



2026 Sea Grant Knauss Marine Policy Fellowship Student Guide

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This is only a GUIDE designed to support applicants. All applicants must follow the requirements listed in the Federal Funding Notice. If you have specific questions, reach out to oar.sg.fellows@noaa.gov.

1. How To Use This Guide

This is only a GUIDE designed to support applicants. All applicants must follow the requirements listed in the [Federal Funding Notice](#). If you have specific questions, reach out to oar.sg.fellows@noaa.gov.

This guide is meant to be a resource, in addition to the Federal Funding Notice, for students interested in the 2026 Sea Grant Knauss Fellowship program. There are aspects of this guide that outline REQUIRED elements for the student for the successful submission of a Knauss application, while other sections are focused on tips and best practices. The document breaks down each section of the application process and provides answers to frequently asked questions, a breakdown of what is expected in each section, and how the section will be reviewed including a few tips. Students should review these materials as well as reach out to the state Sea Grant program through which they are applying to learn more about the process.

Each section contains the following elements, as appropriate:

- **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs):** Questions and Answers of questions that the NSGO receives from prospective students.
- **Notes:** Information and specific details about the section of the application. These notes should be followed strictly.
- **Tips:** Recommendations for strengthening the section of the application.
- **Questions/Instructions:** The specific questions the student should address in the section of the application materials.
- **Score Scale:** The scoring breakdown for that specific section.
- **Criteria:** The details of how the reviewers will evaluate the section.

Acronyms

NSGO--National Sea Grant Office

2. Eligibility

Any student, regardless of citizenship, is eligible to submit to this opportunity if:

1. The student is enrolled towards a degree in a graduate program at any point between the onset of the 2024 Fall Term (quarter, trimester, semester, etc.) and February 19, 2025;
2. The graduate degree will be awarded through an accredited institution of higher education in the United States or U.S. Territories, and;
3. The student has an interest in ocean, coastal, and Great Lakes resources and in the national policy decisions affecting those resources.

Other Considerations

- The one year fellowship will take place in the National Capital Region. Applicants must be prepared to relocate to the Washington, D.C. area. Non-U.S. citizens are responsible for obtaining the appropriate visa to allow them to work in the Washington, D.C. area during the fellowship period.
- Foreign nationals and dual citizens please note: while this fellowship is open to all eligible students regardless of nationality, a significant number of participating federal host offices are unable to accept foreign nationals or dual citizens as fellows. This may reduce the number of placement opportunities available to foreign nationals/dual citizens. Foreign nationals/dual citizens are eligible for both the Executive and Legislative cohort.
- Applicants must be able to pass a federal background security check.
 - NOTE: most positions require a public trust clearance, some require a secret clearance. You will be asked detailed questions about personal history. An example of a security background form can be found [HERE](#).
- Prior contact/arrangements made with possible host offices before the start of the placement week will be cause for immediate disqualification from the process.
- Applicants that have been accepted as national finalists and/or become fellows are not eligible to apply again without the written permission of the NSGO Fellowships Manager, which will only be granted in response to exceptional life events. A national finalist is defined as an applicant who goes through the review process and is selected at the national level for the fellowship program. Applicants are considered finalists until they are paired with a host office during the placement process.

The National Sea Grant College Program champions working to create a marine science workforce that reflects the communities we serve. We are recruiting, retaining, and preparing a dynamic workforce, and proactively engaging and serving the populations of coastal communities. Sea Grant is committed to building research, extension, communication, and education programs that serve people with unique backgrounds, circumstances, needs, perspectives, and ways of thinking.

Special Note: Foreign Nationals, Dual Citizens and permanent residents, please note, you are eligible, however, there are restrictions during the fellowship.

- There are SIGNIFICANT limitations for Foreign Nationals - including, but not limited to, reduced position availability (as much as a 50% reduction in positions), heavy restrictions on security access which may mean limited access to federal networks and daily escorting throughout all federal facilities (FN must be in the line of sight of a federal employee at all times). Finally FN are NOT eligible for direct hire.
- There are limitations for Dual Citizens and permanent residents - including reduced position availability (as much as a 30% reduction in positions)

FAQs About Eligibility

QUESTION: I am a foreign national, am I eligible for the Knauss Program?

ANSWER: Yes! You are eligible for both the executive and legislative branches of the fellowship. For both, there may be restrictions on which offices are able to host a Foreign National.

QUESTION: I would like to defer my selection as a Knauss Fellow for a year, is that possible?

ANSWER: Applicants who are selected to be National Level Finalists are not able to defer their placements. As a Knauss Fellow you are expected to begin your fellowship on February 1 of the respective year.

3. Important Dates

Important Dates (2026 Fellowship Class)	
Eligibility	The student is enrolled towards a degree in a graduate program at any point between the onset of the 2024 Fall Term (quarter, trimester, semester, etc.) and February 19, 2025
Month	Activity
December	Opportunity goes live
February/March	Student Applications due to the State Programs February 19, 2025 by 5:00 p.m. LOCAL TIME
	State Sea Grant programs review packages, check for minimum requirements, properly redact, interview applicants
April	Letters of Intent due to NSGO from state Program April 2, 2025 by 5:00 p.m. EDT
	State Sea Grant programs nominate UP TO 6 applications each to the national competition April 16, 2025 by 11:59 EDT
April/May	NSGO review packages, check for minimum requirements, review redaction
	NSGO reviews Knauss Apps
	Review panel webinar
	Paper Reviews Completed
	Present Selection Recommendations
	FALD Notification
June	Grants actions/program notification
	SG Programs Notified
	Finalists notified
July	Finalists welcome workshop
	Finalist information/commitment due
August	NSGO begins recruiting 2026 Exec hosts
	All alternates notified
September	Exec host position descriptions due

October	Public Announcement
	Exec placement week
November-January	NSGO: IAA, Collect BOPs, Award Processing
November	NSGO: Security
	Recruit for Legislative Hosts
January	Legislative Placement Week
February	Fellowship Starts February 1, 2026

4. Award Information

The Knauss Fellowship award is administered by a cooperative agreement between the National Sea Grant College Program and the state Sea Grant program/university. All funds will be administered through the Sea Grant program of which the applicant applies to, and are subject to their respective university rules and regulations.

Fellow Budget Breakdown			
BASE	Fellow Salary*	\$73,100	To be administered via grant to the host Sea Grant program; will cover fellow salary and individual professional development
	Fellow Professional Development	\$5,000	
Additional Funds	Optional Office Related Travel**	\$15,000	Optional host office related travel funds; to be accepted as a onetime release at the onset of the award
	Legislative Travel Funds	\$2,500	Funds administered only to legislative fellows that may be used for placement week expenses and fellowship related travel

*NOTE: This may vary by individual state Sea Grant program. We encourage all applicants to discuss the details of the award with their state sea grant program at the time of application

**These funds are not guaranteed and vary depending on host office placement.

5. Where To Apply

The student should apply through the [state Sea Grant program](#) where they are currently enrolled in school. If the student is enrolled in a university that is not represented by a Sea Grant program they should contact the National Sea Grant Office (oar.sg.fellows@noaa.gov) to be assigned a program.

FAQs on Where to Apply

QUESTION: I am a resident of a different state than the state that my school is located in, should I apply to the program in the state where I am a resident?

ANSWER: No, the student should apply through the state in which their university is located.

QUESTION: My research focuses on a different state/region than my university is based, should I apply to the state where my research is focused?

ANSWER: No, the student should apply through the State Sea Grant Program your university is located.

QUESTION: What if my state has more than one Sea Grant program, which program should I apply to?

ANSWER: Either program. We encourage you to reach out to the one you are already familiar with to apply. If you are not familiar with either program, reach out to them both and decide which is a better fit for you.

6. Application Materials and Review Criteria

For consideration for the 2026 Knauss Fellowship, a full proposal application must include the following elements:

Project Narrative	
TO BE SUBMITTED BY THE STUDENT	
(1) Curriculum vitae	
(2) Personal Education and Career Development Response	Section Once: Icebreaker
	Section Two: Career Path and Objectives
	Section Three: Career Path Experience
(3) Relevant Coursework and Future Year Plans	
(4) Letters of Recommendation	
TO BE SUBMITTED BY THE PROGRAM	
(5) Director Letter	

a) Submitted by the Student:
(1) Curriculum vitae

Curriculum Vitae	
Recommended Length	Two Page (MAX)
Notes	The student should not include personal contact information or web links to external resources (e.g., LinkedIn, articles, blogs, etc.).
Points	10 Points
Point Scale	The CV does not adequately address the expectations outlined (0); the CV addresses the criterion in a poor or confusing way (1); the CV meets the criterion in an average or expected way (5); the CV meets the criterion in an exceptional way (10)
Review Criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The student has employment, volunteer, or extracurricular activities in academic, applied, research, administration, outreach, or policy positions; -The education and experience (personal and professional) in the student's area of expertise are appropriate to the career stage; -The applicant demonstrates academic, professional or personal experiences that are relevant and applicable to serving the American people; -The applicant's experiences show prior leadership roles relevant to their career stage (e.g., student government, faculty committees, advisory committees, professional societies, community initiatives, etc.).
Pro Tip	Utilize formatting (bold, italics, indentations) to help provide a clear and concise CV.

(2) Personal education and career development response

Summary Table: Personal Education and Career Development Response	
Recommended Length	The entirety of the Personal Education and Career Development Responses should not exceed 1,530 words. Each section and subsequent subsection should be answered separately using the section headers below. Section headers will NOT count as part of the overall word count.
Notes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The student should emphasize their abilities and expectations of the fellowship experience in terms of their career development. -Each section and subsequent subsection should be answered separately using the section headers below. Section headers will not count as part of the overall word count. -The student should NOT include personal contact information or web links to external resources (e.g., LinkedIn, articles, blogs, etc.). If included, programs should redact prior to submission.
Pro Tip	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Read each section carefully and make sure to address the full question being asked. -Think beyond just academics, your life experiences (educational, professional and personal) make you the individual you are. -Do not repeat your CV, rather expand on it.
Total Points	65 Points

Section One: Icebreaker. (Suggested word count: 25 words)

Section One: Ice Breaker		
Label	1A	1B
Recommended Length	20 Words	5 Words MAX (strict word count)
Prompt	The student should use one sentence to describe themselves.	The student should list five adjectives that someone with a close personal connection (coworker, supervisor, etc.) would use to describe them.
Review Criteria	-The student demonstrates creative thinking and a willingness to think outside the box.	
Points	5 Points	
Point Scale	The answer does not adequately address the expectations outlined (0); the answer addresses the criterion in a poor or confusing way (1); the answer meets the criterion in an average or expected way (3); the answer meets the criterion in an exceptional way (5).	
Pro Tip	Think outside the box and be creative!	Actually ask someone who you trust to give you a few words.

Section Two: Career Path and Objectives. (The total suggested word count is 750 words for this section)

Section Two: Career Path and Objectives			
Label	2A	2B	2C
Recommended Length	The recommended word count for each prompt is 250 words. Each prompt should be answered separately using the section headers. Section headers will NOT count as part of the overall word count.		
Prompt	The student should discuss any experience(s) (researcher or otherwise) that support or relate to the mission of the National Sea Grant College Program or the state Sea Grant program (the student does not have to have had a direct connection to Sea Grant). The student should emphasize (if relevant) any experience with extending and distilling science for non-scientific audiences.	The student should discuss their interest in the Knauss Fellowship with a specific focus on how the Knauss Fellowship supports the student's career pathway. The student should focus on how the Knauss Program would further support their development as a professional.	The student should discuss the transferable skills (skills that can be applied across a variety of disciplines) that they would bring to the Knauss Fellowship. In this response, students should highlight experiences from their personal, professional and academic background.
Review Criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The student clearly links experiences to the mission of Sea Grant (national or state); -the student demonstrates their ability to convey scientific knowledge in broader, non-scientific contexts; -the student demonstrates creative thinking, analytical skill, and/or indicates their capacity and willingness to make connections between science and broader economic, social, and political issues. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The student demonstrates an understanding of the Knauss Fellowship program; -the career path and objectives demonstrates the student's broad personal and professional background; -the student clearly articulates their career or professional goals; -the student is specific, direct, and concise while discussing what they would bring to and gain from the Knauss Fellowship. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The skill set demonstrated will provide a foundation for success in the Knauss fellowship; -the student is specific, direct, and concise while discussing the skills they have cultivated throughout their career.
Points	10 Points	10 Points	10 Points
Point Scale	The answer does not adequately address the expectations outlined below (0); the answer address the criterion in a poor or confusing way (1); the answer meets the criterion in an average or expected way (5); the answer meets the criterion in an exceptional way (10).		
Pro Tip	Review the mission of both the National Sea Grant Program and the state through which you are applying.	Be specific about why Knauss. If you are unsure, explore how Knauss will help define or guide your career.	Tell us what you would bring to Knauss.

Section Three: Career Path Experience. (The recommended word count is 750 words for this section.)

Section Three: Career Path Experience			
Label	3A	3B	3C
Recommended Length	The recommended word count for each prompt is 250 words. Each prompt should be answered separately using the section headers. Section headers will NOT count as part of the overall word count.		
Prompt	During the Fellowship, finalists will serve in a range of capacities, including developing and delivering public programs or services, informing policy-making, and providing evidence-based advice to leaders. The student should discuss how they have and/or will embrace the concept of public service.	The student should discuss a situation in which they have worked with a person or group with different perspectives, life experiences, beliefs, etc. from their own to achieve a common goal. The student is encouraged to use examples.	The student should discuss a situation in which they overcame a challenge (e.g. within a community or institution, personally, professionally, etc.) specifically as it relates to how they took a leadership role. The student should also consider including a reflection on what they learned from this experience.
Review Criteria	-The student demonstrates an interest in contributing to public programs or service; -the student demonstrates experiences in public service, including, but not limited to volunteering, leadership, extension or education experiences. These do not have to be directly related to the mission of NOAA.	-The student demonstrates creativity and willingness to navigate a challenging situation; -The student demonstrates leadership and problem solving initiative; -the student has shown interest in working with a variety of collaborators, community members and/or interested partners.	-The student demonstrates creativity and willingness to navigate a challenging situation; -The student demonstrates leadership and problem solving initiative.
Points	10 Points	10 Points	10 Points
Point Scale	The answer does not adequately address the expectations outlined below (0); the answer address the criterion in a poor or confusing way (1); the answer meets the criterion in an average or expected way (5); the answer meets the criterion in an exceptional way (10).		
Pro Tip	Think about what the significance of public service means to you and what activities you have participated in that support that.	Make sure to tell a story (no need for specificity details like names or institutions).	Make sure to tell a story (no need for specificity details like names or institutions).

(3) Relevant Coursework and Future Year Plans

Relevant Coursework and Future Year Plans	
Recommended Length	One Page single spaced (MAX)
Section Description	<p>The student should discuss any relevant coursework and their future year activities.</p> <p>-Relevant Coursework: The student may discuss any completed or in progress classes that they deem relevant to their success in the Knauss Fellowship Program.</p> <p>-Future year activities: The student should include a listing of classes and/or plans for spring 2025, summer 2025, and fall 2025.</p>
Points	10 Points
Point Scale	<p>The relevant coursework and future year plans does not adequately address the expectations outlined (0); the relevant coursework and future year plans addresses the criterion in a poor or confusing way (1); the relevant coursework and future year plans meets the criterion in an average or expected way (5); the relevant coursework and future year plans meets the criterion in an exceptional way (10).</p>
Review Criteria	<p>-The student has activities in academic, applied, research, administration, outreach, or policy;</p> <p>-The future education and experience (personal or professional) support the student's goals or provide further experiences applicable to the Knauss Program.</p>
Pro Tip	Provide explanation for why a class you have taken or activity in your future, applies to or supports the Knauss program.

(4) Two letters of recommendation

Letters of Recommendation (submitted by STUDENT)	
Recommended Length	Two Pages single spaced (per letter) (MAX)
Section Description	<p>Two letters of recommendation from individuals who have worked with the student, including at least one from a faculty member associated with the student's current enrollment who has knowledge of the student's academic and research (when applicable) performance. Each letter should not exceed two pages single spaced and should clearly indicate the letter writer's name and position. These letters should:</p> <p>(a) discuss the following attributes of the student: self-motivation, response to setbacks, skills and involvement in teamwork, collaborative leadership skills, willingness to learn a new skill or topic, academic performance and potential; and</p> <p>(b) speak to anything else the review panel should know about the strengths that the student will bring to the fellowship</p>
Points	5 Points (each)
Point Scale	The LOR does not adequately address the expectations outlined (0); the LOR addresses the criterion in a poor or confusing way (1); the LOR meets the criterion in an average or expected way (3); the LOR meets the criterion in an exceptional way (5).
Review Criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The letter writers demonstrate knowledge of the student and their abilities; -The letter writers speak to the leadership potential, confidence, maturity, and self-direction of the student; -The letter writers provide evidence of the student's willingness and flexibility to tackle issues beyond their area of expertise and an openness and capacity to expand experiences; -The letter writers provide evidence of the student's ability to convey scientific knowledge in broader, non-scientific contexts
Pro Tip	Schedule an appointment or meeting with your letter writers well in advance. Discuss the program to which you are applying, the selection criteria, and highlight your most relevant professional experiences. Make this process as easy for the writers as possible!

b) Submitted by the Sea Grant Program on behalf of the student applicant:

(5) A signed letter of recommendation from the state Sea Grant director.

Sea Grant Director's Letter	
Recommended Length	Two Pages single spaced (MAX)
Section Description	<p>A signed letter of recommendation from the state Sea Grant director, which is built from an interview with the applicant. The letter should not exceed two pages single spaced. As part of that interview and subsequent letter, the director shall:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">(a) demonstrate why the student aligns with the goals of the Knauss program;(b) highlight the skills the student emphasizes in the interview; and(c) explain any gaps in the CV or personal education and career development response or anything that the student feels they were unable to include in the application that they feel is important for the review panel to know.
Points	5 Points
Point Scale	The LOR does not adequately address the expectations outlined (0); the LOR addresses the criterion in a poor or confusing way (1); the LOR meets the criterion in an average or expected way (3); the LOR meets the criterion in an exceptional way (5).
Review Criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none">-The director's letter demonstrates how the student fits with the Knauss Program, including any discussion of why the student belongs in the Knauss Program;-Highlights the skills (academic, professional or personal) that the student would bring to the Knauss program;-Elaborates on information not specifically addressed by the student in their application package
Pro Tip	Be true to yourself in your interview with the director.

Final Review Criteria: Overall application cohesion (10 points)

Overall Application Cohesion	
Section Description	For the Knauss Fellowship program consider all aspects of the application materials (CV, Personal education and career development responses, Relevant Coursework and Future Year Plans, Letters of Recommendation, Directors Letter).
Points	10 Points
Point Scale	The application does not adequately address the expectations outlined (0); the application addresses the criterion in a poor or confusing way (1); the application meets the criterion in an average or expected way (5); the application meets the criterion in an exceptional way (10).
Review Criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none">-The application materials compliment each other;-The student brings a broad perspective to the program;-The application materials provide a clear picture of what the student would gain from receiving the Knauss Fellowship;-The application materials provide a clear picture of what the student would bring to the Knauss Fellowship.
Pro Tip	Ensure that your application materials compliment each other-do not just repeat the same information in every section!

Optional Demographics Form (OMB Control No. 0648-0568)

Through the Sea Grant Knauss Fellowship we strive to provide an educational and employment opportunity for current and recent graduate students interested in ocean, coastal and Great Lakes resources and the national policy decisions affecting those resources.

Students have the option to provide demographic information via this OMB approved [FORM](#). The information and associated background information of graduate students, as well as recent graduates, which may be used for the purpose of tracking scholarship recipients' academic progress, making annual financial awards, and tracking graduate studies and career progress. **This information will not be used to determine program eligibility. Data will be confidential and not part of the review process.**

NOTE: It is incumbent on the Sea Grant program to validate eligibility. A state program may request Transcripts and if applicable, an out of State Letter. These materials are not to be used for scoring purposes.

7. Programmatic Considerations

Participation in the Knauss fellowship is a privilege not a right. The year will ultimately be what a fellow makes of it and chooses to learn from it. Fellows should expect growing pains—new offices, new people, new places. How a fellow approaches, grows and learns from these challenges is up to the fellow and can make or break a fellowship experience. While we hope and anticipate that everyone feels fulfilled and leaves the fellowship having a positive experience, learning that policy, the federal government process, a desk job or style of leadership is not for you, is also beneficial! The Knauss program is an extension of a fellow's education. Approaching the year with an open mind and a chance to learn about yourself and the breadth of the federal government will take a fellow far!

Applicants should consider the below information prior to application:

- The Knauss Fellowship is a DC based fellowship. All selected fellows must have the ability to move to the DC region. Some offices do allow telework, however, this is not a guarantee, rather a privilege.
- Most positions require a public trust clearance, some require a secret clearance. Fellows will be asked detailed questions about personal history. An example of a security background form can be found [HERE](#). Please note, that federal laws supersede state laws.
- The Knauss Fellowship is an extension of a student's education. The program expects participants to participate in a professional development program as well as complete all mandatory reporting requirements.
- The Direct Hire is a PERK of the program. Receiving the Direct Hire Authority is incumbent on the successful completion of the fellowship - which includes, but is not limited to, completing 10 full months of the program, maintaining good standing with the host office and the participation in programmatic professional development activities.
- The Knauss Fellowship is administered through the state program, all student applicants should be made aware of the anticipated salary, benefits, etc. that the program will be providing.
- Having access to materials from previous Knauss applications can be useful, however, students should refrain from copying materials directly. Shared application materials can be a useful reference. The NSGO recommends that students have coaching sessions or conversations with previous fellows, rather than relying on materials alone.

Appendix A: Example template for Personal Educational Career Goals Statement

Notes: Recommend taking advantage of headers/footers for adding your name to application materials.

Personal educational career goals statement

Section One: Icebreaker

1A) Your answer (One sentence)

1B) Your answer (Five words)

Section Two: Career Path and Objectives

2A) Your answer (250 words or less)

2B) Your answer (250 words or less)

2C) Your answer (250 words or less)

Section Three: Career Path Experience

3A) Your answer (250 words or less)

3B) Your answer (250 words or less)

3C) Your answer (250 words or less)