

2026 – 2027 CODE OF GOOD PRACTICE

Table of Contents

Overview of Administrative Fellowship Recruitment.....2
 Background & Challenges:.....2
 Our Mission:3
 National Council on Administrative Fellowships (NCAF).....3
 NCAF is committed to:.....4
 Code of Good Practice by Stakeholder Group.....4
 Graduate Program Directors and Advisors.....5
 Applicants6
 Fellowship Site Administrators.....8
 Recruitment Pathways 10
 2026/2027 Recruitment Dates Overview..... 12
 Recruitment Process Timeline: National Offer Week Participants 12
 NAFCAS & LearningBridge System Dates 13

Overview of Administrative Fellowship Recruitment

Post-graduate administrative fellowships in Healthcare Management (hereafter referred to as “fellowships”) are a critical stepping stone for many early careerists who will ultimately take on senior leadership roles. They contrast with other post-graduate positions in two important ways:

- (1) Fellowships are time-limited, typically lasting between 12 to 24 months
- (2) Fellowships emphasize structured learning and leadership development in addition to completion of work. This includes interim positions, rotations, and project-based learning.

Many graduate health management programs also require a residency experience lasting 9 to 12 months for graduation. Students completing those requirements may also pursue fellowships, although some fellowship sites require completion of the degree prior to application.

The American College of Healthcare Executives’ **Policy on Appropriate Preparation for Healthcare Executive Management Positions for All New Entrants to the Field** (November 2014) notes, “It is preferred that graduate students complete a postgraduate fellowship or residency.” The Policy goes on to say:

Healthcare executives and employers contribute to the success and development of future leaders by providing postgraduate fellowship experiences. Fellowships help transition a young professional from the world of academic learning to real world experiences. Fellows can make a meaningful contribution to the organization when the fellow is assigned real projects that cross organizational lines. Employers are encouraged to offer these opportunities to assist the entry of students to the field of healthcare management.

Background & Challenges:

Although many fellows report highly positive experiences, the absence of consistent practices across the field has historically created avoidable inefficiencies and fairness concerns. These may include burdensome application processes, compressed timelines, conflicting expectations, and pressure points that make it more difficult for students, graduate programs, and fellowship sites to navigate recruitment effectively.

Graduate programs are strong supporters of fellowships as a pathway into the profession, yet faculty and staff often carry significant administrative burden during recruitment, including

providing numerous letters of recommendation on a condensed timeline. Fellowship site leaders face related pressures, including increasingly competitive recruitment environments that can accelerate decisions and limit thoughtful candidate review.

Our Mission:

To support greater coordination, fairness, transparency, and professionalism across the field, the National Council on Administrative Fellowships (NCAF) has developed this Code of Good Practice. This Code establishes shared expectations for all stakeholders involved in fellowship recruitment. It is grounded in professional conduct, good-faith participation, and coordinated practice across the field. While NCAF promotes adherence to these expectations, this Code is intended primarily as a framework for professional practice rather than a punitive enforcement mechanism.

The following principles guide this Code:

- All stakeholders are expected to follow one of the established recruitment timelines outlined in this document.
- Fellowship sites are expected to consider academic calendars and student obligations when planning interviews and informational sessions.
- Graduate programs are expected to provide letters of recommendation in a timely manner when requested.
- Applicants are expected to communicate professionally throughout the process, including responding to fellowship inquiries and offers promptly once a decision has been made.

National Council on Administrative Fellowships (NCAF)

NCAF is a voluntary membership organization of graduate health management programs and administrative fellowship sites that work collaboratively to advance the role, availability, and quality of fellowships and the fellowship recruitment process.

NCAF believes that:

- Early career healthcare leaders and managers benefit significantly from completion of a high-quality post-graduate fellowship.
- Organizations sponsoring fellowships benefit from the contributions of high-potential early careerists.

- Graduate programs, employers, and students benefit from better coordination across the field in the development and operation of fellowship opportunities.

NCAF is committed to:

Supporting the advancement of administrative fellowships by:

- Promoting the value of fellowships across a variety of healthcare sectors.
- Supporting the activities of the NCAF co-chairs and organizational members in setting the strategic direction of NCAF.
- Supporting data collection and benchmarking research used to analyze and evaluate fellowship trends and outcomes, including the annual benchmarking surveys, NAFCAS data, and LearningBridge.
- Providing relevant and updated resources for graduate health management programs and administrative fellowship sites.
- Working collaboratively with other organizations to strengthen the growth and success of fellowships and the health management profession.

Providing member support services by:

- Responding to member inquiries and concerns in a timely manner.
- Maintaining an updated list of NCAF members and contacts to support communication and collaboration, a prospective member list for outreach, and a public-facing directory of NCAF fellowships for applicants.
- Overseeing and coordinating the work of Liaison International to support successful implementation of the National Administrative Fellowship Centralized Application Service (NAFCAS) and the LearningBridge Offer Tracking Instrument.
- Supporting the promotion of NAFCAS applications and fellowship sites that post their applications in both NAFCAS and elsewhere while adhering to the Code of Good Practice.

Together, these activities help support a more transparent, coordinated, and professionally grounded fellowship process and strengthen preparation for future leadership roles in the field.

Code of Good Practice by Stakeholder Group

This section provides an overview of the code from the perspective of each stakeholder who participates in fellowship recruitment, in some capacity.

Graduate Program Directors and Advisors

- Graduate program directors and advisors should take an active role in supporting the fellowship process by:
 - Communicating their support of NCAF fellowship sites and the value of standardized processes, deadlines, and Code of Good Practice requirements to both students and non-NAFCAS fellowship sites.
 - Preparing students with the requisite skills for success in fellowships.
 - Developing an understanding of the role fellowships have on future career development.
 - Promoting the value of fellowships to graduate students interested in fellowships as well as alumni who may be able to develop fellowship sites.
 - Connecting with healthcare organizations that currently offer fellowships so that students gain increased exposure to potential fellowship opportunities.
 - Seeking feedback from recent program graduates about their experiences with specific fellowship sites.
 - Assisting current students in considering whether, how, and which specific fellowship placements may benefit their career goals, align with their interests, and meet their geographic preferences.
 - Supporting students in putting together competitive applications for the appropriate number of fellowships.
 - Reminding students to respond in a timely manner to offers, including logging into the LearningBridge platform to confirm acceptance or denial of the fellowship offer.
 - Assisting students in navigating the offer process for both NCAF and Non-NCAF fellowship sites, by encouraging students to behave in a professional manner. Graduate programs will advise on how to handle multiple offers, to ensure students are able to make the best decision for their career.

Notes on Letters of Recommendation

- Applicants are required to submit three letters of recommendation: one academic reference, one professional reference, and one additional reference of their choosing.

- There is no requirement that the graduate program director serve as the academic reference.
- NAFCAS applications are not verified until all required letters of recommendation and transcripts have been received and confirmed.

Graduate Program Benchmarking Expectation

By participating in NCAF membership, fellowship site organizations understand that they are expected to complete the annual benchmarking survey and provide data regarding their student's experience in the fellowship recruitment process, allowing for the proper collection of fellowship trend data.

Note: The benchmarking survey is launched each summer, and contributing programs receive the final report in the fall or winter.

Applicants

Applicants should take an active and professional role in determining whether a fellowship is an appropriate next step and which opportunities are the best fit for their goals. Applicants should do so by: Discussing fellowship opportunities with their program advisors.

- Investing time into researching fellowship sites before applying, to ensure they are a good fit for their background as well as career interests.
- Investing an adequate amount of time preparing fellowship application materials (personal essay, resume, etc.).
- Submit materials in a timely fashion.
 - Anyone applying via NAFCAS should note that the centralized application service will open on the second Friday in June, and will remain open until September 10, 2026, at 11:59:59 PM. Applicants are expected to submit applications by the deadlines expressed by site, as some recruiters will close their applications on different dates.
- Attending various educational and networking opportunities made available by NCAF. Visit the [NCHL website](#) to learn more.
- Ensure their response to the annual benchmarking survey to further the field of health management and help shape the future of fellowship recruitment.

Applicants who choose to apply for fellowships are expected to demonstrate professionalism throughout the application, interview, and offer process by:

- Applying only to fellowship sites they would genuinely consider accepting. On average, students apply to 5 administrative fellowships.
- Preparing appropriately for each interview.
- Prioritizing fellowship preferences following interviews in order to support an efficient offer process.
- Responding to communications and offers in a timely manner.
- Updating their status in LearningBridge when required and providing any written or verbal confirmation requested by the organization.
- Thoughtfully considering options and accepting a fellowship offer only with the full intention to serve as a fellow at that organization.
- Promptly notifying other sites and withdrawing from all remaining applications, interviews, and offers once a fellowship offer has been accepted.
- Understanding that fellow compensation and benefits are typically established by organizational budget and are often not negotiable.

Offer Response Expectations

- Offers may be received any time after the application deadline of the last Friday in September.
- If an offer is received from a site participating in National Offer Week, applicants will have 48 hours to accept or decline the offer. No responses may extend beyond the stated final deadline for that cycle.
- If an offer is received from a site using an independent recruitment timeline, applicants should be given a clearly communicated and reasonable timeframe to respond.

Offer Acceptance Standard

Acceptance of a fellowship offer represents a professional commitment. Once an applicant accepts an offer, they are expected to withdraw immediately from all other active fellowship processes and notify other sites accordingly.

Note: Continuing to interview, remain under consideration elsewhere, or solicit additional offers after accepting a fellowship is inconsistent with the NCAF Code of Good Practice. Participating fellowship sites may treat such behavior as a breach of professional expectations and may withdraw active offers or discontinue consideration for that recruitment cycle.

Applicants Receiving an Offer from a Non-NCAF Site

If an applicant receives an offer from a fellowship site that is not an NCAF member and it is not the applicant's first choice, the applicant should:

- Ask the site whether additional time may be granted to decide in a manner consistent with this Code.
- Contact their first-choice site, if it is an NCAF site, for an update on the status of their application.
- Meet with their graduate program director or advisor to discuss available options.

Applicant Benchmarking Participation

Applicants are strongly encouraged to complete the annual benchmarking survey. Their participation helps strengthen the field's understanding of recruitment trends, informs improvements to the fellowship process, and supports a better experience for future applicants.

Note: The benchmarking survey is launched each summer, and contributing programs receive the final report in the fall or winter.

Fellowship Site Administrators

Fellowship site administrators are expected to support a fair, transparent, and high-quality recruitment experience by:

- Providing applicants with an accurate description of the fellowship, including both its strengths and limitations.
- Sharing compensation and benefits information whenever possible, consistent with NCAF recommendations.
- Including a link to the most current version of the Code of Good Practice in NAFCAS and in all NCAF member fellowship applications for applicant review.

- Using the LearningBridge platform to document offers and support accurate tracking and communication, when applicable.
- Communicating promptly and appropriately with applicants if the fellowship is withdrawn from recruitment after posting.
- Providing constructive feedback to graduate program directors when appropriate or requested.
- Clearly communicating application, interview, and offer expectations in recruitment materials.
- Providing a high-quality fellowship experience for recruited fellows.
- Participating in annual benchmarking efforts as part of NCAF membership.

In the unlikely event that a fellowship site withdraws from recruitment during or after the active application period because the position is no longer being offered, best practice is for the organization to consider an applicant refund or a comparable accommodation. This communication should come directly from the fellowship site. Any refund or replacement application support should be provided by the organization rather than by NCAF or NAFCAS.

Fellowship Program Quality Expectations

- Fellowship site administrators should strive to ensure that their fellowship program includes:
 - Opportunities to work with senior executives and gain insight into organizational decision-making.
 - Opportunities to work across multiple levels of the healthcare organization.
 - Opportunities to engage meaningfully with multiple departments.
 - Opportunities to take initiative and ownership in creating or improving processes or programs.
 - Opportunities to work on and complete well-structured assignments and projects.
- Fellowship sites should also:
 - Provide performance feedback to fellows on a regular basis.
 - Initiate discussions regarding post-fellowship employment opportunities no later than three months prior to the anticipated conclusion of the fellowship.

- Conduct post-fellowship evaluations to gather timely and accurate feedback that can be used for continuous improvement.

Reminder: The LearningBridge platform allows sites to document offers and support accurate tracking and communication. Fellowship sites should reconcile the offers made from their organizations with LearningBridge to provide a transparent recruiting process to prospective applicants.

Professional Expectations for Fellowship Sites

Fellowship sites should strive to strengthen the overall reputation and value of fellowships within the healthcare management profession by:

- Supporting applicants' ability to determine which site is the best fit for their interests and needs.
- Creating learning and development opportunities that meet or exceed the expectations of the field for early career professionals.

Fellowship Site Benchmarking Expectation

By participating in NCAF membership, fellowship site organizations understand that they are expected to complete the annual benchmarking survey and provide data regarding their fellowship and recruitment experience to support trend analysis and continuous improvement across the field.

Note: The benchmarking survey is launched each summer, and contributing programs receive the final report in the fall or winter.

Recruitment Pathways

Recruitment Model Selection

Fellowship sites may choose the recruitment approach that best aligns with their organizational needs and internal decision-making processes. Sites may either participate in National Offer Week or use an independent recruitment timeline. In either case, sites are expected to communicate their process clearly and conduct recruitment in a professional, fair, and good-faith manner.

NAFCAS Applicants, Standardized Offer Dates, and National Offer Week

Students who apply through NAFCAS to sites participating in National Offer Week may gain access to increased visibility and additional professional development opportunities in recognition of their achievement. These opportunities may include fee waivers or grant-supported applications, national recognition, and participation in exclusive cohort-based mentoring or leadership engagement experiences, when available. See “Recruitment Dates Overview” for the updated 2026 Recruitment Dates.

Administrative Fellowship Sites Participating in National Offer Week

Sites that elect to participate in National Offer Week agree to follow the published Offer Week dates and response expectations for that recruitment cycle. Participating sites are expected to:

- Extend offers only during National Offer Week.
- Allow candidates to 48 hours from receipt of an offer to accept or decline.
- Refrain from formally or informally pressuring candidates to respond before the full response period has elapsed.
- Use LearningBridge, when applicable, to document candidate decisions and support timely communication.

Administrative Fellowship Sites Using an Independent Recruitment Timeline

Sites that choose not to participate in National Offer Week may use a recruitment timeline that aligns with their organizational needs. These sites are encouraged to clearly communicate their application, interview, and offer timelines and to provide candidates with a reasonable timeframe for decision-making consistent with the principles of professionalism, transparency, and fairness reflected in this Code.

Independent timeline sites should:

- Provide clear language in their application materials regarding deadlines, interview expectations, and offer timing.
- Allow candidates **72 hours** to accept or decline an offer.
- Refrain from formally or informally pressuring candidates to respond before the full 72-hour decision window has elapsed.
- Ensure that final candidate decisions are reconciled and completed in LearningBridge by **October 16, 2026**. (Offers are made by October 16, 2026).

Sites may otherwise structure their recruitment approach in accordance with their organizational needs and internal processes.

Together, these activities help support a more transparent, coordinated, and professionally grounded fellowship process and strengthen preparation for future leadership roles in the field.

2026/2027 Recruitment Dates Overview

Recruitment Process Timeline: National Offer Week Participants

| Date | Activities | Additional Information |
|--|--|---|
| Friday, June 5 2026 | NAFCAS Cycle 1 Opens | NAFCAS publishes all active fellowship sites. |
| Monday, August 24 2026 | Fellowship Phone Interviews | Fellowship Sites can perform phone interviews with verified applicants |
| Site's Choice | Application Deadline | Fellowship Sites can choose which day they close their application to prospective applicants, or follow the NAFCAS Portal closure date below. |
| Thursday, September 10 2026 | NAFCAS Cycle 1 Closes | NAFCAS Portal closes alongside the first cycle of administrative fellowship recruitment. All applications will close at 11:59:59 PM ET. |
| Monday, September 14 – Thursday, October 1 2026 | Interview Period | All forms of interviews are conducted during this window, including on-site and final round interviews. |
| Friday, October 2 nd – Friday, October 9 2026 | All Offers Given | Applicants have 48 hours to provide an acceptance or denial response before supplemental offers are distributed. This includes the use of the LearningBridge platform to complete offers and share information with NCHL. |
| Monday, October 11 2026 | Final Offer Acceptance Deadline | Fellowship Sites have made all offer as appropriate and this is the final deadline for applicants to respond. |
| Friday, October 16 2026 | National Offer Week Campaign & LearningBridge Review | Exclusive to applicants accepted to fellowships that participate in National Offer Week, incoming fellows will be celebrated on NCHL's social media and invited to a exclusive professional development offering/webinar. Ensure that final candidate decisions are reconciled and completed in LearningBridge. |
| Monday, November 2 2026 | NAFCAS Cycle 2 Opens | This cycle runs on a rolling basis with no offer period or strict interviewing dates. |
| Friday, January 29 2027 | NAFCAS Cycle 2 Closes | This cycle runs on a rolling basis with no offer period or strict interviewing dates. |

NAFCAS & LearningBridge System Dates

| Date | Activities | Additional Information |
|------------------------------|-----------------------|---|
| Friday, June 5, 2026 | NAFCAS Cycle 1 Opens | |
| Thursday, September 10, 2026 | NAFCAS Cycle 1 Closes | NAFCAS Portal closes alongside the first cycle of administrative fellowship recruitment. All applications will close at 11:59:59 PM ET. |
| Friday, October 16, 2026 | LearningBridge Closes | Ensure that final candidate decisions are reconciled and completed in LearningBridge. |
| Monday, November 2, 2026 | NAFCAS Cycle 2 Opens | This cycle runs on a rolling basis with no offer period or strict interviewing dates. |
| Friday, January 29, 2027 | NAFCAS Cycle 2 Closes | This cycle runs on a rolling basis with no offer period or strict interviewing dates. |