

2026 Medical Student Summer Research Fellowship

APPLICATION GUIDELINES, INSTRUCTIONS & FAQs

As a premier funder of neurosurgical studies, the [Neurosurgery Research & Education Foundation](#) (NREF) focuses on providing fellowship funding in basic neuroscience and neurosurgical programs in North America.

Please read this document in its entirety prior to completing the online application. After reviewing the application and the information below, please NREF at 847.378.0500 or via email at info@nref.org if you still have questions.

ADMINISTRATIVE POLICIES, PROCEDURES & PROGRAM INFORMATION

General Information

The NREF is pleased to offer the [Medical Student Summer Research Fellowship](#) (MSSRF) program. Fellowships in the amount of \$2,500 will be awarded each year to medical students in the United States, Canada or Mexico who have completed one or more years of medical school by the start of the fellowship, and wish to spend a summer working in a neurosurgical laboratory, mentored by a neurosurgical investigator sponsor who is a member of the American Association of Neurological Surgeons (AANS).

- **Deadline for Application** – 11:59 PM (Central Standard Time), **Saturday, November 1, 2025**
- **Period of Fellowship** – Between May and August immediately following the award
- **Background Information** - The NREF does not pay for any indirect costs related to our grant awards. Please visit the [Medical Student Summer Research Fellowship](#) page on the NREF website for a program overview. For additional information, please contact NREF at info@nref.org.

Eligibility

- Medical students who are enrolled in an accredited program in the United States, Canada or Mexico and have completed at least one year of medical school by the start of the fellowship. Students from outside these countries are not eligible for this award.
- PhD or MD/PhD students, who are presumably committed to research careers, are not eligible for this award.

Fellowship Funding Overlap/Duplicate Funding

- Funding for a fellowship awarded by the NREF through this grant program cannot be duplicated by any other outside funding source. If the individual receives funding from another source for a fellowship awarded by NREF through this program, the institution's Fellowship Program Director must notify the NREF immediately and return the fellowship funding. Notification must be sent to NREF Office by email at info@nref.org.

Submission Instructions

- Visit the [NREF Online Grant Portal](#).
- To apply for an NREF grant, you will need to create an account or use your myAANS.org login to access the portal.

Application Procedure

- The project proposal should be in NIH format and include the following elements:
 - Specific Aims
 - Significance
 - Preliminary Findings
 - Approach

NOTE: Including these elements should not be interpreted as a guarantee of an award.

Please keep the proposal to a maximum of three (3) pages using NIH guidelines (for margins, line spacing, and font size including the following:

Margins

- Paper size no larger than standard letter paper size (8 ½" x 11")
- At least one-half in margins (1/2") – top, bottom, left, and right – for all pages

Line Spacing

- No more than six lines per vertical inch. To ensure, you can set line spacing to "exactly 12 pt.". This can be done in the paragraph settings panel in Word's layout tab.

Font Size

- At least 11 pt font size
- Recommend using one of the following: Arial, Georgia, Helvetica, or Palatino Linotype.

Please see the following link for full NIH grant guidelines: <https://grants.nih.gov/grants/how-to-apply-application-guide/format-and-write/format-attachments.htm>

Other elements that should be included in the grant submission, but are not considered part of the three (3) page limit, are as follows:

- References
- Mentor letter of support
- Other letters of support

Based on an evaluation of proposals from recent awardees, here are some factors to consider:

- Are the goals, objective and anticipated results clearly defined, logical and well-described in the proposal?
- Is the scope of the project realistic for timeframe?
- Is the research environment supportive?
- Does the institution offer strong mentorship?

Notification of Award

- **The foundation expects to notify each applicant via email by April 15, 2026.** However, public announcement is contingent upon receipt of written confirmation from applicants. The foundation reserves the right, in its sole discretion, to extend the date for it to provide notification of awards.

Fiscal Policies and Reports

- Fellowship grant payments will be made to the institution where the research project takes place in one (1) payment in June.
- At the conclusion of the fellowship, any unexpended balance of \$100 or more must be refunded to the Foundation within forty-five (45) days together with the report of expenditures and accompanying documentation.
- All final reports must be submitted electronically to info@nref.org.

Publication

- The NREF encourages publication of research findings by fellows, but requires that the NREF is cited as a source of support on the first page of the text.
- When a fellow presents a paper at a professional scientific meeting concerning research findings made during the course of an NREF funded fellowship, the NREF must be cited prior to the beginning of the presentation.
- The NREF should be sent reprints of all papers and publications, including any electronic papers or publications, resulting from work done during the course of a fellowship, even those that appear after the fellowship has concluded.
- The citation should appear in the Acknowledgements section as follows:
This work is supported by the Neurosurgery Research & Education Foundation (2026 Medical Student Summer Research Fellowship).

Frequently-Asked Questions

- 1. Who should apply for these grants?**
 - a. Medical students who are enrolled in an accredited program in the United States, Canada or Mexico and have completed at least one year of medical school before the start of the fellowship.
 - b. PhD or MD/PhD students, who are presumably committed to research careers, are not eligible.
- 2. Is United States Citizenship a requirement to apply?**
 - a. No.
- 3. Is there a list of AANS members that I can contact to be my preceptor (sponsor)?**
 - a. No. It is the responsibility of the applicant to find a sponsor who is an AANS member.
- 4. What type of medical schools are eligible?**
 - a. The NREF will accept applications from students at allopathic (e.g., those accredited by organizations such as the LCME) and osteopathic medical schools.
- 5. How many awardees per Institution are allowed?**
 - a. Usually, no more than one (1) award per year will be given to any one institution.
 - b. However, exceptions may be made at the discretion of the NREF Research Committee.
- 6. When would the MSSRF fellowship start?**
 - a. The fellowship is completed between May and August immediately following the award. A final report is due no later than October 1st.
- 7. How is the application submitted?**
 - a. Applications are accepted through the [NREF Online Grant Portal](#).

8. What are the elements of the application?

- a. All required fields must be completed and the application must be signed.
- b. The application MUST include:
 - i. Letter of reference from sponsor/preceptor/mentor – this is the individual that you will be reporting to during the research project.
 - ii. Letter of reference from medical school dean or faculty member – this individual should be familiar with applicant's scientific interests and abilities.
 - iii. Letter of reference from a faculty neurosurgeon – this individual can be from either the student's school or the institution at which they will complete their project.
 - iv. Purpose statement
 - v. Project information
 - vi. Student goals
 - vii. Sponsor/Preceptor/Mentor statement outlining project and other pertinent information listed on the application.
 - viii. Biographical sketch from the student and the Sponsor/Preceptor/Mentor (Hint: See NIH biosketch guidelines for direction on format: <https://grants.nih.gov/grants/forms/biographical-sketch-format-page-non-fellowship-forms-h>)

NOTE: *There must be three (3) different letters of reference.* If the Sponsor/Preceptor/Mentor is also your Medical School Dean or faculty neurosurgeon, an additional letter must be submitted from someone that can speak to the applicant's research interests and abilities.

9. What are the responsibilities of the fellow, if awarded?

- a. The fellow must submit a written report and abstract within 30 days of the conclusion of the fellowship. The report should be two (2) pages in length and consist of a one-page narrative describing the fellow's personal fellowship experience and a one-page abstract (250 words or less), suitable for submission.
- b. The fellow whose abstract is judged to be the best submission will receive a travel stipend to attend the next AANS Annual Meeting and the report will be considered for presentation at the meeting.

10. What are the responsibilities of the Sponsor/Preceptor/Mentor?

- a. The Sponsor/Preceptor/Mentor must be a member of AANS.
- b. The Sponsor/Preceptor/Mentor is required to submit a bio-sketch (standard NIH format), statement, and letter of support.
- c. The letter of support should verify the Sponsor/Preceptor/Mentor's willingness to mentor the applicant and provide the necessary space and supplies for the applicant during the fellowship period.

11. When is the application deadline?

- a. The completed application must be submitted by 11:59 PM (Central Standard Time) on November 1st.

12. Will applicants be notified that their application has been received?

- a. An administrative review will take place after November 1st and applicants will receive notification via email that their application has been received. Applicants will be contacted by NREF if there are questions or concerns about the application.

13. When will applicants be notified of the awards?

- a. Notification is expected to be made by April 15th, but NREF reserves the right to extend the date.

14. How much funding is available per grant?

- a. Each award is \$2,500.

15. What does the stipend support?

- a. The stipend supports two (2) months of salary and is not intended to supplement an additional funding source.

16. Can the stipend be used toward indirect costs?

- a. No. The stipend is only to be used toward salary support.

17. Can an applicant receive multiple sources of funding for their project?

- a. No, if a grant is obtained from another source for the same research project, funding will be withheld and given to another applicant.

18. Does the application require a budget?

- a. No.

19. Can the applicant or applicant's sponsor/neurosurgery program receive the funding directly?

- a. No. The award will be distributed through the grants office of the institution where the research will take place. The disbursement typically occurs in June.

20. How does an applicant determine who the institution's Financial Officer is?

- a. The Sponsor/Preceptor/Mentor listed on your application should advise you on this matter. Typically, the grant officer works in the Office of Sponsored Programs or a similar office.

21. How is the grant administered?

- a. The NREF is the official administrator of the fellowship. The NREF oversees the application process including receipt, processing, and organizing the review of applications.
- b. The NREF manages the financial aspects of the fellowships and the distribution of funds to the institution.

22. Does the institution need to sign an agreement?

- a. Yes, an agreement must be signed and returned to the NREF before the award is provided.

23. Can the applicant submit work for the fellowship that has been accepted for publication?

- a. No, the applicant cannot be funded for work that has or will be published in the same duration of the fellowship. If it is discovered that work has been published, the applicant will be disqualified and funding will be revoked.

24. Can the applicant change the subject of the proposal?

- a. No, after the fellowship has been awarded, the fellow must adhere to the original proposal.

25. Can the applicant choose a topic not related to his/her current medical school program?

- a. Yes, as long as the research topic is related to neurosurgery and the applicant plans to continue medical school.

26. For letters of reference, what if the Sponsor/Preceptor/Mentor is also a faculty neurosurgeon?

- a. It is a requirement to submit three (3) letters of reference. If your preceptor is a faculty neurosurgeon, you must get a letter of reference from them as well as another faculty neurosurgeon.
- b. Letters of reference are needed from (1) the Sponsor/Preceptor/Mentor, (2) the Medical School Dean or another appropriate faculty member, and (3) a faculty neurosurgeon.

27. Can an institution release letters of recommendation to the student?

- a. Yes, institutions are allowed to release all letters of recommendation to the student.

28. Are past awardees allowed to submit again with a new project?

- a. No, this is not allowed.