

Watson Fellowship Application Directions

Fellowships Advising and Study Abroad
Center for Student Services, rm. 319
FASAOffice@caltech.edu

The campus deadline is April 27, 2026, noon PDT

All application documents must be sent in one email to the FASA office: SAapplications@caltech.edu.

All reference letters should be sent to SAreferences@caltech.edu.

Required Application Documents:

- 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, list of contacts, and anything that shows your connection to the project (artwork, research, videos. ect.)

Applicants must meet with Elizabeth Nugent, Watson Liaison, to discuss proposal ideas by April 17th; 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 for content, not for grammar.

Please contact your reference writers early and check with them at least 7 days before the deadline. **Reference letters** are also due by April 27.

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 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 (this cycle's Watson Fellow announcement will be in March 2027).

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 must stick to countries with travel advisory levels of 1 or 2; visit the U.S. Department of State website for reference:
<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel.html>
- Fellows may not work for money during their year abroad, nor can they use personal funds during the fellowship and will 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.
 - Fellows are 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, an opportunity open only to **graduating seniors**.

Exude your excitement.

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 that you have the skills necessary to accomplish it. It is important to make contact with individuals or organizations who might act as project sponsors or project worksites for you.

Once you work out the feasibility of the project and its scope, you should find it much easier to write a competitive draft proposal. Your budget should also be considered when assessing your proposed project's feasibility.

Go where you need to go for your project.

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 creative in the way you break up your time as long as you can explain why this is feasible.