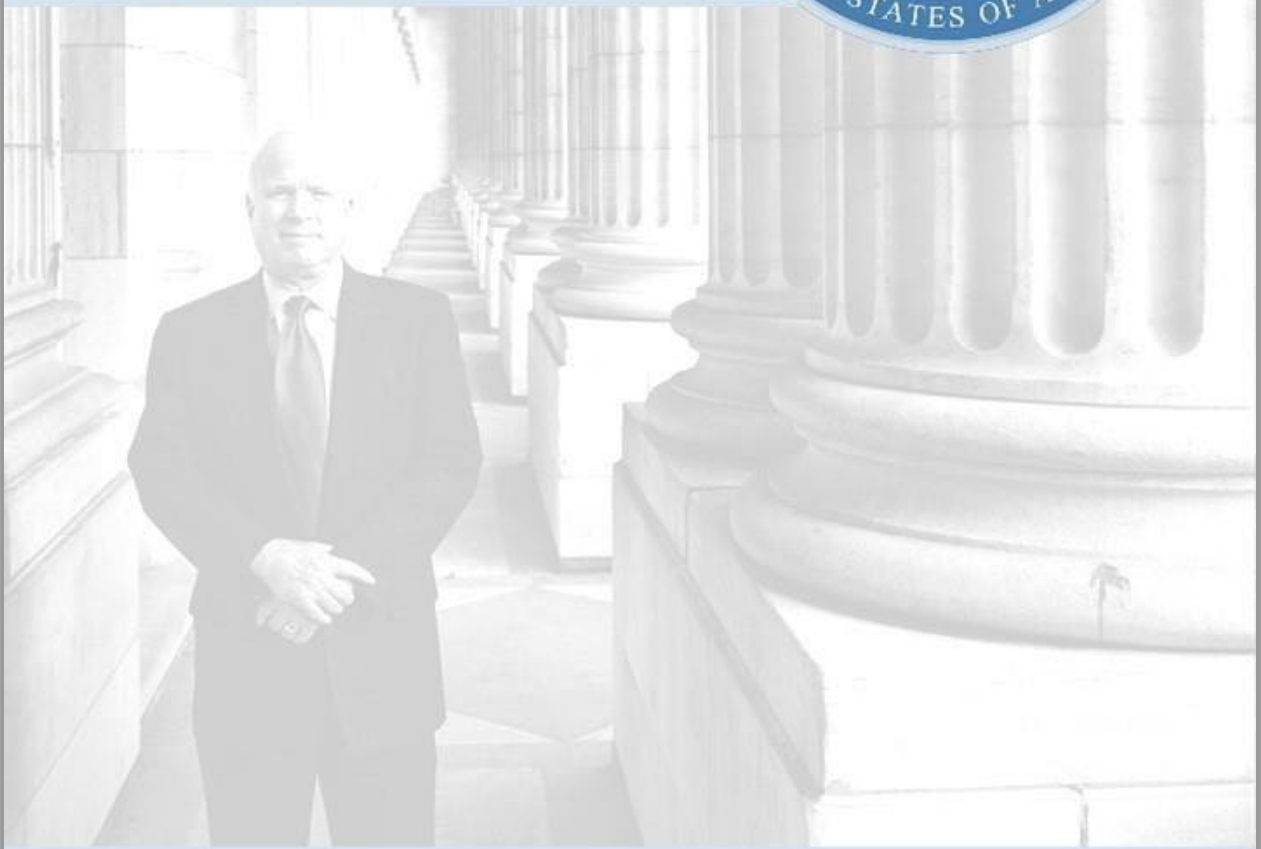


# Frequently Asked Questions



**John S. McCain  
Strategic Defense  
Fellowship Program**

# John S. McCain Strategic Defense Fellowship Program Frequently Asked Questions

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### General Program Questions

**1. What grade level are Fellows appointed into at the start of their one-year Fellowship?**

The National Defense Authorization Act of Fiscal Year 2024 allows participants to be appointed at grade levels between the GS-10 and GS-12 (inclusive of DC Metro Locality Pay). Advertised grade levels will be based on needs identified by the Sponsoring Components. Eligibility for the GS-11 and GS-12 positions will be based on an applicant's resume demonstrating one year of specialized work experience (12 months or 52 weeks) at the preceding grade level. Additionally, Fellows are eligible to receive federal employee benefits during their one-year fellowship.

**2. Who are the sponsoring organizations?**

The sponsoring organizations that may host a Fellow are the Department of Defense components and the Offices of the Secretaries of the Military Departments.

**3. What job series is the Department of Defense seeking to fill with Cohort 5 applicants?**

We're accepting applicants for following job series:

- Human Resources (0201)
- Foreign Affairs (0130)
- Management Analyst (0343)
- Logistics Management (0346)
- Financial Administration & Program Analysis (0501)
- Operations Research Analysis (1515)
- Human Resources (2210)

**4. Does the program accept individuals with disabilities?**

Yes. Individuals with disabilities are not prohibited from applying to participate in the John S. McCain Strategic Defense Fellowship Program.

**5. Are Fellows eligible for reimbursement of relocation costs upon appointment?**

Fellows that have qualifying relocation expenses may apply to receive benefits up to \$5,000. Fellows may elect to apply for the relocation incentive if they have to relocate more than 50 miles to the new duty station area. Additionally, Fellows must relocate no earlier than the acceptance of the Tentative Job Offer and provide supporting documentation. Fellows who accept the relocation incentive will be required to sign a 1-year continued service agreement and successfully complete the program.

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### **6. Does the McCain Fellowship Program offer the Student Loan Repayment Incentive?**

The Student Loan Repayment Incentives may be offered based on program funding availability and fellow eligibility. The McCain Fellowship Program may offer the Student Loan Repayment Incentive for Fellows who are selected into the Program. The Student Loan Repayment Incentive may only be offered to Fellows who have federal education loans for their advanced degrees. The incentive cannot be used to cover loans for undergraduate degrees. Fellows who accept the Student Loan Repayment Incentive will be required to sign a 1-year continued service agreement which covers the duration of the full fellowship year. Removal from the program or voluntary departure during the Fellowship year will result in the Fellow having to reimburse the Department for the incurred cost of the Student Loan Repayment Incentive.

### **7. Are relocation and student loan incentives taxable?**

Yes. In accordance with Federal tax regulations, both relocation and student loan incentives are taxed.

### **8. Does the McCain Fellowship Program offer training opportunities?**

Yes. Fellows may take advantage of training opportunities provided by the Department or as recommended by their hosting organization. The McCain Fellowship Program subsidizes up to \$5,000 in training costs per Fellow during the Fellowship year. Any training costs incurred beyond the \$5,000 will be the responsibility of the hosting organization or the Fellow.

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### Applicant Eligibility Questions

- 1. I have an undergraduate degree but not an advanced degree. May I still apply?**

Only those that have obtained a graduate degree or higher from an accredited institution of higher education; or those that will be awarded an advanced degree within six months after applying are eligible. The advanced degree must not have been awarded later than two years before the date of acceptance into the Fellowship program; OR, no later than six months after application.
- 2. What is an advanced degree?**

An advanced degree is defined as a professional or graduate degree (e.g., Master's, Ph.D., J.D.) earned from an accredited higher education institution.
- 3. I already have completed my advanced degree and heard about the McCain Fellowship Program. Can I still apply?**

To be eligible, the advanced degree must not have been awarded later than two years before the date of acceptance into the Fellowship program or later (Master's degree or above) completion. Applicants expecting to graduate within six months after applying are also eligible to apply. Applicants must meet all advanced degree requirements, including the completion and/or successful defense of any required thesis or dissertations to be eligible.
- 4. I am currently pursuing my advanced degree and heard about the McCain Fellows Program. Can I still apply?**

Students may apply during their last semester or year as long as they complete their advanced degree and graduate within six months after applying to the Fellowship Program. This includes the completion or successful defense of any required thesis or dissertation. If the applicant fails to graduate or receive their advanced degree within six months after applying to the program, even if selected, they cannot participate in the program and may be removed from the program. The McCain Fellows Program is a full time and competitive one-year fellowship program. McCain Fellows must be recent graduates and are not concurrently in school.
- 5. I previously applied to the program and did not get selected. Can I apply again for the next cohort?**

Eligible applicants can re-apply for the next cohort. Applicants must re-submit their complete application packages prior to the deadline. Applicants can submit previous recommendation letters as long as the issued dates are within one year.
- 6. I am a U.S. Citizen or lawful U.S. permanent resident. Do I need to provide proof of citizenship or permanent residence?**

Yes. Applicants must be U.S. Citizens or lawful U.S. permanent residents and must provide proof of citizenship during the onboarding process and security investigation, if selected.
- 7. The application requirements include "Passing background and security investigations," so do I need to have a security clearance when I apply?**

No. A security clearance at the time of application is not required. If selected, Fellows will undergo a security clearance process and must successfully obtain a security clearance to become a McCain Fellow.

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### Supporting Documents Questions

**1. What resume format should be used? Should it be a “Federal Resume”?**

Applicant’s resume should be in a federal resume format and must contain the following, at a minimum: applicant name, contact information and email address, educational institution, qualifying degree programs, and work experience. Work experience should include job title, employer and supervisor name and contact, position status (full-time or part-time position), the number of hours worked per week, annual salary, detailed description of job duties, skills, and accomplishments. If work experience was in a federal position, series and grade as well as clearance level should be included. Additional information about federal resumes can be found on USA Jobs and on the McCain Fellows Program website.

**2. The application package requires two letters of recommendation and an endorsement letter. What is the difference between a letter of recommendation and an endorsement letter?**

A letter of recommendation addresses the applicant’s character, academic ability, and any extracurricular activities. A letter of recommendation may be from your current or previous professors, dean, academic advisor, coach, etc.

An endorsement letter endorses you for the position you are applying to and must come from the applicant’s graduate institution of higher learning. The endorser should include how long they have known you, in what capacity, and the qualities that may make you a suitable candidate for the position. They may include your accomplishments or abilities they’ve observed from you in the aforementioned capacity.

**3. Is there a page limit or character limit for the academic writing sample?**

No, there are no page limits or character limit for the academic writing sample. Applicants may submit a writing sample of any length.

**4. The application package requests a personal statement explaining career areas of interest and motivations for service in the Department. Is there a page limit or character limit for this essay?**

No, there is no page limit or character limit for the essay of interest and motivation in working for the Department of Defense.

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### Educational Requirements/Transcripts Questions

**1. Do I need to submit both my undergraduate and graduate official transcripts?**

Yes, you will need to submit both your undergraduate and graduate official transcripts to identify your degrees and issuing academic institutions.

**2. Can I include the unofficial transcript in my application package instead of the official transcript?**

Yes, the McCain Fellowship Program can accept unofficial transcripts for the purpose of the application package. If selected, finalists will need to arrange to have their official conferred transcript sent to the Program Office during the onboarding phase.

**3. I am currently pursuing my advanced degree and have not yet graduated. I will graduate within the 6-month time frame of applying to the program. My conferred transcript will not be available until then. How do I apply?**

Applicants who will graduate within the 6-month period of applying to the program may submit their unofficial transcript in the application package. If selected, applicants will need to have their official transcript sent to the Program Office and if it is non-conferred, a letter of enrollment from their registrar office will be required. Fellows will have up to six months after their start date to submit their conferred graduate transcripts to the Program Office. Failure to provide a conferred graduate transcript during that 6-month period will result in removal from the program.

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### Application Process Questions

**1. How can I find out about the next McCain Fellows application cycle?**

Application period and announcements will be posted on the McCain Fellows public website.

Applicants may also find the McCain Application Announcement on USA Jobs during the application period.

**2. Where do I apply for the next McCain Cohort?**

Prospective applicants will apply through the McCain Fellowship Job Posting on USAJobs. The application announcement will be posted on USAJobs during the application period. To learn about the application period dates, please refer to the McCain Fellows public website.

**3. Can applicants or finalists request an extension or a deferral for their application?**

The McCain Fellowship Program does not allow for extensions or deferrals. All applications must be completed and submitted by the application deadline to be considered.

**4. I applied for the upcoming McCain Cohort. When do I find out if I have been selected?**

Applications will be reviewed after the application period is closed. Applicants who are ineligible will receive a notification via USA Jobs. The McCain Fellowship Program Office will review the remaining applicants to determine if they are qualified for the Fellowship positions and referral to participating DoD organizations. This process may take up to 30 to 45 days and applicants will be notified when they are referred for selection.

**5. How are applicants evaluated?**

Applicants are evaluated based on their overall application package, as well as their eligibility and qualification for the positions being filled. The Program Office will evaluate each applicant to determine if they are eligible and qualified to fill the positions needed and will refer qualified applicants to participating DoD organizations. Participating organizations will evaluate referred applicants and interview interested candidates.

**6. I was interviewed by a participating DoD organization. What is the next step?**

Participating DoD organizations will make their selections after the interview phase and will notify the McCain Program Office of their selections. The McCain Program Office will extend Tentative Job Offer (TJO) to selected applicants. Applicants who were not selected after the interview phase may be notified of their status.

**7. I accepted a Tentative Job Offer and the Security Clearance process was initiated. How long does the security clearance process take?**

There is no established timeline for the security clearance process. The security clearance process timeline varies per individual case, depending on the background of each



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individual and the level of security clearance being processed.

**8. Is drug testing required for those selected to participate in the McCain Fellowship Program?**

Yes. All Fellows are placed in Testing Designated Positions, which requires pre-employment and random drug testing upon appointment.

**For any additional questions, please contact [whs.mccainfellows@mail.mil](mailto:whs.mccainfellows@mail.mil) or visit our website at <https://www.whs.mil/McCain-Fellows-Program/>**