



LLS Application and Fellowship Experience Frequently Asked Questions

This Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) resource provides additional information on the content covered during CDC’s [Laboratory Leadership Service \(LLS\)](#) informational program and recruiting [webinars](#). Please contact the LLS program (LLS@cdc.gov) with additional questions.

Useful Links

- Laboratory Leadership Service (LLS) Fellowship: [Laboratory Leadership Service \(LLS\) | CDC](#)
 - CDC Fellowship Programs: [Fellowships and Student Programs | CDC](#)
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LLS Fellowship Application

What are the eligibility requirements for LLS?

- LLS applicants must meet the following requirements to be eligible:
 - U.S. Citizen or permanent resident *at the time of application*
 - If you are in the process of obtaining U.S. permanent residency at the time of application, you will not be considered eligible for the program.
 - Qualifying degree:
 - Doctoral-level degree in a laboratory related discipline (e.g., microbiology, molecular biology, organic chemistry, environmental chemistry, genetics, bioinformatics); other health professionals are welcome to apply, but you must also hold a relevant doctoral-level degree. Degree must be conferred by March 31st of the year you enter the fellowship.
 - For example, fellows beginning the fellowship in July 2023, must have defended and conferred their degree by March 31, 2023.

Am I eligible for LLS if my degree is from a non-U.S. university or institution?

- LLS eligibility is not based on where your degree is earned (see eligibility requirements above). Foreign degrees (those conferred by a university or institution outside the United States and its territories) are accepted.
- Foreign degree transcripts must be in English to be accepted as-is. Transcripts in other languages require a credential evaluation.
- LLS is aware that some universities (e.g., University of Cambridge) do not provide transcripts for conferred degrees. In these situations, applicants are asked to upload a copy of their course list to accompany transcripts.

If I have a foreign degree, do I need a credential evaluation?

- A credential evaluation is only needed if your transcripts are not in English.
- A foreign degree credential evaluation is required at the time the application is submitted for all degrees for which English-language transcripts are not available.
- Note, a credential evaluation is not the same as a translation service.

Do I have to have my official transcripts to apply to LLS?

- You are required to upload a copy (unofficial or official) of your transcripts for all conferred degrees during the application process.
- Official transcripts will be required if you are accepted into the LLS fellowship; accepted fellows will receive transcript submission instructions after match.

What type of research and work experience should I include in my LLS application?

- Research and work experience should include your ability to take initiative and allow us to infer something about your leadership ability or potential. Be thorough and organized. List your most recent experience first. Consider the following:
 - Can you manage complex research projects?
 - Have you worked in or developed successful collaborations?
 - Are there examples of your communication and presentation skills?
- For candidates who haven't yet finished their Ph.D., include your doctoral training as part of your research experience. Be sure to give enough details to reviewers to understand the scope of the project and any technical skills you gained through that experience.
- Don't forget to highlight your leadership experience, where applicable, including opportunities that resulted in publications, relevant abstracts, or presentations.

Is volunteer experience an important part of the LLS application?

- LLS is a service-learning program. Volunteerism and being service-oriented are important and are scored elements of the application. You will want to share details about how you've helped or supported others, perhaps through mentorship or volunteerism. Use this opportunity to show how you are service-oriented.

Will I have to write an essay for my LLS application?

- Applicants are asked to provide brief responses to a few personal statement questions about career goals and interest in public health.

What makes for a strong personal statement in an LLS application?

- The application includes a few personal statement-type questions. This is where you can share your career goals and your passion for public health.
- You should be prepared to discuss:
 - Why is LLS the right fit for you?
 - Why is LLS the next logical step in your career?
 - How the program will help you reach your career goals in public health.
- Consider the following for your responses:
 - Where do you want to be in 5-10 years? Is it in public health?
 - What about the LLS fellowship appeals to you?
 - What skills or experiences do you need that LLS can help you obtain?
- Do your homework and study up on the program by visiting the [LLS website](#), talking with fellows and alumni, and asking questions of the program staff so that you can provide informed responses.
- Don't forget to show us your personality!

Whom should I ask to submit letters of recommendation for my LLS application?

- Two letters of recommendation are required for the application. *Choose your recommenders carefully.*
- Recommendations should be from supervisors or senior mentors who know you well and can speak to your accomplishments, scientific skill, leadership potential, ability to manage projects and your time, and overall suitability for the program. Examples of suitable recommenders include:
 - Direct supervisors from a job
 - Doctoral or postdoctoral advisor
 - A member of your thesis or dissertation committee that was hands-on and involved.
- Reach out to your recommenders in advance about your application to let them know that the recommendation is not a traditional letter but a standardized format with specific questions (with the opportunity to provide additional comments).
A poor recommendation can hurt your application score, but also reflect poorly on you if you've selected a person who is altogether an inappropriate choice.

Is it important to reach out to current and former LLS fellows?

- Current fellows and alumni are a great resource to learn more about the application and interview process. They are also a great resource to learn more about LLS and the fellowship experience.
- LLS fellows and alumni are happy to chat with and support you, share their experiences, and give feedback on your application so that you can submit your application with confidence. This "insider info" is available to everyone.
- You can find LLS fellows and alumni on the LLS website. If you need help with contact information, the program can help connect you. Making these connections, even attending more than one of the informational webinars, can really help give perspective about the application and the overall process.

How will my LLS application be scored?

- Your application will be scored by a panel that will review the different sections of the application:
 - academic achievement
 - training and skills
 - awards and merit-based fellowships
 - presentations and publication history
 - work and volunteer experience
 - personal statement
 - letters of recommendation
- Reviewers will also look for your leadership and project management potential throughout the application.
- When completing your application, consider these points to improve your score:
 - Your **academic record** should reflect a consistently high level of achievement in undergraduate and graduate school.
 - You should provide **training and skills** that illustrate opportunities such as certifications, workshops, and professional development opportunities that have provided skills development. Do not include training required for routine lab work, such as blood-borne pathogens or biosafety cabinet training.
 - The **awards, merit-based fellowship, and honors** section of the application allow you to highlight the overall scope of your laboratory training and experience.
 - Peer-reviewed **publications and presentations** are scored during the review process. In this section, avoid including any working papers or papers in progress. If you include any presentations, be sure to add details, such as whether the presentation was a poster or an oral presentation.
 - **Volunteer experience** is a scored element of the application. Reviewers will use this section to make inferences about your service-oriented mindset, initiative, accountability, and leadership potential. Note that when assessing leadership potential, reviewers look at experience and positions, including volunteer positions.
 - Reviewers will assess your **project management potential** by looking at areas where you demonstrated that you are capable of managing or leading multiple or complex projects or project priorities. This can include skills such as managing your time well to ensure project activities are completed on time.
 - Your **personal statement** is an important scored element of the application. Scores are based on your ability to clearly express (1) reasons that influenced you to consider a career in public health, (2) the impact of LLS on your career path and how it will help achieve your goals, and (3) skills that you are seeking to develop or improve during the fellowship. We will also review your personal statement for grammatical errors, sentence structure, and logical flow and reasoning.
 - **Letters of recommendation** are the last element of the application that is scored. LLS reviewers will review comments on your ability to manage tasks and projects timely, your ability to take initiative, how you respond to constructive feedback, and your working relationships with others.

What is the timeline for the overall LLS selection process?

- The LLS selection process includes the application, application reviews, program interviews, host site interviews, and finally, determining a quality match between candidates and host sites.
- LLS matches to select the class.
- The selection process begins in March and runs through the first week of November.
 - March – June: Fellow application
 - June – July: Application review
 - August: Program interviews
 - September: Pre-match interviews with eligible laboratory host sites (not offered every year)
 - October: Regular match interviews with laboratory host sites

- Late October/early November: Candidates are notified whether they have matched with a laboratory host site and are accepted to the LLS class
- Following July: Fellowship Begins (with month-long orientation training in Atlanta, GA)

How many applicants are accepted as LLS fellows each year?

- LLS seeks to accept at least 12 fellows each year, but this number can vary depending on the available budget.

Are there additional resources available that can help me prepare my LLS application?

- We encourage all applicants to attend one of the LLS informational webinars to learn from the program and our current fellows about the application process. [Informational Webinars for Fellowship Applicants | Application Information | Laboratory Leadership Service \(LLS\) | CDC](#)
- Participate in [LLS Office Hours](#). LLS program staff and current fellows will be available to answer your application questions.
- You can also visit the LLS website and reach out to the LLS program (lls@cdc.gov) with your application questions.
- LLS will also help connect you with current fellows and alumni for additional support during the application process. If you are interested in connecting with an LLS fellow or alumna, please email lls@cdc.gov.

Do I have to have public health experience to be accepted into the LLS program?

- You do not need to have public health experience to be accepted into the LLS program. It is important to communicate or share your passion for public health in your personal statement.
- LLS is a training fellowship and will help you gain experience in public health. Many LLS fellows enter the program with limited to no experience in public health.

What if I am interested in both the LLS and EIS fellowships?

- It is not uncommon for LLS applicants to also apply for the EIS fellowship. If you are interested in both and do apply for both, we only ask that you keep the LLS program informed of your status.
- The LLS and EIS timelines do overlap, and in the later stages of the selection process, the LLS team will reach out to you and make you aware of any key dates and activities that may affect your participation in either selection process.

Fellowship Experience and Training

What will I learn in LLS?

- LLS provides training and experiences which are based on competencies that scientists will need to be leaders in the public health laboratory workforce, including applied laboratory research, quality management, biosafety, leadership, communication, and bioinformatics.
LLS is the only public health laboratory fellowship program that provides comprehensive training (experiential, didactic, field deployment) in all these areas.

What type of training can I expect during my LLS fellowship?

- During the 2-year fellowship, fellows learn through service and hands-on assignments under the guidance of seasoned mentors and supervisors; rigorous, didactic coursework; case studies; and e-learning.
- Fellows complete Core Activities of Learning (CALs) that align with the program's training competencies that develop skill and proficiency in each domain.
- Leadership training and opportunities are woven throughout the training competencies and CAL projects.
- Fellows conduct applied laboratory research to address a public health or safety-related issue, assess laboratory quality management systems, conduct a laboratory safety risk assessment, give scientific presentations, and write a first-author scientific manuscript for a peer-reviewed journal.

- To learn more about what LLS fellows do and examples of fellowship training activities, visit the [LLS website](#).

Do LLS fellows collaborate with Epidemic Intelligence Service (EIS) officers?

- LLS fellows frequently collaborate with EIS officers on field investigations and outbreak responses. Whenever possible, the LLS and EIS programs combine the laboratory and epidemiologic expertise of their fellows so these disease detectives can apply a comprehensive approach to complex public health issues.
- LLS fellows also participate in training with EIS Officers during first and second year summer course and during fall course. This provides the opportunity to network with fellows and EIS Officers.

Do LLS fellows participate in deployments or other field experiences?

- Yes. LLS fellows participate in deployments and other field experiences as the need arises. LLS fellows provide service to CDC through collaboration and support during field investigations and outbreak responses, including large-scale responses to protect public health.
- LLS fellows may also have the opportunity to lead a Lab-Aid. A Lab-Aid is a mechanism for providing rapid, short-term support to state, local, and federal public health labs for critical laboratory testing or operational needs. Lab-Aids give LLS fellows the opportunity to assume leadership roles, supported by a CDC subject matter experience, to address an urgent public health concern that may be conducted in the field.

Am I expected to present or publish my work as an LLS fellow?

- LLS fellows are expected to complete each of the ten (10) CALs or core activities of learning by the end of the two-year fellowship. Three of the CALs focus on presentation and publication.
- Fellows will need to give a 10–20-minute oral presentation to a scientific audience, an in-depth public health talk on their original LLS work or field of study and write a first-author scientific manuscript for a peer-reviewed journal.
- In addition to completing the CALs, fellows are encouraged to present and publish their work as appropriate during their fellowship.

Will I have to travel as an LLS fellow?

- Yes. Some travel will be required as an LLS fellow. LLS will coordinate all required travel, pay for airfare, and reimburse lodging and meals and incidentals expenses at the federal per diem rate.
- Required training courses such as first and second year summer courses and fall course are in-person and held in Atlanta, GA. Fellows are required to attend in person.
- The Laboratory Immersive Training Experience (LITE) is a two-week training experience coordinated with an LLS partner jurisdictional and select CDC headquarters labs that provide an immersive experience in laboratory operations, leadership, lab quality, testing regulations, and public health laboratory collaboration. Travel is required for LITE, but exceptions can be made for those with geographic restrictions.
- Other travel may arise depending on whether fellows participate in deployments, Lab-Aids, or Epi-Aids as opportunities arise.

What types of jobs do LLS fellows have after they graduate?

- Over 90% of LLS graduates remain in public health, and the majority accept positions with CDC.
- LLS fellows routinely accept positions that align with one or more of the fellowship competencies, e.g., positions in applied laboratory health research, laboratory or laboratory science-related operations and management, quality management, and communications. Examples of these positions are available on the [LLS website's alumni webpage](#).

- LLS is a training fellowship, not a hiring mechanism. The fellowship program cannot guarantee a fellow a position after completing the program. However, the program offers individualized support to second-year fellows to network, identify available positions, and submit applications.

LLS Host Sites and Locations

Where will I work as an LLS fellow?

- LLS fellows work in CDC public health laboratories at the CDC headquarters and other CDC locations throughout the United States as well as jurisdictional, state, local, or territorial public health labs.
- During the LLS match process, typically in September, LLS candidates receive a list of the host sites and a position description about the fellowship opportunity at each host site.

Will LLS pay to relocate me to my laboratory host site location?

- Federal civilian employees cannot receive relocation expenses support. USPHS officers are eligible for relocation in accordance with Department of Defense policies and processes.

Is there a list of host sites I can review in advance of applying?

- LLS host site partners change every year and are not provided in advance of the fellow application. You are encouraged to visit the LLS website and review current LLS fellows and alumni to learn more about the types of LLS host site partners.
- Host site information is shared with LLS candidates during the match process.

Employment & Benefits

Are LLS fellows CDC employees?

- Yes. LLS fellows are CDC employees and are hired through a Title-42 civil service appointment.

What is the United States Public Health Service (USPHS) and how is this hiring mechanism different than Title-42?

- Title-42 is the initial appointment for incoming fellows; the U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS) Commissioned Corps is alternative option for U.S. Citizens. U.S. permanent residents are eligible only for civil service.
- USPHS is a specialized career system designed to attract, develop, and retain health professionals to accomplish its mission. Incoming LLS fellows must apply and meet the eligibility criteria for the Commissioned Corp:
 - U.S. Citizen
 - Under 44 years of age at the date of entry into LLS
 - Have a degree in an appropriate health-related discipline
 - Meet medical standards
- [USPHS](#) is one of the United States' seven uniformed services. Fellows who enlist in USPHS are subject to all policies and requirements of service. Interested candidates are encouraged to speak with current and former fellows who are USPHS officers.

What will my salary be as an LLS fellow?

- The entry grade will be set comparable to the Federal Government General Schedule (GS) base pay rate equivalent of GS-12, step 3 regardless of previous experience and compensation. An additional locality pay, for non-medical LLS fellows, is based on the location of the official duty station.

- Fellows receive a step increase to GS-12, step 4 after the first year.
- [Federal salaries vary by location](#); note adjustment(s) to locality pay for field assignments.
- Pay is the same if you are a USPHS officer, but USPHS officers also receive a housing allowance stipend based on their locality.

Will I receive federal leave, health, and retirement benefits as an LLS fellow?

- Yes. LLS fellows will receive federal benefits, including the following:
 - Thrift Savings Plan
 - Federal Employees Retirement System Benefit Plan
 - Federal Employees Health Benefits Plan
 - Federal Employees Group Life Insurance
 - Federal Employees Vision and Dental Insurance Program
 - 4 hours of annual leave and 4 hours of sick leave every 2 weeks (13 days) total of each