

# Watson Fellowship Application Directions

Fellowships Advising and Study Abroad  
Center for Student Services, rm. 319

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The campus deadline is **April 23, 2025 by 5pm PDT.**

Email all materials together in one email to Fellowships Advising and Study Abroad:  
[SAapplications@caltech.edu](mailto:SAapplications@caltech.edu).

And have references email their recommendation forms and letters to:  
[SAreferences@caltech.edu](mailto:SAreferences@caltech.edu).

## You must turn in:

1. **Completed Application**
2. **Personal Statement**, 1500 words, double spaced, single sided, no staples
3. **Project Proposal**, 1500 words, double spaced, single sided, no staples
4. **Two letters of reference on Watson Reference Form**
5. **Current official transcript**
6. **Supplemental Information**: approximate budget breakdown and list of contacts

**Applicants must meet with Elizabeth Nugent, Watson Liaison, to discuss proposal ideas by April 18th; contact her at enugent@caltech.edu to schedule an in person or Zoom meeting.**

\* Example proposals can be requested by emailing Elizabeth Nugent at enugent@caltech.edu. You can also review past project abstracts on the official Watson Fellowship page: <https://watson.foundation/fellowships/tj>

\* FASA will review your essays prior to the deadline for content issues (not proofreading).

\* Check with your references at least 7 days before the deadline. **Reference letters** are also due by **April 23.**

Applicants will be interviewed by the campus Watson Selection Committee mid-Spring Term. Caltech may nominate up to three applicants for the national deadline in early November. If nominated, they will continue to polish their proposal and personal statement over the summer, expand both essays to 1500 words each, and submit on-line for the national deadline in November. Nominees are then interviewed usually in January by the Watson Foundation. Over forty colleges nationwide submit nominees to the Watson Foundation. All nominees are interviewed by a Watson representative, i.e., the fellowship director or a guest interviewer, and all interviewers are former fellows. From those nominated, up to forty will be granted Watson Fellowships.

## **Watson Guidelines:**

- \* There is no citizenship or GPA requirement.
- \* Fellows must leave by Aug. 1 after graduation. This date allows for at least a full year in the field before the required Returning Fellows Conference, scheduled in early August.
- \* Note that Watson Fellows cannot return to the United States during the year of their Watson. Those who are not U.S. citizens are also restricted from visiting their home country during their Watson year. Do not include countries in the proposal in which you have previously lived, worked or studied, or in which you have extensive travel experience.
- \* Watson fellows cannot travel to countries with travel warnings as listed on the U.S. Department of State website: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel.html> Travel advisory levels of 3 and 4 are not allowed on Watson fellowships, only countries with levels of 1 and 2 will be permitted.
- \* Fellows may not work for money during their year abroad, nor can they use personal funds during the fellowship. They must live solely off the \$40,000 award. Money not used during the fellowship year must be returned to the Watson. Fellows may use up to \$1000 for "capital" equipment (one-time expense). Fellows receive reimbursement for health insurance during their Watson year. The Watson will reimburse the equivalent of 12-months of payments on outstanding institutional and federally guaranteed (Perkins, Stafford) loans and the Fellow is responsible for making the payment. The Fellow is also responsible for paying the taxes on the \$40,000 award, which may be paid using the stipend.
- \* The Watson is a solo project – fellows are expected to undertake the year abroad independently, and not live with or travel with friends or family. Short visits are allowed.
- \* Fellows may bring their spouses, or if in special cases they need assistance due to a disability, accommodations can be arranged. In such cases, the stipend is increased by \$10,000. Spouses or aids may not participate in the project.
- \* Fellows should be careful to clarify their relationship with any institution (university, non-profit organization, company, etc.) that hosts them. Although unpaid internships or other volunteer work may be permissible during a Watson year, you must always feel free to step away from the organization with no strings attached in order to pursue your Watson project. It is suggested that Fellows work alongside an organization, in an observer capacity. It is possible to work in exchange for room and board.
- \* A plausible strategy for coping with language barriers is required. If you do not speak the language, you should have a plan on how you will communicate in the destination country.

## **Additional tips on preparing your Watson:**

**Start NOW:** Students should begin working on a Watson draft as soon as possible, and allow weeks to develop their proposal. **If you aren't sure about how to begin**, start talking to people about it and explore the internet to get ideas. The FASA Library also has examples of past applicant and awardee proposals and you can schedule time to meet with Elizabeth to help refine your proposal idea. The Watson is a unique opportunity to travel and live abroad for a year, and there is no other fellowship like it. It is an opportunity open only to **graduating seniors**.

**Exhibit passion:** Although the project does not have to stem from a long-standing interest on your part, it should be a natural extension of you and your interests. These projects do not need to be STEM-centric.

**Prove feasibility:** Watson projects must be well thought out and researched. You must be able to demonstrate in your proposal that it is doable, and you have the skills necessary to execute it. This is done best by making contact with individuals or organizations who might act as project sponsors or project work sites for you. Work out the feasibility of the project and its scope, then you will find it much easier to write a competitive draft proposal.

**Go where you need to go:** You don't have to develop a project that requires worldwide or constant travel. Your project could involve local travel in one country or involve travel and work in just two or three countries, for example. You can also construct a proposal where you have a project in which you will have some research or internship opportunities and can stay in place for several months at a time. While your project must be independent, you do not have to engage in itinerant travel over an extended period unless that suits your project. You can have a home base or bases for your year-long experience. You can be quite creative in the way you break up your time as long as you can explain why this is feasible.

**Read our Do's and Don'ts handout for insight into common issues with Watson proposals.**

*Make an appointment to see Elizabeth Nugent, Caltech's Watson Liaison, to discuss your project idea, and to request previous nominated and winners' proposals as examples to review. Our website's "Additional Resources" page has many ideas and suggestions that are great for trip planning: <https://fasa.caltech.edu/additional-resources>*

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