR or GRO fellowships. Before a fellowship is awarded, the residency status of all aliens will be confirmed with the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service.

I am a U.S. citizen enrolled in a graduate program in another country. Am I eligible to apply?

No. You must attend a graduate program in a college or university within the United States or its possessions.

I have applied for a green card but I don't have it yet. Can I still apply?

No. You must have your green card when you submit your application. Before a fellowship is awarded, the residency status of all aliens will be confirmed with the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service.

I will be a part-time student. Am I eligible for either a STAR or GRO Fellowship?

No. Full-time status is required during the period of receiving funding under the EPA fellowship programs.

Is there a specific GPA I need in order to apply?

No. Note, however, that these fellowships are highly competitive. Applicants with average or below average GPAs may be competitive, but only when they excel in other aspects of their academic career.

Should I already be enrolled in a graduate program when I apply?

No. However, proof of acceptance in an accredited college or university must be provided if you become a finalist.

I will be starting the last year of my graduate program. Am I eligible to apply for a fellowship?

No. Since the review, selection, and award processes take approximately nine months, you should not apply if at the time of application you have less than two years to complete your current degree requirements. These fellowships are not intended to support postdoctoral work and cannot be transferred to other programs or institutions.

I am completing my last year of a master's program, intend to get a Ph.D., and would like to apply for a fellowship. Is that allowed?

If you are reasonably certain that you will be accepted into a Ph.D. program, you can apply as a Doctoral Student. Verification of your acceptance will be required prior to the award of a fellowship.

I am starting a master's degree program and I intend to pursue my Ph.D. Can I apply as a Ph.D. student?

If at the time of application you are officially enrolled in a dual degree program where a Ph.D. is the final degree, you can apply as an entering doctoral student. If you are not officially enrolled in such a program, you should apply as a master's student. You can apply again in subsequent years once you have finalized your educational pursuits. See the Education Levels section of the full announcement for more details.

Do I have to do my research in the United States?

No. However, EPA only provides \$5,000 per year for expenses that could be used for travel expenses in lieu of other education-related expenses (e.g., health insurance, books, supplies or travel to scientific meetings). Also, research conducted outside the U.S. is subject to review and approval by EPA.

I'm not sure which funding opportunity number to use. Can someone at EPA tell me?

No. The multiple funding opportunity numbers in the announcement reflect the breadth of environmental research the EPA can support. In some cases a student's research may straddle two or more categories. You should consider the outputs and outcomes you will be reporting on in your research and consult with your advisor or a mentor and select the most appropriate category. Do not submit the same application under multiple funding opportunity numbers. Outside experts will be reviewing the applications based on their understanding of the broad issues in a field rather than particular specialties. For examples of previously funded research, see Research Grants. Click search on the sidebar and look at the preset topics.

There is no funding opportunity number for my particular study area on the EPA-provided list. What should I do?

Pick the funding opportunity number that best applies to your field of study. However, remember that you can only choose one Funding Opportunity Number.

Once I submit a pre-application with a selected field of specialization (funding opportunity number) and then I am awarded a fellowship, can I switch to another field?

No. The field of specialization is used to assist in the review process and does not otherwise affect the chance for funding.

Who should write my three letters of recommendation?

Your advisor should provide one of the three required letters. The other two letters should be written by professors, instructors, researchers, current or previous employers or others who are familiar with your academic abilities and goals. If you do not yet have an advisor, you should acquire references from three professors, instructors, researchers, current or previous employers or others who are familiar with your academic abilities and goals. See the RFA for additional information.

One of my professors would like to e-mail her letter of recommendation. Is that O.K.?

Yes. Letters of recommendation may be submitted electronically. See the RFA for additional information.

Would it help my case if I were to submit more than three letters of recommendation, or other information that wasn't requested?

No. Only three letters will be considered. Please do not send any information that has not been requested as it will not be considered.

Will I need to submit a transcript?

At the pre-application stage, we request that you submit only a list of all your college courses. All college coursework is essential for the review. If you are selected as a finalist, you will need to provide sealed official transcripts from all schools you have attended for validation purposes.

How will my application be reviewed?

The pre-applications and letters of recommendation will be reviewed by non-EPA experts from the appropriate field of study. Reviewers are recruited based on specialty fields represented by the pre-applications. Pre-applications that receive scores of excellent from the peer reviewers (excellent or very good for GRO applicants) are subject to a programmatic review by EPA scientists. Finalists will be selected based on the availability of funds, reviewers' evaluations and EPA goals, such as distribution of awards across disciplines, institutions and geography, degree level being sought, and other possible indicators of program balance. Final funding decisions are made by the Director of the National Center for Environmental Research.

When, where and how do I submit my pre-application?

You may submit either a paper pre-application or an electronic pre-application but not both for this announcement. The necessary forms for submitting a paper pre-application will be found on the Research Grants website. To apply electronically, you must follow the instructions printed in the RFA (see section IV).

What notification will I receive about the status of my application?

If you comply with the requirement to include an email address in your pre-application, you will receive an email within 30 days of the deadline date. See the RFA for further information.

I have another source of income (e.g.; another fellowship, RA, TA, part-time employment). Must I give it up if I am offered an EPA fellowship?

Possibly not. You may not receive any other federal assistance -- scholarships, grants, fellowships, or traineeships -- at the same time as the EPA fellowship. However, if the funding source of your income is not federal, you can possibly have both. Additional employment cannot interfere with your studies. You must be a full time student in order to receive our fellowships.

If I receive a fellowship, how will my funds be distributed?

Your tuition and academic fees will be paid directly to the university. You will receive a monthly stipend check paid directly to you. You will receive additional funds for your educational expenses as a lump sum at the beginning of the academic year. This educational expense account will be managed by your institution.

Will I be required to work at EPA once the fellowship ends?

No. There is no internship or postdoctoral requirement or option.

I'm having problems with some of the forms. Can someone help me?

Please read the solicitation again. If you still have problems, send a web-based inquiry as instructed in the RFA. You will receive a response within one business day. Calls to the contact person, Brandon Jones, are typically responded to in two business days.