

Watson Fellowship Guide

Fellowships Advising and Study Abroad
Center for Student Services, RM. 319
FASAOoffice@caltech.edu

Thomas J. Watson Fellowship <https://www.watson.foundation/fellowships/tj>

Timeline & Eligibility

- **Campus Nomination Deadlines** vary by institution
 - **Caltech:** Initial campus deadline **April 23, 2026**; final nomination by **Oct 30, 2026**
- **National Application Deadline:** Typically, in **early November**, following campus nominations
- **Interviews:** Conducted between **early November and February**
- **Final Decisions Announced:** Around **mid-March 2027**

Eligibility Requirements:

- Must be a **graduating senior** nominated by one of the Watson Foundation's ~40 partner institutions
- **Citizenship:** U.S. citizens or international students are eligible, but must be nominated by a partner college
- **Projects** must be:
 - Conducted **entirely outside the U.S.**
 - **Independent and unfunded by academic institutions**
 - Without formal employment, and in regions not restricted by U.S. travel advisories

Getting Started—Step-by-Step

1. **Check Your Eligibility**
 - a. Confirm your school is a Watson partner and confirm your expected graduation date aligns.
2. **Secure Campus Nomination**
 - a. Initiate the process with your campus Watson liaison, complete internal materials and possibly a video intro
3. **Build Your Application:**
 - a. **Personal Statement** (~1,200–1,500 words) explaining your drive and personal connection to the Watson opportunity.
 - b. **Project Proposal** (~1,200–1,500 words) detailing your travel plan, countries visited, and methodology
 - c. **Resume**, unofficial transcripts, travel history, language proficiencies, 100-word bio, and optional personal video (used on some campuses like Bryn Mawr or Bowdoin)
 - d. **Two letters of recommendation**, at least one from faculty

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4. Campus Interviews & Nomination

- a. Completing your internal application leads to campus interviews and selection of nominees who advance to the national level

5. Finalize National Submission & Interview

- a. Revise your essays for the final submission (early Nov).
- b. Participate in a **one-hour interview** with a Watson Foundation representative

Tips to Build a Competitive Application

- **Project Design:**
 - Must flow from a **deep personal passion**, show independence, courage, adaptability, and have broad global relevance
 - Must **avoid countries you've lived/studied in**, unless only briefly visited (4–6 weeks)
 - Avoid regions with advisory levels 3 or 4 (U.S. State Department)
- **Presentation & Voice:**
 - The Fellowship values **imagination, integrity, emotional maturity, resourcefulness, and leadership**
 - Be **authentic**—this fellowship supports people, not academic credentials.
- **Recommend Date Strategy:**
 - Start outreach to recommenders early and vet them for knowledge of your personal narrative and project vision.

Selection Process Overview

- **Campus-level selection** includes review and interviews by your college's Watson committee
- **Watson Foundation Interviews:** National nominees participate in rigorous one-hour conversations with foundation representatives
- **Award Announcement:** Final decisions come in **mid-March**

Benefits & Fellowship Expectations

- **Stipend:** Approximately **\$40,000 for a solo fellow**; **\$50,000** if accompanied by a spouse or dependent
- **Additional Support:**
 - Health insurance.
 - Repayment of federal and institutional loans (Perkins, Stafford) for 12 months
 - Extra stipend for PAS or spouse support.

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- **Fellowship Requirements:**

- Must **spend a full 12 months abroad**, with no return to the U.S. or your home country
- Attend a **pre-departure webinar** (spring) and a **returning fellows' conference** the following August
- Submit **quarterly updates** and a final expense report

Summary Checklist

- Confirm your school is a Watson nominating institution
- Meet internal campus deadline (typically Sept–Nov)
- Draft and refine personal statement & project proposal
- Submit necessary documents: resume, transcripts, travel/history, languages, recommenders
- Attend campus interview and secure nomination
- Submit final application to Foundation in early November
- Prepare for and complete the national interview
- Be ready to depart by August 1, 2027, if awarded
- Submit interim reports and attend conferences as required