

Early-Career Research Fellowship (ECRF)

Environment Track:

Office Hours - Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

This FAQ document compiles general questions discussed during the Early-Career Research Fellowship – Environment Track Office Hours for the 2026 application cycle. It is intended to support prospective applicants who were unable to attend and to provide additional clarity on the application process, eligibility, and proposal expectations.

Key Application Resources

Applicants are strongly encouraged to review the following materials, which provide important guidance on how applications are evaluated and the expectations of the fellowship:

- Environment Track [Review Criteria](#) (found under Selection Criteria on the ECRF Track website)
- [Terms of Agreement](#) (found under Selection Criteria on the ECRF Track website)
- For any additional questions, please contact: GulfFellowships@nas.edu

Environment Track Goal:

For the 2026-2028 Application Cycle, the Environment Track focuses on Ecosystem Health - Monitoring and Managing for Environmental Change. This track invites research that leverages innovative scientific or technological approaches to assess, monitor, or predict the resilience of critical ecosystems and species to changing conditions.

Fellows should develop or test innovative monitoring techniques and/or develop solutions that enhance a system's biodiversity or slow its loss. This work should translate into actionable management & policy strategies that sustain ecosystem services & strengthen community resilience. Special emphasis will be placed on applicants that utilize genetic/genomic/machine learning/or AI methodologies in their work.

All proposed projects must focus on communities within the U.S. Gulf region, defined as Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas, consistent with the scope of the Gulf Research Program.

General & Administrative Questions

What is the application deadline?

Applications must be submitted by **June 2, 2026, at 5:00 PM Eastern Time.**

Is feedback or reviewer commentary released with funding decisions?

Applicants who are not selected will have the opportunity to request reviewer feedback. Instructions for requesting feedback will be included with application decision notifications.

Should the application be submitted through our institution?

No. Applications are submitted directly by the applicant through the online portal. Applicants will be asked to provide Authorized Organizational Representative (AOR) information for administrative purposes during the application process. This information will only be used should they move forward to the agreement stage.

Who should serve as the Authorized Organizational Representative (AOR)?

The appropriate Authorized Organizational Representative (AOR) varies by institution. In many cases, the AOR is located within an Office of Sponsored Research, Research Administration, Research Development, or a similar office authorized to administer external awards on behalf of the institution. Applicants are encouraged to consult their institution's research administration office to identify the appropriate contact.

Can applicants apply to multiple tracks?

Yes. Applicants may apply to multiple tracks within the same application cycle. However, each application should be tailored to the specific goals and priorities of the track to which it is submitted. Applicants are encouraged to focus on the track that most closely aligns with their research area in order to submit the strongest possible application.

How many applications are typically received, and how many awards are made?

Each track typically supports approximately 7–8 fellows, depending on the quality and competitiveness of the applicant pool. Applicants are encouraged to focus on preparing a strong application aligned with the published review criteria.

Is the fellowship expected to continue in future years?

The fellowship has historically been offered on a recurring basis, subject to continued programmatic support and funding availability. Applicants should refer to the program

website in late fall or early winter for the most current information regarding following year's application cycles.

Where does the funding for this fellowship come from?

The Early-Career Research Fellowship program is supported through the Gulf Research Program (GRP) of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. Additional information about the Gulf Research Program can be found [here](#).

Eligibility & Scope Questions

Does the applicant or institution need to be located in the U.S. Gulf region?

No. Applicants and institutions are not required to be physically located within the U.S. Gulf region. However, proposed projects must clearly demonstrate relevance to environmental challenges, stewardship priorities, or communities connected to the U.S. Gulf region and align with the goal of the Environment Track.

Does the research need to occur directly in the Gulf region?

Research conducted outside the U.S. Gulf region may still be competitive if applicants clearly articulate how the work is relevant and applicable to environmental priorities, stewardship challenges, or communities within the U.S. Gulf region

Does the Gulf region include Alaska or the Gulf of Alaska?

For this fellowship opportunity, applicants should ensure their proposed work aligns with the geographic focus described in the Environment Track materials. In general, the program focuses on the U.S. Gulf Coast region. If additional geographic areas are included within a funding opportunity, this will be explicitly stated in the track description.

Proposal & Review Questions

Can you share information about who the reviewers are?

Applications are reviewed by individuals with relevant subject matter expertise spanning disciplines and perspectives appropriate to the Environment Track. Each application is reviewed by three reviewers. Review panels are designed to reflect a broad range of expertise aligned with the track priorities, and the Gulf Research Program works closely with partners to identify qualified reviewers with appropriate subject matter expertise.

Is there a preference for proposals with an AI or machine learning component?

Special emphasis will be placed on applicants that utilize genetic/genomic/machine learning/or AI methodologies in their work. However, these approaches are neither required nor expected for all projects. Applicants should incorporate AI or machine learning only when it meaningfully strengthens the proposed research design or outcomes.

Can you speak more about the emphasis on AI and machine learning?

The program recognizes that emerging tools such as artificial intelligence and machine learning may offer valuable opportunities in some environmental research contexts. However, these approaches are not required in all projects. Applicants should only incorporate AI or machine learning when it is scientifically appropriate, justified, and meaningfully enhances the proposed work.

What should be included in the statement related to personal growth?

Applicants should discuss areas of professional development they hope to strengthen during the fellowship period. This may include leadership development, mentoring, interdisciplinary collaboration, community engagement, project management, communication, or broader career goals. Reviewers are interested in understanding how the fellowship will contribute to the applicant's long-term development as an early-career researcher.

Are applicants expected to avoid certain terminology or topics?

The National Academies must remain in compliance with federal guidance as it evolves. Given this, we advise applicants to ensure their applications align with applicable executive orders and review criteria and focus on presenting a strong and well-supported proposal.

Fellowship Funding & Award Use

Can fellowship funds support students or trainees? Is there flexibility in how fellowship funds are used?

Yes. Fellowship funds may generally be used to support students, trainees, or other project-related personnel if the support is well justified and aligned with the goals of the proposed work. You can find the allowable costs for this funding opportunity under [terms of agreement](#).

Mentorship & Fellowship Experience

Are there networking opportunities for fellows?

Yes. Fellows will have opportunities to participate in networking, cohort-building and engagement activities associated with the Gulf Research Program and the broader fellowship community. Opportunities may include orientation activities, conference participation, virtual engagement opportunities, and access to the fellowship engagement platform.

Does the mentor need to be in the same institution or discipline?

No. Mentors do not need to be from the same institution or discipline. The primary consideration is whether the mentor is well positioned to provide meaningful professional guidance and support aligned with the applicant's development goals. Please note that if a mentor is outside of the applicant's affiliated organization, the mentor honorarium will be waived, and applicants will be asked to provide additional justification for the external mentor selection.

This document reflects primarily general questions relevant to broader applicants' community. Questions related to individual circumstances or eligibility determinations should be directed to gulffellowships@nas.edu for follow-up.