

U.S. and Foreign Commercial Service Pilot Fellowship Program

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NOTICE OF FUNDING OPPORTUNITY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Federal Agency Name(s): Global Markets, International Trade Administration, Department of Commerce

Funding Opportunity Title: U.S. and Foreign Commercial Service Pilot Fellowship Program

Program Announcement Type: Initial

Funding Opportunity Number: ITA-GMX-GTM-2024-00001

Federal Assistance Listing Number: Federal Assistance Listings Number:11.041, U.S. and Foreign Commercial Service Pilot Fellowship Program

Dates: Completed applications must be received by Grants.gov (<https://www.grants.gov>) and within [eRA Commons](#) by August 7, 2024, at 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time or paper applications postmarked no later than August 7, 2024, and sent to the Department of Commerce, International Trade Administration, Global Markets, Office of Global Talent Management. Applications that are postmarked after the due date will be disqualified.

Please Note: Applicants must register in both [Grants.gov](#) and [eRA Commons](#). We encourage you to begin the registration process several weeks before the August 7, 2024 deadline. All applicants should be aware that adequate time must be factored into applicant schedules for delivery of the application. It may take both [Grants.gov](#) up to two (2) business days and [eRA Commons](#) up to two (2) weeks to register. After registration is complete, the application can be submitted to [Grants.gov](#), and it may take several days for [Grants.gov](#) and [eRA Commons](#) to validate or reject your application. It is important to allow extra time for potential error correction and resubmission. Electronic applicants are advised that volume on [Grants.gov](#) and [eRA Commons](#) can be extremely heavy, resulting in further delays. Paper applications are only allowable for the following reasons: 1) [Grants.gov](#) is unable to accept applications electronically in a timely fashion; 2) the applicant does not have access to the internet; or 3) the person providing the letter of recommendation does not wish for the applicant to see the contents of the letter. Otherwise, all applications must be submitted via [Grants.gov](#).

Funding Opportunity Description: The U.S. and Foreign Commercial Service Pilot (USFCS) Fellowship Program provides an opportunity for Master's degree students in the fields of International Affairs, International Relations, International Studies, Economics, Business, Trade, Public Administration, or Public Policy, to increase their level of knowledge and awareness of the Foreign Commercial Service (FCS) and its vital role in promoting American exports and facilitating trade and commerce around the world. The program also

provides a pathway to potential employment with the Department of Commerce, International Trade Administration, Global Markets, and particularly encourages students from underserved communities to apply.

The U.S. and Foreign Commercial Service is dedicated to ensuring that diversity, equity, and inclusion are at the core of every action and every decision. Having varied perspectives helps generate better ideas to solve the complex problems of a changing world. It also enables us to be effective stewards and reflect the communities in which we live, work, and play. As such, creating a culture that is welcoming and inclusive of all helps to ensure the U.S. and Foreign Commercial Service is able to effectively execute on its mission of creating prosperity by strengthening the international competitiveness of U.S. industry, promoting trade and investment, and ensuring fair trade and compliance with trade laws and agreements.

Individuals who are U.S. citizens or U.S. nationals and are in the first year of an eligible Master's degree program, or will complete their first year in the spring or summer of 2024, at a U.S. accredited institution, may apply. Given the structure of the Program, individuals enrolled in Master's degree programs of less than a two-year duration are not eligible to apply. Fellowship selections are based on academic excellence, letters of recommendations, a personal statement, relevant experience, skills demonstrated during interviews, and financial need. Applicants must have either 1) a cumulative 3.30 grade point average (GPA) in their graduate program or 2) have earned a cumulative 3.30 grade point average from undergraduate studies to be eligible to apply. Applicants must maintain a minimum cumulative GPA of 3.30 per either semester or quarter for the duration of their Master's degree program.

If Fellows engage in fraudulent conduct or fail to comply with any term or condition of the fellowship, funding may be withdrawn, or Fellows may be required to repay monies already received. Additionally, if the selecting official determines that satisfactory progress towards market research and the Fellowship paper is not completed within the timeframe of the award, Fellows may be required to repay any expenses borne by the government for their participation in the U.S. and Foreign Commercial Service Pilot Fellowship Program.

The U.S. and Foreign Commercial Service Pilot Fellowship Program may provide, subject to appropriations, up to \$35,000 of support per person for up to an eight-week fellowship program in an overseas U.S. diplomatic mission.

Recipients of a U.S. and Foreign Commercial Service Pilot Fellowship will be required to participate in a mandatory one-week Office of Global Talent Management Orientation and Training in the spring of 2025.

As a recipient of the U.S. and Foreign Commercial Service Pilot Fellowship, you become a recognized member of the U.S. and Foreign Commercial Service community. Global Markets

will provide financial resources to help you increase the level of knowledge and awareness of the Foreign Commercial Service (FCS) and how it facilitates the growth of global trade, commerce, and American exports, as well as provide mentorship to assist you with your learning experience.

There will be two separate program deliverables required of each Fellow. The first deliverable is the Individual Post Analysis Report (IPAR) which will document the up to eight-week summer enrichment program at an assigned overseas post, summarizing industry sector-focused market research that helps clients understand the opportunities available in selling their specific products and services in a select market as well as any specific tariff or non-tariff regulatory barriers that may impede market access. The IPAR must be submitted by July 31, 2025.

During the succeeding Professional Development and Networking phase of the fellowship, which runs from August 2025 through September 2025, the fellows will be assigned their second deliverable, a Capstone Project. Fellows will be provided with the Capstone Project requirements including specific prompts that highlight how they will transfer the knowledge and skills learned through the fellowship into her or his professional career. Mentors will be assigned to enhance the fellows' growth and help them understand their own personal career development opportunities. At the culmination of the fellowship, the Fellow will be required in September 2025 to present their project virtually before a diverse panel of ITA/Global Markets' senior managers.

Fellows must be ready to travel overseas and pass a Security Assurance Check. Placements to an overseas location for the duration of the fellowship are required for every fellow.

Federal financial support (grant) for the summer enrichment program may be used toward allowable costs such as: travel to and from the Department of Commerce facility, housing, per diem, books/materials costs. Funds cannot be used toward research costs. Fellows are required to provide their own health insurance coverage during the program collaboration. Health insurance coverage and any supplemental insurance can be paid for with grant funds. More details on allowable costs can be found in 2 CFR part 200, Subpart E – Cost Principles.

Applications for the U.S. and Foreign Commercial Service Pilot Fellowship Program will be assessed on the criteria listed below. As a reminder, if you are in the last year of your Master's program, you are not eligible for this program. For a complete list of review criteria, please see Section V, subsection A.

1. Your statement of intent aligns closely with the International Trade Administration Foreign Commercial Service mission, with a particular interest in a career with the Foreign Commercial Service. This is 30 points of your application score.

2. You have exceptional letters of recommendation. This is 20 points of your application score.
3. Additional relevant experience and communication skills. This is 15 points of your application score.

FULL ANNOUNCEMENT TEXT

I. Funding Opportunity Description

A. Program Objective

The U.S. and Foreign Commercial Service Pilot Fellowship Program was established under the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023 (Public Law No. 117-328) and particularly encourages students from underserved communities, including members of minority groups, to apply. The Fellowship is designed to heighten the student's awareness of the Foreign Commercial Service through a summer enrichment program and a virtual Professional Development and Networking component.

Status in any underserved community is not considered when selecting award recipients. However, outreach efforts are being employed to increase awareness of this new opportunity among underserved communities, as defined by Executive Order 14035, including:

- Communities of color, such as Black and African American, Hispanic and Latino, Native American, Alaska Native and Indigenous, Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander, Middle Eastern, and North African persons;
- Individuals who belong to communities that face discrimination based on sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity (including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, gender non-conforming, and non-binary (LGBTQ+) persons);
- Persons who face discrimination based on pregnancy or pregnancy-related conditions;
- Parents and caregivers;
- Individuals who belong to communities that face discrimination based on their religion or disability;
- First-generation professionals, or first-generation college students;
- Individuals with limited English proficiency;
- Immigrants;
- Individuals who belong to communities that may face employment barriers based on older age or former incarceration;
- Persons who live in rural areas;
- Veterans and military spouses; and,
- Persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty, discrimination, or inequality.

The ITA will seek to ensure that Fellows represent a range of academic disciplines, geographies, and degrees sought, with additional consideration of financial need, academic achievement, and the potential for satisfying the Foreign Commercial Service Assessment requirements.

The program is administered through the International Trade Administration, Global Markets, Office of Global Talent Management.

International Trade Administration Mission:

Create prosperity by strengthening the international competitiveness of U.S. industry, promoting trade and investment, and ensuring fair trade and compliance with trade laws and agreements.

Our Focus

- Promote U.S. exports
- Attract inbound investment
- Provide actionable data and information
- Defend against unfair trade

Our People

Our trade experts and professional staff—approximately 2,200 employees—are positioned in more than 100 U.S. cities and 80 international markets.

Connecting Businesses to Global Markets

Our global network of experienced trade professionals is located throughout the United States and in U.S. Embassies and Consulates worldwide. Whether a U.S. company is looking to make its first export sale or expand to additional markets, we offer the expertise they need to connect with lucrative opportunities and increase their bottom line.

Worldwide Recognition: As the U.S. government, we can open doors that no one else can in markets around the world.

Global Network: Our unmatched global network with trade experts in more than 80 countries can provide U.S. businesses with on-the-ground knowledge and connections.

Results Driven: Our expert, customized counseling is unparalleled and designed to help U.S. businesses succeed in global markets.

U.S. Department of Commerce Strategic Plan for 2022-2026:

<https://www.commerce.gov/about/strategic-plan>

Global Markets Mission:

Global Markets assists and advocates for U.S. businesses in international markets to foster U.S. economic prosperity.

Utilizing our network of trade promotion and policy professionals located in over 70 countries and 100 U.S. locations, Global Markets promotes U.S. exports, especially among small and medium-sized enterprises; advances and protects U.S. commercial interests overseas; and attracts inward investment into the United States.

Commercial Officers carry out a wide variety of critical functions and work with a broad spectrum of government and private sector organizations to articulate, develop and refine United States commercial policy, promote U.S. exports, and protect U.S. commercial interests abroad. Key to the successful execution of a Commercial Officer's duties is the ability to cultivate personal and professional contacts to be used in influencing foreign trade policies to benefit and protect United States commercial interests. Serving a substantial portion of their careers at overseas diplomatic missions (usually in embassies, consulates, or trade centers), Foreign Service Officers enjoy access to people and places beyond the experience of most United States Government employees.

Foreign Service Career

A career as a Commercial Officer also provides outstanding opportunities to learn new languages and travel internationally. You'll have the opportunity to experience foreign cultures, make friends around the world, and help shape history. You can expect to spend two-thirds of your career overseas. Joining the Foreign Service is a career opportunity of a lifetime for some, but it isn't the right lifestyle for everyone. While some people might find the career challenging, exciting and rewarding, others will see it as a less-than-perfect match. Take this quiz to help you to determine if the Foreign Service is right for you:

<https://careers.state.gov/career-paths/foreign-service/quiz/>

To learn more about Foreign Service Commercial Officer Career click here:

<https://www.trade.gov/foreign-service-outreach>

II. Award Information**A. Funding Availability**

Subject to appropriations, approximately \$1,000,000 may be available for awards under this program during fiscal year (FY) 2025. The U.S. and Foreign Commercial Service Pilot Fellowship provides one year support up to \$35,000 per student to cover travel related expenses, housing, meals and necessary materials and supplies.

A mandatory orientation will be held for incoming fellows. Fellows must participate in this orientation to ensure a basic knowledge of the program. If Fellows cannot participate for whatever reason (e.g., travel visa issues, medical emergency, etc.), the program manager has the discretion to revoke the fellowship. Travel support (logistics and funding) not to exceed \$35,000 per year will be provided to Fellows, who will also meet with the ITA leadership and staff. The USFCS funds cannot be used toward research costs.

B. Project/Award Period

The award periods are up to 15 months for a student enrolled in an eligible Master's degree program. The anticipated start date is June 2025. If an applicant is selected for initial funding, the USFCS reserves the right to revoke funding at any point.

C. Type of Funding Instrument

The funding instrument will be a cooperative agreement with the individual applicant. The substantial involvement anticipated under this award includes a summer enrichment program component where the Fellow is required to spend up to eight weeks at a U.S. diplomatic mission as well as continuous mentorship. The Office of Global Talent Management intends to work with each Fellow to facilitate placement at a post and to help the Fellow refine the scope of their summer enrichment program, if necessary.

III. Eligibility Information

A. Eligible Applicants

Only individuals who are U.S. citizens or U.S. nationals and are either accepted at or enrolled as a first-year student in a U.S. accredited graduate institution to pursue a Master's degree in the fields of International Affairs, International Relations, International Studies, Economics, Business, Trade, Public Administration, or Public Policy are eligible for an award under this Fellowship program.

In addition, to be eligible to apply, applicants must have a cumulative 3.30 GPA either from their graduate program or from undergraduate studies (see **Funding Opportunity Description**).

Individuals who accept federal funding for other fellowships or award programs, such as grants or scholarships sponsored by the U.S. Government, are not eligible to receive the U.S. and Foreign Commercial Service Pilot Fellowship if there is more than a one-week overlap in the start date between programs. For example, an applicant who has received an award from the Federal Government for research work conducted from May 2025 through September

2025 is not eligible, as that award time period overlaps, by more than one week, with the beginning of the U.S. and Foreign Commercial Service Pilot Fellowship Program anticipated start date of May 2025.

Universities or other organizations may not apply on behalf of an individual. Prospective fellows need to be enrolled in a graduate program at the time of application to be awarded this fellowship. Eligibility must be maintained for each succeeding year of support, and annual reporting requirements, to be specified, will apply.

B. Cost Sharing or Matching Requirement

There are no matching requirements for this award.

C. Other Criteria that Affect Eligibility

There are no other criteria that affect eligibility.

IV. Application and Submission Information

A. Address to Request Application Package

Application packages are available through Grants.gov (<https://www.grants.gov>). [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) and [eRA Commons](https://www.eRA Commons) require applicants to register with the system prior to submitting an application. This registration process can take several weeks and involves multiple steps. In order to allow sufficient time for this process, applicants should register as soon as they decide they intend to apply, even if they are not yet ready to submit their applications. The ITA/GM Office of Global Talent Management will not accept applications that are submitted late due to an applicant's error of submission to [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov). The ITA/GM Office of Global Talent Management may allow more time for application submission due to a "systems issue" that takes place at the time of application submission and is beyond the control of the applicant. In these limited circumstances where there is a systems issue, the applicant must contact the help desk for the relevant system (i.e., [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov), [eRA Commons](https://www.eRA Commons)) and obtain a help desk ticket number. The applicant must contact the ITA/GM Office of Global Talent Management immediately upon discovering the issues and must still submit the required application documents in order for their application to be considered for review. Required information for the application, such as financial documentation, may require extra time to obtain, so please plan accordingly. Completed applications must be received by [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) by August 7, 2024, at 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time or postmarked by August 7, 2024, and sent to the GM Office of Global Talent Management.

Adobe Acrobat is continuously making updates to their software. We recommend that applicants check the compatibility of Adobe products with the application's required forms

well in advance.

Additional guidance on the application package, instructions, submission procedures, and an application checklist can be located on the U.S. & Foreign Commercial Service Pilot Fellowship Program website: <https://www.trade.gov/cs-fellowship>. Further information about the Fellowship and the International Trade Administration strategic priorities can be found at the following websites <https://www.trade.gov/cs-fellowship> and <https://www.trade.gov>, respectively.

Information in hard copy may be requested from:
U.S. & Foreign Commercial Service Pilot Fellowship Program
GM Office of Global Talent Management
Attn: Wendy Thompson
Herbert C. Hoover Building
1401 Constitution Ave. NW
Room 1843
Washington, DC 20230

Information contact: Send requests for information to the GM Office of Global Talent Management at the address shown above or via email to CSFellowship@trade.gov. Please allow adequate time for inquiry responses.

B. Content and Form of Application

Each application package must include the items listed below unless otherwise indicated. Failure to submit any items as described in this section will result in disqualification. Application packages are available through Grants.gov (<https://www.grants.gov>).

Please do not include a cover page for your application.

Each application package must be included within the single Adobe PDF document in the correct order as outlined in Section B of the Application and Submission Information. Failure to submit any items as described in this section will likely result in disqualification.

Please provide a title of the item (for example, General Information Sheet, Statement of Intent, etc.) on each page in a Header Section except when a previously formatted PDF is added, such as transcripts or a PDF copy of a letter of recommendation.

1. Standard Form 424 (SF-424), Application for Federal Assistance, is located on the [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) portal and must be completed with information pertinent to the applicant. If you require specific guidance on how to complete the SF-424 form, please reach out via email to CSFellowship@trade.gov. Item number 21 on the SF-

424 cannot be used as a replacement for the declaration statement required in Item 10 below. The SF-424 must be uploaded to [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) separately from the items outlined below. If submitting a paper application, the application packet must also include a completed SF 424 and the SF-424 must be signed and dated with pen and ink.

Numbers 2-8: The following items of the application listed below shall be uploaded into [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) in the single Adobe PDF file, in the order outlined below. Failure to provide the single Adobe PDF file with all the components in the order listed below is likely to result in disqualification. If submitting a paper application, the full application must be in the order outlined below or the application is likely to result in disqualification. If sealed letters of recommendation are included in a paper application these envelopes can be added to the mailing envelope and not included in the rest of the correctly organized application package and should be referenced in the table of contents as attachments at the end. Submitting a paper application is only acceptable for the following reasons: 1) [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) is unable to accept applications electronically in a timely fashion; 2) if the applicant does not have access to the internet; or 3) if the person providing the letter of recommendation does not wish for the applicant to see the contents of the letter.

2. Table of Contents: On a single page, please list the items and page numbers of the following required information. Page numbers are not required for pre-existing PDF documents, such as transcripts or PDF letters of recommendation, but should still contribute to the page count. If the sealed letters are in envelopes, the table of contents should reference them as attachments.
3. General Information Sheet: Provide the information outlined below, but do not exceed two (2) type-written single-spaced pages, font size 12 in Times New Roman, with a 1" margin. General Information Sheets that are longer than two (2) pages in length and/or do not follow the formatting requirements listed above will likely result in disqualification.

Personal Data: Provide your full name (including all aliases and maiden/married names); country of citizenship; current address and/or permanent address; current phone number; and email address.

- a. Optional Personal Data: The U.S. & Foreign Commercial Service Pilot Fellowship Program is committed to broadening awareness of Foreign Commercial Service careers. To accurately gauge whether the fellowship program is achieving this important goal, we ask that applicants indicate

gender, race, and ethnicity, or identification in another underserved community. Please note that this information is voluntary. Whether you provide this optional personal data, and what your personal data indicates, if provided, will not be considered in the application process.

- b. Education: State the name and location of your institution and your academic department for your graduate study.
- c. Degree: List all academic degrees conferred to date, date of receipt, and your cumulative GPA for each. All applicants must also list the existing Master's degree program that the applicant is currently pursuing, with expected date of graduation. For this, provide your graduate advisor's name, telephone number, and email address. If your GPA includes coursework from a U.S. university or an international institution that does not align with the typical 4.0 GPA system for grades, please have a school representative, advisor, or independent reviewer submit a letter that states you meet the 3.30 GPA requirement and provides an accurate conversion. Provide your original GPA and your converted GPA in this section. If you have been accepted into a Master's degree program at the time of application, your undergraduate GPA will suffice.
- d. Academic Honors: List any academic honors received.
- e. Relevant Experience: List experience related to your field of study. You may include research and teaching assistantships and any other paid or unpaid work. Include languages spoken and proficiency level.
- f. Knowledge of Fellowship: In a few words, please describe how you initially heard about the U.S. and Foreign Commercial Service Pilot Fellowship Program (e.g., word of mouth, academic colleague, school/institution, specific professor/mentor, online database, etc.).

Failure to include the General Information Sheet, as outlined, is likely to result in disqualification.

- 4. Statement of Intent: The Statement of Intent must be typewritten, single-spaced, font size 12 Times New Roman, with a 1" margin and must not exceed one (1) page in length. Your description must provide enough detail to review accordingly. Statements longer than one (1) page or that do not follow the formatting requirements listed above are likely to result in disqualification.

This statement will be used to evaluate your motivation for applying for this fellowship, and your communication skills and potential to become a Foreign Commercial Service Officer. This statement must tell us something about why you are interested in this fellowship opportunity and demonstrate your organizational and written communication skills.

- a. Academic, Career Goals and Aspirations: A self-description of your career goals, and how your proposed academic course of study will help you achieve these goals. This is your opportunity to present yourself, your academic and career pursuits, and your broader aspirations. Please include any background information that is pertinent, such as work and academic experience, languages spoken, and extra-curricular activities that are relevant to your educational goals and provide insight into why you chose to pursue these goals.
- b. Interest in International Affairs: An explanation of the applicant's interest in international affairs, and how this program will assist him/her in acquiring the skill set necessary for a career in the U.S. and Foreign Commerce Service. This is an opportunity for the applicant to align their knowledge, skills, and abilities to the mission and goals of the U.S. and Foreign Commercial Service.

In this section (i.e., Section 4), please provide a description of how your experience is related to the Foreign Commercial Service precepts, including knowledge of trade, leadership, management, problem-solving, cross-cultural, and interpersonal skills. Also explain how this fellowship program will help you enhance those skills and will make you a competitive candidate for a career in the Foreign Commercial Service. If you are a recipient of this fellowship, successfully complete the requirements of the fellowship, and are ultimately offered a position in the U.S. and Foreign Commercial Service, you will be required to accept the position.

If you are a recipient of the fellowship award, you will be required to complete the medical form with immunization information (provided by the U.S. & Foreign Commercial Service) and provide proof of U.S. citizenship or U.S. national status through one of the following documents:

- Birth certificate
- Certificate of Citizenship
- Certificate of Naturalization
- U.S. passport

* Note: If you use a birth certificate, please note that if you are selected, you will need to send us a hard copy of a notarized birth certificate before your final acceptance. Those using passports or certificates of citizenship will have to bring

originals to show at the start of the program. Social Security cards and driver's licenses are not proof of citizenship and will not be sufficient.

Transcripts: Applicants must submit transcripts for all complete years of academic study (both undergraduate and graduate), including courses in which you are currently enrolled. Headers are not required for transcripts. Transcripts from an institution or university that are only for one (1) semester are not required (excluding work in progress) but may be included in the single Adobe PDF document if needed to support evidence of international relations experience. Applicants must have a cumulative 3.30 GPA either from their graduate program or from undergraduate studies (see **Funding Opportunity Description**).

5. Students whose school does not follow a typical 4.0 GPA scale must submit a letter from a school representative, advisor, or independent reviewer that states you meet the 3.30 GPA requirement and provide an accurate conversion. Unofficial transcripts, which clearly state the name of the student and institution, submitted by the applicant are acceptable and must be included within the single Adobe PDF document in the correct order as outlined in Section B of the Application and Submission Information. All unofficial transcripts must list the student's name and the name of the institution.

Failure to submit transcripts, as outlined above, will result in disqualification. Official transcripts will be required prior to making an award.

6. Enrollment Verification: Enrollment verification must include the name of the school and applicant. Individuals selected to receive the U.S. and Foreign Commercial Pilot Fellowship must provide proof of enrollment into the first year of a graduate program at a U.S. accredited institution at the time of notification or the individual will be ineligible to receive the award.

Failure to meet the Enrollment Verification requirements as indicated above will result in disqualification.

7. Two Letters of Recommendation: Each application must include **only** two (2) letters of recommendation with handwritten signatures on the actual letter from individuals who have knowledge of your academic record and work and/or life experience. One reference must be from a professor who can provide knowledge of your academic career and another professional reference. It is recommended that each letter is no more than two (2) pages long. Letters of recommendation do not need to include headers. Relevant unpaid work, such as internships and volunteer efforts, are applicable. Letters of recommendation must include:

- a. A statement that the individual writing the letter has a clear understanding of the applicant's work, goals, and aspirations on a personal and professional level.
- b. A statement on the applicant's ability to succeed in a Foreign Commercial Service career with indication of clear support for the applicant.

If an applicant plans to have an ITA employee submit a letter of reference as one of the letters of recommendation required in this section, please note that the letter is limited to factual information and the ITA employee's knowledge of the applicant's ability or character based on the employee's government interactions with the applicant. The letter may not endorse one applicant over other applicants. Subject to restrictions and management approval, an ITA employee may submit a letter of reference to ITA for the agency's use in evaluating the application. The supervisor must decide whether it is in the agency's interest to write such a letter. If the supervisor approves the letter, it must be written on agency letterhead and the employee must use his or her ITA title. The employee may not send the letter in his or her personal capacity. ITA employees can sign the letter digitally, but it is advised to not have these letters signed with their CAC card to prevent PDF issues.

The two (2) letters of recommendation must be included in the single Adobe PDF document. Each letter must have a handwritten signature on the official letterhead of the person recommending the candidate. Page numbers are not required for pre-existing PDF documents but should still contribute to the page count. If the person providing the letter of recommendation does not wish for the applicant to see the contents of the letter, the applicant must submit a paper copy of their full application, include their letters of recommendation in sealed envelopes, and reference the letters of recommendation as attachments in the table of contents. Note that if you are submitting a paper application, the SF-424 form must be signed and dated with pen and ink. Failure to provide two (2) signed letters of recommendation on official letterhead, as outlined above, will result in disqualification. If more than two (2) letters of recommendation are provided, will result in disqualification.

8. Declaration: Applicants must certify that all statements and information in their application are true and correct by either 1) copying the following statement on a separate sheet of paper or 2) downloading the declaration statement from <https://www.trade.gov/cs-fellowship> then providing a handwritten signature on the same paper, and including it in the single Adobe PDF document:

I, the undersigned, declare, under penalty of perjury, that:

"I understand and agree to the limitations of the allowable costs for the fellowship

funds as defined in this Notice of Funding Opportunity and that I am aware of the data sharing stipulation policy applicable to all ITA federal funding opportunities. This statement serves as my "Data/Information Sharing Plan" insofar as it expressly states that no funds associated with this award will be used for the collection or creation of any trade related information or data. If I engage in fraudulent conduct or fail to comply with any term or condition of the Fellowship my funding may be withdrawn, or I may be required to repay the amount of funding already received. I understand that if determined by the selecting official that satisfactory progress towards a market research and Fellowship paper is not completed within the timeframe of the award, I may be required to repay any expenses borne by the government for my participation in the US & Foreign Commercial Service Pilot Fellowship Program.”

All statements and information in my application are true and correct at the time of this application.

Executed on [insert date]:

Print or type name:

Signature: [insert handwritten signature]

Failure to include the exact statement above, signed in pen by the applicant, will result in disqualification.

Answers to frequently asked questions on the application process are available at:
<https://www.trade.gov/cs-fellowship>

- Funds provided under this program cannot be used toward research costs.
- Each application package must include the items listed in the Application and Submission Information section. Failure to submit all items, excluding the SF-424, which can be uploaded individually, in the single Adobe PDF document as described in the Application and Submission Information section and in the above outlined order or if any item is omitted will disqualify the application from consideration. Individual documents uploaded to [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) will not be accepted and the applicant is likely to be disqualified.

If the applicant has difficulty obtaining any of the above components of the application in electronic copy form, the applicant may submit a single paper application. If submitting a paper application, the application packet must also include a completed SF-424 and the SF 424 must be signed and dated with pen and ink. The paper application must be postmarked by the due date as outlined in the NOFO.

C. Submission Dates and Times

Completed applications must be received by [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) by August 7, 2024, at 11:59 p.m. Eastern Standard Time or postmarked by August 7, 2024, and sent to the GM Office of Global Talent Management. The GM Office of Global Talent Management mailing address is located in Section IV, subsection G. "Other Submission Requirements," below. Applications postmarked after the due date will not be reviewed or considered and will result in disqualification. Applicants may submit applications via [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) or paper applications. Date and time of receipt of each application sent via [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) is electronically recorded. For paper applications, each envelope is time and date stamped when received and needs to be postmarked by the due date mentioned above. For an application to be considered "Complete" all items are required in subsection IV.B. "Content and Form of Application" must be received by [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) or postmarked by the submission date. If you choose to mail in a paper application, we suggest using a service that can guarantee confirmation of delivery.

Please Note: For detailed information about registering as an individual and applying in the [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) system, please review the following document: <https://www.grants.gov/applicants/workspace-overview.html>. All applicants, both those using electronic and paper, should be aware that adequate time must be factored into applicant submission timelines for delivery of the application. It may take [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) up to two (2) business days and [eRA Commons](https://www.eRA Commons) up to two (2) weeks to validate or reject the application. You will receive an official notice from [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) if you have uploaded your application correctly. It is not the responsibility of the GM Office of Global Talent Management to verify receipt of any application.

D. Intergovernmental Review

Applications under this program are not subject to Executive Order 12372, Intergovernmental Review of Federal Programs.

E. Funding Restrictions

No special restrictions apply.

F. Other Submission Requirements

Please refer to important information in submission dates and times above to help ensure your application is received on time. Applications should be submitted via [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov). If an applicant does not have internet access to complete the application through [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) or prefers to submit a paper application, paper applications may be submitted in one

envelope to:

U.S. & Foreign Commercial Service Pilot Fellowship Program
ITA/ GM Office of Global Talent Management
Attn: Wendy Thompson
Herbert C. Hoover Building
1401 Constitution Ave. NW
Room 1843
Washington, DC 20230

Please Note: For paper applications, failure to submit all application items in one (1) envelope and in the correct order, including a completed SF-424 will result in disqualification. If submitting a paper application, the application packet must also include a completed SF-424 and the SF-424 must be signed and dated with pen and ink.

V. Application Review Information

A. Evaluation Criteria

The evaluation criteria and weighting of the criteria are as follows:

1. Statement of Intent (30 points). For this program, this includes:
 - a. Academic, Career Goals and Aspirations: 10 points
 - b. Interest in pursuing the Foreign Commercial Service Career: 15 points
 - c. Communication skills, Written: 5 points
2. Letters of Recommendations (20 points). For this program, this includes:
 - a. Familiarity of Applicant: 5 points for each letter (10 in total)
 - b. Strength of Support: 5 points for each letter (10 in total)
3. Additional Relevant Experience (15 points). For this program, this includes:
 - a. Experience: 7 points
 - b. Interview: 8 points

B. Review and Selection Process

Once ITA receives an application, an initial administrative review is conducted to determine compliance with the minimum requirements, including completeness of the application and inclusion of all elements required in each of the NOFO sections. ITA, in its sole discretion, may continue the review process for applications with non-substantive issues that can be easily rectified or cured.

All applications that pass the administrative review will be evaluated and scored individually in accordance with the assigned weights of the above evaluation criteria by a review panel. Each reviewer will independently evaluate each application and provide an individual score and comments to corroborate that score. The panel of reviewers convenes and comes to a consensus on each application. Applicants with an initial scoring of 40 points and above after review of the Statement of Intent (30 points), Letters of Recommendations (20 points), and Experience (7 points), will be considered for the Interview, which will comprise the final 8 points of the scoring criteria.

The panel will be composed of three (3) or more individuals, having expertise in the ITA Foreign Commercial Service and knowledge of the program priorities of the International Trade Administration. The reviewers will rate the applications using the evaluation criteria and weighting provided above. The panel will then meet to discuss applications. The review panel will not come to a consensus regarding applicants' scores. The individual panelist scores will be averaged for each application and placed in a ranking order of all applications. The Program Officer will transmit the review information to the Selection Official and may make a recommendation to the Selection Official about applying the selection factors below. The Selection Official will recommend in rank order unless an application is justified to be selected out of rank order based on one or more of the selection factors below.

C. Selection Factors

The merit review ratings shall provide a rank order to the Selecting Official for final funding recommendation. The Selecting Official shall award in rank order unless the proposal is justified to be selected out of rank order based upon one or more of the following factors:

1. Balance/Distribution of Funds
 - a. Across academic disciplines
 - b. Geographic area
2. Availability of funds
3. Specific to the ITA Foreign Commercial Service priorities and organizational needs

D. Anticipated Announcement and Award Dates

Subject to the availability of funds, review of applications and subsequent notification to applicants will be completed in December 2024. Funds are expected to be awarded by May 2025, which is the start date that must be used on the Application for Federal

Assistance (SF-424) for successful applications.

VI. Award Administration Information

A. Award Notices

Successful applicants will receive an electronic notification that the application has been funded from the ITA. An email notification will be issued to each successful applicant with instructions on how to access the [Grants.gov](https://grants.gov) system and view the terms of the award. The annual reporting requirements are also included in the award package.

The names, academic institutions, degrees being sought, research plans, photographs and biographical information of the scholarship award recipients will be posted on the U.S. & Foreign Commercial Pilot Fellowship Program website after selections have been confirmed and accepted. The information posted on the website may also be published in marketing materials developed to advertise U.S. & Foreign Commercial Service Pilot Fellowship Program and further the mission of the ITA

Unsuccessful applicants will be notified that their application was not recommended for funding (declined) by December 2024.

B. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

1. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE PRE-AWARD NOTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS FOR GRANTS AND COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS. The Department of Commerce Pre-Award Notification Requirements for Grants and Cooperative Agreements contained in the Federal Register notice of December 30, 2014 (79 FR 78390) are applicable to this solicitation and may be accessed online at <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2014/12/30/2014-30297/departments-of-commerce-pre-award-notification-requirements-for-grants-and-cooperative-agreements>

2. UNIFORM ADMINISTRATIVE REQUIREMENTS, COST PRINCIPLES, AND AUDIT REQUIREMENTS. Through 2 C.F.R. § 1327.101, the Department of Commerce adopted Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards at 2 C.F.R. Part 200, which apply to awards in this program. Refer to <http://go.usa.gov/SBYh> and <http://go.usa.gov/SBg4>.

3. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE TERMS AND CONDITIONS. Successful applicants who accept a US & Foreign Commercial Service ITA award under this solicitation will be bound by Department of Commerce Financial Assistance Standard Terms and Conditions. This document will be provided in the award package and is also available at the following link:

https://www.commerce.gov/sites/default/files/2020-11/DOC%20Standard%20Terms%20and%20Conditions%20-%2012%20November%202020%20PDF_0.pdf

4. **LIMITATION OF LIABILITY.** Funding for programs listed in this notice is contingent upon the availability of appropriations. Applicants are hereby given notice that funds may not have been appropriated yet for the programs listed in this notice. In no event will ITA or the Department of Commerce be responsible for proposal preparation costs. Publication of this announcement does not oblige ITA to award any specific project or to obligate any available funds.
5. **DATA SHARING PLAN.** This announcement is seeking proposals that do not generate environmental data; therefore, no data management plan is required as part of the application.
6. **FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT (FOIA)** - The applicant acknowledges and understands that information and data contained in applications for financial assistance, as well as information and data contained in financial, performance and other reports submitted by applicants, may be used by the Department of Commerce in conducting reviews and evaluations of its financial assistance programs. For this purpose, applicant information and data may be accessed, reviewed, and evaluated by Department of Commerce employees, other Federal employees, and by Federal agents and contractors, and/or by non-Federal personnel, all of whom enter into appropriate conflict of interest and confidentiality agreements covering the use of such information. As may be provided in the terms and conditions of a specific financial assistance award, applicants are expected to support program reviews and evaluations by submitting required financial and performance information and data in an accurate and timely manner, and by cooperating with Department of Commerce and external program evaluators. In accordance with 2 C.F.R. § 200.303(e), applicants are reminded that they must take reasonable measures to safeguard protected personally identifiable information and other confidential or sensitive personal or business information created or obtained in connection with a Department of Commerce financial assistance award.

In addition, Department of Commerce regulations implementing the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), 5 U.S.C. Sec. 552, are found at 15 C.F.R. Part 4, Public Information. These regulations set forth rules for the Department regarding making requested materials, information, and records publicly available under the FOIA. Applications submitted in response to this Notice of Funding Opportunity may be subject to requests for release under the Act. If an application contains information or data that the applicant deems to be confidential commercial information that should be exempt from disclosure under FOIA, that information should be identified, bracketed, and marked as Privileged, Confidential, Commercial or Financial Information. In

accordance with 15 CFR § 4.9, the Department of Commerce will protect from disclosure confidential business information contained in financial assistance applications and other documentation provided by applicants to the extent permitted by law.

7. DOC Allegations of Harassment Prohibited by Federal Law Policy DAO 202-955 states that “The Department of Commerce is committed to ensuring a harassment-free workplace. When allegations of unlawful harassment are substantiated, prompt and appropriate action shall be taken.”

C. Reporting

Fellowship recipients are required to provide reports documenting the fellow's activities, accomplishments, academic progress, research progress. The report must include copies of receipts indicating disbursement of the education allowance and copies of receipts for allowable expenses under the summer enrichment program. The report must include a certification from the fellow's academic advisor indicating that the student's work is on track and a copy of the official transcript indicating the scholar has a minimum term and cumulative GPA of 3.30. These reports must be submitted through the [Grants.gov](https://grants.gov) system.

At the conclusion of the summer enrichment program, recipients are required to submit a trip report documenting their accomplishments and including a summary testimonial of their experience. In addition, recipients will be required to participate in an evaluation survey.

The Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006 includes a requirement for awardees of applicable Federal grants to report information about first-tier sub-awards and executive compensation under Federal assistance awards issued in FY 2011 or later. All awardees of applicable grants and cooperative agreements are required to report to the Federal Sub-award Reporting System (FSRS) available at <https://www.FSRS.gov> on all sub awards over \$30,000.

VII. Agency Contacts

Send requests for information to CSFellowship@trade.gov or mail requests to:
U.S. & Foreign Commercial Service Pilot Fellowship Program
ITA/ GM Office of Global Talent Management
Attn: Wendy Thompson
Herbert C. Hoover Building

1401 Constitution Ave. NW
Room 1843
Washington, DC 20230

VIII. Other Information

A. The Travel Stipend

The travel stipend will be paid directly to the fellow and will include expenses for transportation, visas, housing, meals, necessary office supplies. Receipts will be required.

B. General Fellowship Information

Specific instructions regarding the disbursement, management, and reporting requirements for all stipend payments will be provided to the fellowship recipients.

IX. Appendix: Submitting Your Application in [Grants.gov](#) and [eRA Commons](#)

Thank you for applying to the U.S. and Foreign Commercial Service Pilot Fellowship Program.

Submitting Your Application Electronically

To submit your application electronically, you must register in both [Grants.gov](#) and eRA Commons. We encourage you to begin the registration process several weeks before the August 7, 2024 deadline, as it may take both [Grants.gov](#) up to two (2) business days and [eRA Commons](#) up to two (2) weeks to register. After registration is complete, the application can be submitted to [Grants.gov](#) and it may take several days for [Grants.gov](#) and eRA Commons to validate or reject your application. It is important to allow extra time for potential error correction and resubmission. Applications received after the due date will be disqualified.

Application Package Validation

Application packages submitted electronically undergo **two** separate sets of validations.

- I. [Grants.gov](#): Checks for a) on-time submission; and b) that attachments are attached to each required form in the application package. If your application passes those two checks and your submission is deemed successful, you will receive an e-mail from do_not_reply@grants.gov, which will contain a tracking number. **Note: Receiving this e-mail does not mean that your application has successfully passed the eRA check.**
- II. [eRA Commons](#): After you submit your application package through Grants.gov submission, you will receive an email notification from era-notify@mail.nih.gov, either a) confirming a successful submission to eRA; or b) listing validation errors and warnings associated with the application. You must address all indicated validation errors and resubmit via [Grants.gov](#) (which will create a new [Grants.gov](#) tracking number) **before the NOFO closes**. Receiving an email from era-notify@mail.nih.gov with no errors indicated confirms that your application has been successfully submitted. You can find more information on registering in [eRA Commons](#) at this link: <https://www.commerce.gov/ocio/programs/gems/register-your-organization-era-commons>

You can view the submission status of your application in [eRA Commons](#) at any time during the application timeframe.

Common eRA Errors

- [eRA Commons](#) IDs
In order to successfully submit your application, you will need an [eRA Commons](#) account, and that Commons account must be a) affiliated with your eRA registration;

and b) hold the Principal Investigator (PI) role. That valid, affiliated Commons ID must then be included on the application materials in the “4. Applicant Identifier” box of Form SF-424. Failure to register in [eRA Commons](#) and to include a valid [eRA Commons](#) ID in the “4. Applicant Identifier” box of Form SF-424 will prevent the successful submission of an electronic application.

- **Congressional District**

You are required to enter their Congressional District on the SF424 in a very specific format. For tips on finding and entering Congressional District correctly, applicants can review the info found at this link:

<https://grantsgovprod.wordpress.com/2017/06/21/how-to-find-your-congressional-district-for-the-sf-424-form/>.

Briefly, your entry must consist of your state’s two-letter abbreviation and end with a three-digit district number. A hyphen separates the two parts, like this, “VA-001” [State of Virginia – 1st Congressional District]. Any other format (for example “VA001” or “VA-01”) will result in an error and rejection from eRA.

- **Formatting Issues**

To ensure a successfully submitted application, review the full list of eRA formatting requirements found at this link: <https://grants.nih.gov/grants/how-to-apply-application-guide/format-and-write/format-attachments.htm>

Common errors to avoid include, but are not limited to, the following:

- File sizes that are too large (over 100 MB)
- Including paper (page) size larger than standard letter paper size (8 ½" x 11")
- File names that are too long (greater than 50 characters including spaces)
- Including invalid characters in the file name
- Not “flattening” the PDF prior to attachment

When Systems Issues Occur

In the event of a systems issue that takes place at the time of application submission and is beyond your control:

- Contact the help desk for the relevant system (i.e., [Grants.gov](#), [eRA Commons](#)) and obtain a help desk ticket number.
- Contact the ITA/GM Office of Global Talent Management immediately at CSFellowship@trade.gov.

You must still submit the required application documents in order for your application to be considered for review.