

MARGARET A. DAVIDSON GRADUATE FELLOWSHIP: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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GENERAL

What is the Davidson Fellowship?

The Margaret A. Davidson Graduate Fellowship provides funding to graduate students admitted to or enrolled in a master’s or Ph.D. program to conduct estuarine research within one of the 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 and manage the funding.

What is a national estuarine research reserve?

The National Estuarine Research Reserve System is a network of 30 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.

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. Check out this [Guide to Collaborative Science](#) for more information and resources to plan and implement a collaborative research project.



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

Who was Margaret A. 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 fellowship program.

How is the Davidson Fellowship related to NOAA's other coastal fellowship programs?

While all coastal fellowships are administered by the NOAA Office for Coastal Management to build coastal leaders by providing professional training and development opportunities, the programs are different in scope. The Davidson Fellowship program places current graduate students who are still conducting degree research in a national estuarine research reserve. The other [coastal fellowships](#) place postgraduate students—who will have already completed their degrees—with state coastal management programs or partner organizations to work on projects proposed by those hosts.

ELIGIBILITY

Who is eligible for the fellowship?

Prospective fellows must be

- Graduate students admitted to, or enrolled in, a master's or Ph.D. program at an accredited U.S. college or university. A prospective fellow may submit a signed letter from the institution indicating provisional acceptance to a graduate degree program conditional on obtaining financial support, such as this fellowship.
- Citizens or permanent residents of U.S. states or territories at the time of application.

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?

Fellows must plan to be enrolled for all of the first year, and the majority of the second year of funding. Students in the final year of their graduate program are not advised to participate in this fellowship.

Are students able to continue working on their degree (i.e., master’s, Ph.D.) 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.

Are students required to be enrolled in course work during the summers?

No, as long as the student is making progress through the degree program as determined by the university during the two years of the fellowship.

Can students who have not yet begun their graduate studies, but who have been accepted to an institution, become fellows?

Yes. A letter of acceptance into a qualifying graduate program should be included as part of the application materials. A prospective fellow may submit a signed letter from the institution indicating provisional acceptance to a graduate degree program conditional on obtaining financial support, such as this fellowship.

Is fellowship research eligible for academic credits?

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

What if I am enrolled part-time as a graduate student at the time of application?

Part-time enrollment meets the eligibility criteria for a prospective fellow to submit an application; however, please note that the fellows will be required to be enrolled full-time during the fellowship period.

APPLICATION PROCESS

How do I apply?

The Notice of Funding Opportunity (Funding Opportunity) will be posted on Grants.gov every other year, and will include all application instructions and requirements for the upcoming cohort of fellows. A link to the application on Grants.gov will be made available at [coast.noaa.gov/nerrs/research/davidson-fellowship.html](https://www.coast.noaa.gov/nerrs/research/davidson-fellowship.html) for convenience. Please note that the prospective fellow’s institution of higher education is the applicant for the fellowship, so students are strongly encouraged to work with their university advisor and Office of Sponsored Programs, or equivalent, well in advance of the deadline to prepare the application package.

When are fellowship applications due?

The Funding Opportunity 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. While the research may include multiple reserves, a primary “host” reserve must be identified during the application process. Information on individual reserves’ research priorities can be found in the respective Funding Opportunity and will be posted on the program website at [coast.noaa.gov/nerrs/research/davidson-fellowship.html](https://www.coast.noaa.gov/nerrs/research/davidson-fellowship.html).

Can students propose projects for more than one reserve?

Yes. However, a separate proposal package must be submitted for each reserve, and must address one of the reserve-specific research priorities. If attempting to conduct comparative research, the student must indicate the host reserve they wish to apply to and include any additional reserves in the project summary and description sections.

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

No. A prospective fellow may propose a project for any reserve. However, because the fellowship is designed for the student to spend a significant amount of time at the reserve, there may be additional costs to the student if the student is not located near the reserve.

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 host reserve and management question to be addressed. The application will be considered for the specified reserve only.

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

Yes. Prospective fellows are strongly encouraged to contact the reserve before applying to discuss the feasibility of their project idea and the resources available at the reserve. Reserve points of contact are provided in the reserve research priorities document linked in the Funding Opportunity and posted on the program website at coast.noaa.gov/nerrs/research/davidson-fellowship.html.

When does each cycle of fellowships begin?

The fellowship start date is August 1, every other year.

What must I submit as part of my application?

All forms and documents required for the application package are included in the Funding Opportunity. Please note that the prospective fellow's institution of higher education is the applicant for the fellowship, so students are strongly encouraged to work with their university advisor and Office of Sponsored Programs, or equivalent, well in advance of the deadline in order to prepare the application package.

Where can I view the reserve research priorities?

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 and so fellows may be involved in reserve activities that relate to their project and/or support the reserve's community engagement, education, and stewardship efforts. These responsibilities will be determined in consultation with the reserve at the start of the fellowship. The minimum requirement for onsite research or reserve programming support is six weeks (consecutive or nonconsecutive) each year of the fellowship.

When will academic institutions receive notification of year-two funds availability?

Institutions should receive notification of year-two funds availability approximately three months prior to the year-two start date.

Can I get a little help on these budget forms?

Students are strongly encouraged to work with their institution's sponsored programs office, or the equivalent, to develop their budget. An example budget form (SF-424A) can be found at coast.noaa.gov/data/docs/nerrs/davidson-sf424a-example.pdf. Sufficient detail should be provided in the budget narrative to justify all proposed costs, and should match funding amounts listed in the SF-424A budget form. The total funding amount requested should be the same on all budget forms.

How much should I expect to budget for required travel or professional development?

The program recommends budgeting \$7,000 per year for travel and professional development related expenses. This includes travel to the NERRS/NERRA Annual Meeting in year one, travel to the required fellow workshop in year two, travel to present the fellow's research at a professional conference, and at least \$500 for professional development training fees. While the required training activities offered by NOAA are free, many professional development opportunities external to NOAA charge a registration fee.

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 Funding Opportunity.

What are the evaluation criteria?

The six 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 Funding Opportunity.

How are individual reserves involved in the selection process?

Reserve staff members or their designees will receive all eligible applications to their reserve, along with the reviewer notes from the merit review process to assess relevance of the research to the management question it addresses. More detail about each stage of the review can be found in the Funding Opportunity.

When will I be notified with a decision?

We estimate that successful applicants will be notified that they are recommended for funding in April of the year following the application deadline. Unsuccessful applicants will be notified by email in approximately May of the year following 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 their review comments.

Will NOAA award fellowships every two years?

Future fellowships are contingent on congressional appropriations.

FELLOW RESPONSIBILITIES

What types 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. Check out this [Guide to Collaborative Science](#) for more information and resources to plan and implement a collaborative research project.

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 and professional development goals.

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 30 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 with their host reserve access to equipment necessary to conduct their project work.

How much travel will this fellowship entail?

The frequency of travel to the host reserve, community meetings, and professional conferences will vary based on the individual fellow's research needs, proximity to the reserve, and professional development goals. One or two trips each year will be required for training and professional development coordinated by the national program. Travel funds are allocated and must be included as part of the proposal. Details are available in the Funding Opportunity.

Is participation in 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 training and workshops. Opportunities will include mentorship by a reserve staff member, participating in the annual reserve system meeting, professional conferences, two fellow workshops, 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?

Davidson fellows receive up to \$45,000 per year for direct support, which may include a stipend, supplies, travel, or tuition.

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.

Is health insurance included as part of the fellowship?

The student will receive their direct support from the university, according to the institution's individual policies and practices.

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. Reserve mentors will help students make connections with the broader coastal management community. Fellows can expect to participate in regular training webinars and in-person training courses on career development topics such as searching for a job, project management, and leadership. Each fellow will also have the opportunity to participate in professional conferences and develop networking skills.

Fellows are required to participate in the following activities to support their professional development and obtain the baseline skills necessary to be successful in the coastal management field.

- Formal training in project design, collaborative science, facilitation, and science communication (there is no registration fee for the first three, but registration fees for the science communication training may vary and be upwards of \$500 to \$1,000 per person)
- The research reserve system's annual meeting (Year 1 – location TBD; fellows are invited, but not required to attend in Year 2)
- Annual fellow workshop (Year 1 – virtual; Year 2 – location TBD, but likely Charleston, SC, or Silver Spring, MD)
- Present research at a professional conference of the fellow's choosing (Year 2, but can be earlier)

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

Fellows receive up to \$45,000 per year in direct support, to include travel. A travel budget allocation of approximately \$7,000 per year is recommended to cover the necessary travel and professional development expenses each year.

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