

Margaret A. Davidson Graduate Fellowship: Frequently Asked Questions

NOAA Office for Coastal Management

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General

What is the Davidson Fellowship?

The Margaret A. Davidson Graduate Fellowship is a new program that will provide funding to graduate students admitted to or enrolled in a master's or PhD program to conduct estuarine research within one of the 29 reserves in the National Estuarine Research Reserve System.

Who administers the program?

NOAA's Office for Coastal Management awards a cooperative agreement to each fellow's degree-granting university to administer the stipend.

What is a national estuarine research reserve?

The National Estuarine Research Reserve System is a network of 29 coastal sites designated to protect and study estuarine systems. Established through the Coastal Zone Management Act, the reserves represent a partnership program between NOAA and the coastal states. NOAA provides funding and national guidance, and each site is managed on a daily basis by a lead state agency or university with input from local partners.

Who was Margaret Davidson, and why is this fellowship named in her honor?

Margaret Adelia Davidson was a hard-working visionary in the global coastal community. An active participant in coastal resource management issues since 1978, Margaret served in many leadership roles at NOAA, including as the founding director of the Coastal Services Center, acting director of the Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management when the two offices merged into the new Office for Coastal Management in 2013, and acting assistant administrator for the National Ocean Service from 2000 to 2002. She focused her professional work on environmentally sustainable coastal development practices, the reduction of risk associated with extreme events, and climate adaptation. The consummate networker, Margaret was gifted in recognizing and capitalizing on common goals. She never took her eyes off the goal of community engagement in protecting coastal resources around the nation. Margaret passed away on May 23, 2017. NOAA is continuing to build her legacy by training the future generation of coastal leaders through this new fellowship program.

What are the goals of the Davidson Fellowship program?

- To support the next generation of leaders in estuarine science and coastal management
- To address critical reserve management priorities through high-quality research
- To develop a strong network among the fellows that remains after the fellowship well into their careers

Is the Davidson Fellowship related to NOAA's Coastal Management Fellowship program?

While both fellowships are administered by the NOAA Office for Coastal Management to build coastal leaders by providing professional training and development opportunities, the two programs are different in their scope. The Davidson Fellowship program places current graduate students who are still conducting degree research in a national estuarine research reserve. The Coastal Management Fellowship program places postgraduate students—who will have already completed their degrees—with a state coastal management program to work on projects proposed by the state.

What is collaborative science?

The goal of collaborative science is to ensure that information generated from field and laboratory studies is useful for decision-making at the national, regional, state, and community levels. Today's complex environmental challenges require us to rethink how we pursue our research efforts and employ partnerships to integrate across the ecological, sociological, and political contexts of ecological and environmental problems. This requires that the users of the research be integrated into the research process, which increases trust and legitimacy in the research product.

Eligibility

Who is eligible for the fellowship?

Graduate students currently admitted to or enrolled in a master's or PhD program at an accredited U.S. college or university with at least two years remaining in their program. Students must be citizens or permanent residents of U.S. states or territories to apply. While there is no required field of study, applicant qualifications should be appropriate to complete the proposed research project. Students pursuing degrees in natural and social sciences are encouraged to apply.

What is the length of the fellowship?

Davidson Fellowships are for two consecutive years, with funding provided each year.

Are students who will graduate in less than two years from the application deadline eligible for the fellowship?

No. Students must have at least two years left in their academic course of study to apply to the fellowship.

Are students able to continue working on their degree (e.g., master's, PhD) requirements during the fellowship?

Yes. While the research being conducted at the reserve is intended to be a substantial part of the fellow's degree research, the fellow will be able to continue taking courses during the fellowship to satisfy degree requirements.

Can students who have not yet begun their graduate studies, but who have been accepted to an institution, apply for the fellowship?

Yes. A letter of acceptance into a qualifying graduate program, or similar documentation, should be included as part of the application materials.

Is fellowship research eligible for academic credits?

It can be, but should be discussed with the applicant's academic advisor and university.

Application Process

How do I apply?

A formal request for proposals will be posted online every other year at coast.noaa.gov/nerrs/research/davidson-fellowship.html, which will include all application instructions and requirements for the upcoming cohort.

When are fellowship applications due?

The request for proposals will include the due date for each application cycle.

Can students identify which reserve they would like to be placed with?

Applicants will be required to designate a specific reserve and management priority on their proposal. Each proposal can designate only one reserve. The request for proposals will include information on individual reserves' research priorities.

Does the location where applicants live or go to school determine which reserve they are eligible to work with?

No. An applicant may apply to any reserve. However, because the fellowship is designed for the student to spend a significant amount of time in the reserve, there may be additional costs to the student if the student is not located near the reserve.

Can students apply to more than one reserve?

Yes. However, a separate proposal package must be submitted for each reserve, and must address one of the reserve-specific questions. If attempting to conduct comparative research, the student may indicate the host reserve they wish to apply to and include an additional reserve in the proposal approach.

Can a prospective fellow be matched with a reserve different from the one they identified in their application?

No. The proposal should specify a single reserve and management question to be addressed. The application will be considered for the specified reserve only.

Can a prospective fellow reach out to a reserve to discuss the feasibility or appropriateness of a project before applying?

Yes. Applicants are strongly encouraged to contact the reserve before applying to discuss their project idea and determine if it is appropriate for addressing the needs of the reserve.

When does each cycle of fellowships begin?

The request for proposals will include the start date. Generally speaking, every other fall, with the first cohort starting in 2020.

What must I submit as part of my application?

All forms and documents required for the application package are included in the request for proposals.

Where can I view reserve research questions?

When the application period is open, they will be available online at coast.noaa.gov/nerrs/research/davidson-fellowship.html.

What if I miss the deadline?

No late applications will be accepted.

Are fellows expected to remain at or near the reserve site for an extended period?

Yes. Students are expected and encouraged to spend as much time as possible at the reserve during the two-year fellowship. The intent is to have them be a part of the reserve system. The minimum requirement for onsite research is 6 weeks (consecutive or nonconsecutive) each year of the fellowship.

Is a student eligible if starting a two-year degree program at the time of application, which would mean completing that two-year program halfway through the fellowship?

No. Funding will be coming through the university, so fellows need to stay enrolled through most of the second year of the two-year fellowship.

Evaluation and Selection Process

How are applications reviewed, and by whom?

There is an initial administrative review by NOAA, followed by a merit review by reviewers with scientific and coastal management expertise, followed by a panel review by the reviewers from the proposed project's reserve. Details of the proposal review and selection process can be found in the request for proposals.

What are the evaluation criteria?

The five evaluation criteria for the merit review process are importance or applicability of proposed project to the program goals, technical and scientific merit, overall qualifications of the funding applicant, project costs, outreach and education, and data management plan. More details on each criterion and how it is weighted can be found in the request for proposals.

How are individual reserves involved in the selection process?

Reserve staff members or their designees will receive a ranked list of candidates from the merit review process to assess relevance of the research to the management question it addresses.

When will I be notified with a decision?

We estimate that successful applicants will be notified that they are recommended for funding within six months of the application deadline. Decisions will be publicly announced after all funding awards have been finalized by NOAA.

Can I receive my score and reviewers' comments?

Upon request, NOAA will send applicants comments from the merit review.

Will NOAA award fellowships every year?

Future fellowships are contingent on congressional appropriations.

Fellow Responsibilities**What sorts of research projects will students work on during their fellowship?**

Fellow research will be focused on answering a key question that helps a reserve understand drivers or impacts of environmental change or the reciprocal effects on human or community resilience. Each two-year project will employ the tenets of collaborative research, including engaging end users throughout the project, incorporating multiple disciplinary perspectives, and ensuring that outcomes are applicable to local management needs and decision-making.

How will fellows determine their research projects?

Fellows will be required to submit a proposed project that answers a specified reserve management question, listed for each reserve on the fellowship website, and that fits into the applicant's course of study. The fellow will work with their university advisor and reserve mentor to tweak the project to adequately meet both the fellow's and the reserve's needs.

Are fellows expected to publish their research?

Products, publications, presentations, and any other outputs will be identified by the applicant in their proposal. Applications will be evaluated, in part, on the quality and appropriateness of those outputs.

Who will guide and support the fellows' research?

Fellows will have a faculty advisor in their degree program at their host university and a mentor at the reserve who will guide their research.

Are all reserves guaranteed a fellow?

Funding is available for each reserve to have one fellow. Placement will depend on receiving applications from qualified students.

Can a reserve host more than one fellow at a time?

At this time, funding is available for only one fellow at each of 29 reserves.

Where will fellows live when they are conducting their research at the reserve?

Applicants are encouraged to contact the reserve before submitting their proposal to discuss accommodation. If short-term housing is required, most reserves have dormitory facilities to house researchers.

Will fellows have access to reserve boats, labs, and other scientific equipment for their research?

Fellows may discuss access to equipment necessary to conduct their project work. Funding for \$7,000 will be provided to each reserve to support the fellow's project.

How much travel will this fellowship entail?

Two or three trips a year will be required for training and professional development. Travel funds are allocated and must be included as part of the proposal. Details are available in the request for proposals.

Is participation in the professional development opportunities mandatory?

Yes. One of the hallmarks of this fellowship is the professional development, mentoring, and networking, and fellows are expected to participate in designated trainings and workshops. Opportunities will include mentorship by a reserve staff member, participating in the annual reserve system meeting, professional conferences, a fellows meeting, and quarterly webinars.

How is a fellow's mentor selected?

Each reserve will determine an appropriate mentor according to existing staff capability, interest, and expertise. All parties will agree to and sign a mentoring agreement to ensure responsibilities are clear.

Benefits and Professional Development Opportunities

What is the stipend for the Davidson Fellowship?

The current stipend is \$34,000 per year.

How are fellows paid?

All funds will be administered to the fellow by the fellow's academic institution through a cooperative agreement with the NOAA Office for Coastal Management.

How can the stipend be used?

The stipend can be used for living expenses, tuition, research costs, and academic supplies.

What other funds are available?

In addition to the stipend, fellows will receive up to \$7,000 for required professional development travel. Reserves will have \$7,000 allocated to help cover supplies and equipment associated with fellowship project costs, and while the students should not include these costs in their budgets, students can discuss potential ideas for this funding with the reserve during proposal development.

Is health insurance included as part of the fellowship?

The student's stipend will be from the university, so it depends on the university as to what additional benefits are included.

Do fellows receive relocation reimbursement?

No.

What professional development opportunities are available?

The hallmark of this fellowship will be the professional development, mentoring, and networking opportunities provided to the fellows. On-site mentors will help students make connections with the broader coastal management community. Fellows will also have quarterly training webinars and multiple in-person training courses on searching for a job, project management, and leadership. Each fellow will also have the opportunity to participate in professional conferences and develop networking skills.

How much funding do fellows receive for travel to professional development events?

Fellows will be reimbursed up to \$7,000 per year for required professional development travel expenses. This is in addition to the \$34,000 stipend.

Do fellows have contact with one another during the fellowship?

Yes. One of the goals of the fellowship is to build a cohort of the next generation of coastal scientists and managers. Fellows will get to know each other and engage in peer-to-peer sharing during virtual and in-person training sessions. Professional conferences and the annual reserve system meeting will also provide networking opportunities. A dedicated Office for Coastal Management staff member will coordinate the professional development and cohort-building opportunities for the fellows.

Who can I contact if I have additional questions?

ocm.davidsonfellowship@noaa.gov