

# 2027 Knauss Fellowship Summary

To support programs in their recruitment efforts, the National Sea Grant Office (NSGO) provides the following summary of key points for consideration as a supplement to the NOFO requirements.

## Eligibility

Any student is eligible to submit to this opportunity if:

- The student is a U.S. Citizen (born or naturalized), a U.S. Lawful Permanent Resident (Green Card holder), or a U.S. dual national;
  - Dual nationals, please note: Dual nationals are eligible for both the executive and legislative cohorts. However, a significant number of participating federal host offices are unable to accept dual nationals as fellows. This may reduce the number of placement opportunities available to dual citizens.
- The student is enrolled towards a degree in a graduate program at any point between the onset of the 2025 Fall Term (quarter, trimester, semester, etc.) and June 3, 2026;
- The graduate degree will be awarded through an accredited institution of higher education in the United States or U.S. Territories, and;
- The student has an interest in ocean, coastal, and Great Lakes resources and in the national policy decisions affecting those resources.
- The one-year fellowship will take place in the National Capital region. Applicants must be prepared to relocate to the Washington, D.C. area.
- Applicants must be able to pass a federal background security check. Most positions require a public trust clearance; some require a secret clearance. Finalists will be asked detailed questions about their personal history. An example of a security background form is available [here](#). Please note that federal laws supersede state laws.

## Application Process

- Having access to materials from previous Knauss Fellowship applications can be a useful reference; however, students should not copy materials directly. The NSGO recommends that students have coaching sessions or conversations with previous fellows, rather than direct access to application materials.

- Applicants who have been accepted as national finalists and/or become fellows are not eligible to apply again without the written permission of the NSGO Fellowships Manager. Permission may only be granted in response to exceptional life events. A national finalist is an applicant who completes the review process and is selected at the national level for the fellowship program. Applicants are considered finalists until they are paired with a host office during the placement process.
- Any prior contact/arrangements made with potential host offices before the start of the placement week will result in immediate disqualification from the process.

## As Knauss Fellows

Participation in the Knauss Fellowship is a privilege, not a right. The year will ultimately be what a fellow makes of it and what they choose to learn from it. Fellows should expect growing pains—new offices, new people, new places. How a fellow approaches, grows and learns from these challenges is up to the fellow and can make or break a fellowship experience. While we hope and anticipate that everyone feels fulfilled and leaves the fellowship with a positive experience, learning that policy, the federal government process, a desk job, or a leadership style is not the right fit is also beneficial. The Knauss program is an extension of a fellow's education. Fellows should approach the year with an open mind and a chance to learn about themselves and the breadth of the federal government.

Applicants should consider the following information before applying:

- The Fellowship is a non-partisan program. Applicants should prepare materials to reflect a non-partisan approach to issues and be willing to work across the ideological spectrum on ocean, coastal, and Great Lakes-related issues.
- Some host offices will review a finalist's social media and other internet activities.
- The Knauss Fellowship is an extension of a student's education. The program expects participants to engage in professional development and complete all mandatory reporting requirements.
- Knauss fellows are representatives of both their placement office and the Sea Grant program. Fellows may be expected to draft or implement policies (within the law) in line with their offices' expectations. At times, personal opinion will be superseded by office priorities.
- The Direct Hire Authority (DHA) is a benefit of the program. Receiving the DHA is contingent upon the successful completion of the fellowship, which includes, but is not limited to, completing 10 full months of the program, maintaining good standing with the host office, and participating in programmatic professional development activities.

- Knauss fellows are not federal employees; however, they are subject to host office and university policies regarding telework, working hours, and travel. This may mean that fellows are subject to federal travel restrictions.

## Executive vs Legislative

The Sea Grant Knauss Fellowship has two tracks for fellows: the Legislative and Executive cohorts. Following selection, student applicants (finalists) will have the opportunity to learn from the fellowships team and program alumni about the differences between the cohorts. Finalists will have the opportunity to express their interest in either cohort. Additionally, finalists will be asked to complete additional tasks, such as a questionnaire and professional writing samples, to assess fit for the cohort.

### Legislative Cohort

Congress, established by Article 1 of the Constitution, is the legislative branch and law-making body of the US federal government. Congress is composed of the Senate and the House of Representatives. In addition to writing laws, Congress is responsible for oversight of the executive branch through hearings and investigations.

The Legislative Cohort places fellows in Congressional members' offices and committees, where they work with staffers on national and state priority topics, including the environment, coasts, and beyond.

### Typical Day as a Legislative Fellow

- In many cases, a host office is looking for a fellow who can translate and understand science broadly, not just on a very specific topic. Often, Knauss fellows serve as scientific experts and researchers for their office.
- Subject matter is dictated by the office, what legislation is moving on the floor, and new hot issues, and may change without much warning.
- Fellows are expected to prepare briefings and talking points for upcoming hearings or meetings.
- Fellows may draft (or redraft) legislation. This includes starting from the beginning or picking up where another staff member has left off, depending on the voting cycle.
- Fellows may be expected to find cosponsors for bills of interest.
- Fellows will be expected to take meetings with and respond to constituents.

Student applicants are encouraged to consider the legislative cohort if any of the following fit their goals:

- Enjoy fast-paced work and the opportunity to address a wide range of tasks each day.
- Able to work for and communicate respectfully with people and organizations that hold differing viewpoints.
- Able to work in open-space, often busy environments, and able to balance personal working needs with frequent engagements.
- Enjoy quickly digesting and distilling information to provide a concise perspective or recommendation on actions or next steps, along with an ability to back up decisions with evidence. Long stretches of time to do deep dives on research are extremely rare.
- Open to working across topical areas related to the environment, ocean, energy and community issues.

### Executive Cohort

The executive branch of the U.S. government, headed by the President and Vice President, is responsible for implementing, enforcing, and administering federal laws. The executive branch includes 15 executive departments and over 50 independent agencies, which are responsible for implementing the laws enacted by Congress.

Sea Grant fellows have been placed across the executive branch from the White House Office of Science Technology and Policy to the State Department and U.S. Coast Guard, as well as across NOAA Line Offices. There are typically two types of positions in the executive branch: those that are highly focused on a particular topic, where fellows can become subject-matter experts, and those at higher levels of the agency, which provide a broad view of how executive branch offices implement laws and execute budgets and projects.

### Typical Day as an Executive Fellow

- Fellows work as part of a team, and may support a specific issue area, a broad office portfolio or both.
- Fellows may research issues, gather information and prepare summaries or briefing materials for leadership.
- Fellows may respond to requests and help coordinate time-sensitive projects or priorities.
- Fellows may draft reports, memos, correspondence or responses to congressional and interagency requests.
- Fellows may support, and in some cases, lead project management, strategic planning and implementation of efforts.

- Fellows may develop expertise in a focused topic area or contribute across a wide range of subjects related to the host office.

Student applicants are encouraged to consider the executive cohort if any of the following fit their goals:

- Excited to gain experience working within the executive branch and contribute to an agency's mission.
- Are interested in learning how federal policies, priorities and decisions are implemented in practice.
- Gain exposure to the intersection of science, policy, management and public service.
- Are eager to deepen expertise in a familiar topic or to expand their knowledge by working in a new subject area or function.