

Sea Grant Knauss Fellowship Program

Guidance for Students

Key Program Highlights for Student Applicants

This information is intended to educate student applicants on the comprehensive Knauss Fellowship experience and help them set realistic expectations of program participation.

- **Learning Opportunity:** The Sea Grant Knauss Fellowship program offers graduate students a unique educational experience to apply and refine their graduate training and skills in the context of public service and federal policy and processes in the legislative and executive branches of the federal government.
- **Public Service:** Student applicants *should discuss how they have and/or will embrace the concept of public service.* The National Sea Grant Office (NSGO) expects fellows to be active contributors, working toward achieving their host office's goals and objectives (NOFO, pg 8).
- **Nonpartisan Focus:** The National Sea Grant College Program is a nonpartisan federal program. Student application materials, particularly the CV, should avoid expressing personal opinions on politicized topics. Experiences should be presented in a nonpartisan way.
- **Social Media Review:** Hosts, particularly those in the legislative branch, may review applicants' social media profiles. Programs should encourage student applicants to screen their accounts to ensure they are professional and work-appropriate.
- **Location Requirement:** *All successful student applicants must be prepared to relocate to the Washington, D.C. area* (NOFO, pg 4).
- **Legislative Office Culture:** The tone of each legislative office is set by the member of Congress, including how human resources concerns are handled and how the office presents itself through its decor and staff. For instance, it is common for offices to have dress codes, allow dogs or display decor that reflects the members' priorities. **Legislative fellows must be adaptable to the office's culture.**

Security Red Flag Review

All fellows will undergo some form of security screening before joining their office.

- Student applicants must be able to pass a federal background security check. Most positions require a public trust clearance; some require a secret clearance (2027 Knauss Student Guide, pg 4). Note that federal laws supersede state laws, which include laws regarding the legality of substance use.
- A significant number of participating federal host offices are unable to accept dual citizens as fellows, potentially limiting placement options for them. Additionally, dual citizens may undergo additional security processes depending on placements (NOFO, pg 4).
- Programs are encouraged to view students with the following considerations in mind.
 - **Prioritize Truthfulness:** Look for attempts to lie or omit information on applications.
 - **Scrutinize Foreign Connections:** Review application materials with current countries affected by Presidential Actions in mind.
 - **Verify Accuracy and Consistency:** Check for gaps in employment and education, and ensure all dates match.
- If a student applicant has nuanced questions regarding background investigations, programs can direct them to oar.sg.fellows@noaa.gov.

Qualities and Skills of Successful Knauss Fellows

The director's letters should *highlight the skills the student emphasized in the student application materials and interview; highlight the student's response to program interview questions regarding interpersonal skills and ability to manage expectations in challenging situations; and the student applicant's interpersonal skills and ability to manage expectations in challenging situations* (NOFO, pg 7).

Some of the qualities and skills of a successful Knauss fellow are listed below.

Note: There is a broad range of positions for executive fellows, from predictable and relaxed to fast-paced and high-stress. Some qualities are especially important for legislative fellows and are marked with asterisks (*).

1. **Adaptable***: Willing to quickly adjust to new environments, political priorities, evolving tasks, and shifting team dynamics. Learns quickly and in a fast-paced environment. Can work long, irregular hours at times, shake off difficult situations and remain calm under pressure.
2. **Self Starter**: Can identify personal, professional and host office-related gaps or projects and take initiative to recommend solutions or tasks independently.
3. **Organized**: Can manage multiple priorities and track tasks with differing timelines. Can manage projects and schedules with varying levels of complexity.
4. **Coachable***: Open to receiving critical feedback and making adjustments to products or performance.
5. **Doer Mindset**: Demonstrates the capacity to translate strategic goals into concrete actions, and do so effectively even when lacking complete details. Can provide progress updates and request input from supervisor, team and partners. Proactive in providing progress updates and soliciting necessary input from relevant partners.
6. **Effective Communicator***: Can converse amicably with many different people. Clearly and concisely shares information through verbal and written discourse. Can engage with teams and constituents, including those with perspectives that differ from their own.
7. **Analytical**: Digests and distills information into concise, audience-relevant outputs.
8. **Topically Flexible***: Open to working across multiple topical areas (e.g., environment, energy, security and community issues). Can apply core skills and experience beyond their area of technical expertise and integrate science as one of several factors in a decision-making process.
9. **Humility***: Eager to listen and learn, willing to embrace responsibilities and take on any task. Recognizes that the Knauss Fellowship is a learning experience and is respectful of and open to guidance from more experienced colleagues.
10. **Office-First Mindset***: Dedicated team player, can put the needs of the office and constituents ahead of self. Can work for and communicate respectfully with people who hold differing perspectives. Can represent a position or viewpoint that differs from personal beliefs.

Characteristics that Limit Knauss Fellow Success

1. **Inflexible:** Finds compromise difficult and is uninterested or incapable of engaging or working with people who hold different perspectives. Unwilling to negotiate or work to reach mutual objectives.
2. **Lack of Professional Curiosity:** Uninterested in learning new topics or having new experiences. Narrow view of the skills and experiences that would help them be successful in future endeavors.
3. **Entitled:** Believes they deserve special treatment, recognition or awards disproportionate to their efforts. Sees their needs and wants as a higher priority than those of others. Demanding of those around them. Lacks the appropriate level of respect for others.
4. **Low Emotional Intelligence:** Cannot read social situations well. Cannot work well on teams. Lacks humility and empathy for others.
5. **Low Resilience:** Difficulty adapting, recovering or thriving in the face of workplace challenges, setbacks and evolving conditions. Struggles to manage stress and emotions effectively and to remain calm and productive under pressure.

