

HEED OPHTHALMIC FOUNDATION FELLOWSHIP APPLICATION FAQ

Please note that that application site will not be open until January 1, 2026. New accounts cannot be created at this time.

Q: I am currently in my first year of a fellowship; my fellowship is a 2-year program. Am I eligible to apply?

A: Yes.

Q: I will be applying for a HEED fellowship this upcoming Spring. I was reviewing the application requirements and noticed that a research proposal is not listed as part of the application. I wanted to confirm this is accurate, as I understand in previous years that a proposal was required. Or, should a research proposal be included in the personal statement/biosketch?

A: The application does not require a research proposal, but the Fellowship Preceptor letter is supposed to state that a minimum of 20% of your time will be spent on research. The letter can elaborate further if a research proposal is already in place and you also have opportunities to mention research in your personal statement or the biosketch if already in place, but you are not required to submit a proposal.

Q: One of my letter writers informed me that she received an incomplete link to upload her letter of recommendation.

A: I'll need to refer this to an IT staff member as I am not able to see the links on the back end of the application. Please confirm the email address of the Letter Writer you are referencing.

Q: I wanted to enquire about your citizenship criteria for the heed fellowship. On your site it mentioned the applicant has to be a citizen or naturalized citizen. I hold a US green card. Would that make me eligible to apply?

A: The terms of the trust that provides the funding requires US citizenship. The green card unfortunately is not the equivalent of US citizenship so would not qualify.

Q: My mentor wanted me to check in with you whether a single faculty member can be the research sponsor for multiple people. One of the incoming fellows starting in July had asked my mentor to sponsor them as well.

A: Yes, a mentor can sponsor more than one fellow's research.

Q: I just learned I was audited for not including my Heed fellowship funds in my 2021 tax returns. Can you confirm whether these funds should be taxable or not?

A: As I understand it, the award is an unrestricted merit award. The letter the bank sends to each Fellow confirming the amount they received each year states, "All or a portion of your award may be taxable to you. Please consult your accountant to determine the proper taxability of these funds."

Based on this wording it seems it is possible that it may be taxable, but we are not in a position to state definitively.

Q: I have started the first year of a 2-year fellowship. Do I have my fellowship program director or my residency program director write my program director letter? I couldn't quite figure that out from the website. I know most people apply as residents, but I only just obtained citizenship this month, hence my lack of application last year.

A: Residency Program Director and/or Chair where you did your residency. It can be a combined letter or either one of them. But it is the Residency Program Director they are looking for a letter from vs. the Fellowship Director.

Q: My question relates to responsibilities that occur if my project were to be awarded. Are there presentations or reports after a successfully awarded fellowship? I want to be able to let my new program director know if the ask.

A: There are no required presentations. There will be requests for a Mid-Year Fellowship Experience Report and a Final Experience report. These are only brief reports.

Q: I am interested in applying for the Heed fellowship and was wondering for the letter from the Fellowship Preceptor, should this be written by my fellowship program director or the research faculty who I would primarily be working with on research?

A: The required letter should be from the person that will oversee your Fellowship and be responsible for confirming if the program is AUPO FCC Compliant and that a minimum of 20% of your time will be spent on research. The two individuals you are inquiring about could also co-write a letter if you think that would be helpful.

Q: I am interested in applying for the Heed fellowship award this year. I applied last year but did not receive it. I tried logging into the application website and it appears my application from last year is still present in the website, and it does not allow me to edit it. Is there a way for me to reset the application?

A: We deleted your old application. Please log completely out of the application and then try logging in again. That should refresh for you so that you can start a new application. [success reported]

Q: Upon review of the application, there are 2 sections for personal statements: (I) BioSketch form and (II) the application website itself under Task 2. Are these meant to be identical statements, or is this an opportunity to share about ourselves, along with our Heed Fellowship ambitions?

A: For the application itself, please stick within the word limit, then yes, you can use the biosketch personal statement section to expand further as you wish. Not required, but acceptable to do that.

Q: Is the letter from the preceptor of your future fellowship program, a letter of recommendation or is it just a letter describing the program.

A: It is not a letter of recommendation. Ideally it is a letter specific to the fellow that details the research program and other activities of their fellowship that will prepare them for a career in Academic Ophthalmology.

Q: I plan on reapplying for the Heed Fellowship this year. Can my application from last year be unlocked so that I may edit it with a new biosketch and letter from my fellowship preceptor? Otherwise, I can create a new login using a different email.

A: We do not retain the applications from prior years; they are cleared out. Please proceed with creating an account and completing a new application. Sometimes the old application has not cleared from your cache or browsing history. If you find this to be true, please try these steps before starting a new application:

1. Open a new browser (use chrome if you are on edge or edge if you are on chrome). Login.
2. In the same browser go to <https://app.heed.org/clean>. Click on "Clear Selected Storage" once to view the items to be cleared, and then once more to clear them. The list of items to be cleared will read "0". Then login again.

Q: I've made a slight error in the preceptor letter - although my preceptor for fellowship will be writing the letter, I was supposed to send it to our program coordinator. Could you please help me change that in the system as I am not able to?

A: We can delete your original letter request, which will then allow you to submit a new request. Please log out of the application portal and then back in to refresh before you submit a new request.

Q: I understand that a letter of recommendation from the Chair of the department or program director is typically required for the application. During my residency, our program was undergoing a transition period, and as a result, we did not have an established Chair or program director. In these circumstances, would a letter of recommendation from the Vice Chair of the department be acceptable at all? Given the continuity of their position, the Vice Chair supervised me the most during my training and is well-acquainted with my performance and capabilities.

A: The letter of recommendation should be from the Chair or Program Director (or a combined letter from both. If the Chair or Program Director is willing to have the Vice Chair co-author the letter that would be acceptable, too. (Feedback from Dr. Wilson after sharing above question: I don't see that he addressed the Program Director as the logical alternative to The Chair. It would be fine to get a letter from the Program Director, and as all Residency Programs are required by ACGME to have a Program Director, there should be someone in that position who could provide a letter.)

Q: I had a question regarding the Heed application. I graduated residency June 2024 and am currently a first-year surgical retina fellow at Retina Group of Washington. The application asks for a letter of recommendation from my chairman or program director. Can the letter be from my fellowship program director or does it have to be my residency program director?

A: There are 2 required letters. The letter of recommendation must be from either the Chair or the Program Director for the residency program; or a combined letter from both of them is also acceptable. The Fellowship Director cannot be substituted for this letter.

The second letter is a letter from your Fellowship Director. That letter should confirm that at least 20% of your time will be spent on research and it should also confirm whether the fellowship program is AUPO FCC compliant or not. If they wish to add additional information about their

experiences with you or the research that is acceptable but this letter is not considered a letter of recommendation.

Q: I am very interested in applying for the Heed Fellowship. As a lawful permanent resident (Green Card holder), I would like to kindly inquire about my eligibility to apply.

A: The trust that was established for the Heed fellowships requires US citizenship. That can be by birth, or naturalized through the citizenship process. The green card allows you to live and work permanently in the US, but it is not the same as citizenship. Without citizenship, you are unfortunately not eligible for a Heed Fellowship.

Q: I will be starting my fellowship in Neuro-ophthalmology and wish to apply for the Heed Fellowship. On the applicant page it states that the applicant should submit a letter from the Ophthalmology Chair who supervised the applicant's residency. My residency is in Neurology, so I just wanted to confirm that I am still eligible to apply and should submit a letter from my Neurology Chair?

A: Yes eligible and Yes from Neurology Chair.

Fellowship Not Awarded Q & A

Q: I applied for the Heed fellowship last year, but unfortunately it didn't work out for me. Am I eligible to apply again in my second year of fellowship?

A: Yes.

Q: I applied previously and was not selected. Is there any specific reason it didn't work out for me that might help me as I put my application together for this year?

A: The Committee's decisions are confidential. Approximately 100 applications are received annually with around 20 fellowships funded each year. Competition is high. When eligible, you are encouraged to apply again.

Q: I heard back that I was not selected for the Heed fellowship. I am in a 2-year fellowship so might apply next year if there is anything that I can improve/change in the application in between. Do you know if it would be possible to get some feedback from the committee on my application?

A: The Committee's decisions are confidential. Approximately 100 applications are received annually with around 20 fellowships funded each year. Competition is high. When eligible, you are encouraged to apply again.

Troubleshooting application issues:

Q: I received a request to submit a Letter of Recommendation for an applicant. The system generated link was incomplete. Can you please send me a functional link/URL?

A: Please add <https://app.need.org> to the beginning of the url and it should work properly, taking you to the letter submission portal.

Q: I need to delete one of the Letter Requests that I sent in order to resend to someone else. Can you help?

A: Yes, with your permission, I can delete the Letter Request that you sent so that you send to a new person. After you are notified that the letter request has been deleted, be sure to log out of the portal and then back in to refresh.

Q: I am trying to upload the Heed fellowship letter. I am able to upload the letter but I do not see an area in which to send the document. Is there problems with the website today?

A: I am verifying that I see the letter uploaded. The process is to upload directly into the application, vs. send to the application, which you have done. All looks fine on the back end.

Q: I've been asked to submit a LOR for 3 Heed fellowship applicants Drs. X, Y and Z. I uploaded their letters through the portal via the links sent to me. But some of them told me that the letters still appear missing from their ends. I re-uploaded all 3 letters again this morning and I'm attaching my confidential letters for each of their applications to you in this email, so that I do not delay or jeopardize their applications.

A: The problem you are encountering is most likely that the documents you are trying to upload are Word documents instead of PDFs. If you save the letters as PDFs first, you should be able to upload them. Would you like to give that a try?