

Program Director Associations Guide for Residency Applicants

Anesthesiology

The *Program Director Associations Guide for Residency Applicants* is a collaborative effort between the Organization of Program Directors Association (OPDA), Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC), and American Medical Association (AMA). Its purpose is to provide specialty-specific guidance, application information, and resources.

This guide outlines specialty-level guidance and policies for applicants to Anesthesiology programs. **Specialty-specific guidance reflects the specialty’s intent for applicant preparation and the residency application process but may not reflect all individual program requirements.** Applicants should review individual program requirements in Residency Explorer™ tool, FREIDA™, or on program websites.

Specialty responses in this guide were provided through a standardized web form. The corresponding questions from that form are referenced in the footnotes. If a specialty indicated “No specialty guidance,” it means the specialty does not provide guidance on that aspect of the selection process.

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Specialty Guidance for the 2026–2027 Cycle

Specialty-Specific Resources

Anesthesiology has published a statement: <https://www.saaapm.org/guide-for-residency-applicants-2026-2027>

Away Rotations

Away Rotation Details	Specialty Recommendation
Away rotations in the specialty¹	Optional, Not Expected Purpose: to gain additional exposure or confirm interest in specialty before applying
Number of away rotations in the specialty	No more than 2

Additional Guidance: Anesthesiology programs encourage applicants to arrange a fourth-year rotation schedule that allows them to confirm their interest in Anesthesiology and gain broad-based experience in other areas of medicine that interest them.

- Completion of an away rotation is welcomed but not required.
- Applicants should complete no more than 2 external electives in Anesthesiology to be mindful of future colleagues and equity concerns related to access to rotations.
- Applicants will not be penalized for not completing away rotations at programs to which they have applied.
- We recommend that individuals who choose to complete away rotations perform at an acting intern level and utilize the month to gain broad experience in Anesthesiology as well as familiarize yourself with that program and institution.
- If interested in away rotations, students should visit the website(s) of programs they are interested in to see if they utilize the Visiting Student Learning Opportunity (VSLO) platform and/or have separate applications.
- Consider applying to away programs early as spots are limited and fill quickly.
- IMG applicants should strongly consider an away rotation with clinical experience in the US system.
- Completion of an away rotation is independent of program signaling. Applicants SHOULD signal programs where they completed a sub-internship/away rotation if those programs are among their preferred programs.

¹ Even if an applicant's home institution has a program in your specialty, are completing away rotations in the specialty optional, strongly recommended, or required for applicants?: Optional, Not Expected (to gain additional exposure or confirm interest in specialty before applying); Strongly Recommended (important to being considered, but not always required given certain circumstances); Required (will not be considered without it)

Use of USMLE and/or COMLEX-USA Scores

License Exam Details	Specialty Recommendation
USMLE transcripts required for DO applicants?²	No, USMLE scores are not required for DO applicants

Additional Guidance:

- The Association of Anesthesiology Core Program Directors recommends that programs should not require osteopathic trainees to take other licensing examinations in addition to COMLEX-USA. However, individual programs may choose to require USMLE examination scores for osteopathic students. Please look for guidance regarding this requirement on individual program websites.
- Anesthesiology applicants should ideally have their exam transcripts (USMLE Step 1 and Step 2 CK transcripts and/or COMLEX-USA Level 1 and Level 2-CE) available for programs to review by the application opening date. Many programs will not review applications in consideration for interview that do not have a result reported on USMLE Step 1 and Step 2 CK or COMLEX-USA Level 1 and Level 2-CE.
- We suggest any late materials be uploaded AND emailed to the program coordinator of programs the applicant is applying to.
- Most programs require a Step 2 CK or COMLEX-USA Level 2 CE to be reported to be considered for the rank list.
- Programs vary in their consideration of applicants who have previously failed a licensure exam.
- The average Step 2 CK score for matched first year residents in Anesthesiology from the 2020-2021 AAMC Report on Residents showed a Step 2 CK score >240 or a COMLEX-USA Level 2-CE score >600, although programs may choose to interview applicants whose test performance is below these values.

² Does your specialty require that DO applicants submit USMLE scores in addition to COMLEX-USA scores?: Yes, USMLE scores are required for all applicants; No, USMLE scores are not required for DO applicants

Application Process

Application Process Details	Specialty Recommendation
Main Residency Match Season	AAMC Electronic Residency Application Service (ERAS)
Supplemental Offer and Acceptance Program (SOAP)	AAMC Electronic Residency Application Service (ERAS)
When programs start reviewing applications³	Date applications are released to programs by the application service
Application materials accepted after the deadline⁴	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Letters of recommendation should be submitted prior to interview at the very latest (see additional guidelines). • USMLE Step 2 CK or COMLEX-USA Level 2 CE transcripts: Many programs require a Step 2 or equivalent to be considered for interview so results should be available to review as soon as possible after initial application submitted.

Additional Guidance: Individual programs vary on their review of materials added after September 23. All materials should be submitted within a month of initial application to optimize chances of an interview.

- Anesthesiology applicants should ideally have both their USMLE Step 1 and Step 2 CK transcripts or both COMLEX-USA Level 1 or Level 2-CE available for programs to review by the application opening date. Many programs will not review applications that do not have a result reported on USMLE Step 1 and Step 2 or COMLEX-USA Level 1 and Level 2-CE.
- If additional material is added after September 24th, the information may not be reviewed.
- LORs beyond the minimum of 3 can be added at a later date, but programs may not notice documents added to ERAS after September 23.

We suggest any late materials be uploaded AND emailed to the program coordinator of programs the applicant is applying to.

³ Which best describes when programs will start reviewing applications for this application cycle (2026-2027)?: Date applications are released to programs; Other

⁴ Is it acceptable for applicants to submit some application materials after the initial application?: Yes; No

Program Signals

Program Signals Details	Specialty Recommendation
Number of signals	5 gold, 10 silver
Signal home institutions?	Yes
Signal programs where they completed away rotations?	Yes
Submit program signal explanations?	Yes

Program Signal Explanations: As part of the ERAS application, applicants will be asked to provide a statement explaining their interest in each program they signal.

Additional Guidance: Use of signaling is HIGHLY RECOMMENDED for applicants and programs in Anesthesiology. Signals should reflect a candidate's GENUINE INTEREST in the program and not solely be based on probability of interview.

- Programs will be able to view signaling (if present) on each applicant's ERAS profile. Signals are not further presented in any particular order. In other words, there is not a gold number 1, gold number 2, etc.
- Programs will NOT be able to see which other programs an applicant has signaled.
- Applicants should use all their signals. There is no known advantage to not using all available signals.
- Anesthesiology applicants will be asked to provide a signal statement explaining their interest in each program they signal.
- Applicants are strongly encouraged to consider their personal values and goals, consult faculty advisors, as well as utilize resources to explore residency programs such as individual program websites, AMA FREIDA, AAMC Residency Explorer, and any other available resources. The applicant's goal should be to find programs that best align with their goals and where they are most likely to be competitive. It is discouraged to send signals to programs at which the applicant is unlikely to be competitive, as this is less likely to result in an interview offer.
- Geographic signaling will continue to be utilized in Anesthesiology applications for the 2026 - 2027 season.
- Additional guidance on using program signals and geographic signals is available on the AAMC ERAS website.
- Applicants who are couples matching should ensure both members of the couple signal the same programs whenever possible. Asking a program an applicant did not signal to grant the applicant an interview because their partner received an interview at the same institution is discouraged and unlikely to be successful.

Letters of Recommendation or Evaluation

LOR Details	Specialty Recommendation
Required number of LORs	At least 3, No more than 4
Required letter writers ⁵	Someone within the specialty (e.g., faculty, attending)
Is there a specialty-specific standardized letter? ⁶	No

Additional Guidance:

- At least one LOR (many programs require at least 2) should be from the field of Anesthesiology. Please review program websites for guidance.
- Other supporting letters should come from faculty that are most familiar with your performance. These faculty may include research mentors, medical school mentors, or faculty from other clinical specialties, whether from your home institution or an away rotation.
- There is no specific recommendation or requirement for a Standard Letter of Evaluation (SLOE) or Chair or Program Director letter, although individual programs may have specific requirements for letters. Applicants should review program websites to which they plan to apply.

Guidance for Applicants from Transitional Year/Prelim Programs: It is highly recommended (but not required) that any applicant who is currently in a residency training program provide a letter of recommendation from their current program director. Programs may vary on their requirements for this.

Guidance for IMG Applicants: There are no specific letter of recommendation requirements for IMG applicants however it is suggested to have at least one letter from a US-based physician who knows the applicant's clinical experience. Otherwise, applicants should refer to program specific guidelines.

Research/Scholarly Activity

Showing evidence of scholarly activity of some kind is important, but not an absolute requirement, for applying in anesthesiology. Presentation of posters, or significant contributions to a Quality Improvement or Patient Safety Project can be a valuable addition to the application. Quality is valued over quantity. The research does not need to be in the field of anesthesiology or done with an anesthesiologist as a mentor. Programs are interested in seeing that applicants have the critical thinking and organizational skills to conduct a project and see it to publication regardless of the field of study. Applicants who do not have published articles can still show evidence of similar skills

⁵ Who is required to submit letters? (Select all that apply): Someone within the specialty (e.g., faculty, attending); Department chair; Program director; Physician preceptor at an away rotation (e.g., program director, faculty); Other

⁶ Does your specialty have a specialty-specific standardized letter of evaluation or standardized letter of recommendation?: Yes; No

through involvement in activities such as quality improvement projects, poster presentations, leadership in community projects, etc.

For all experiences, we encourage applicants to showcase quality over quantity. For any scholarly activity listed on the CV/application, the applicant should be prepared to discuss the topic and their involvement with interviewers with reasonable insight into the project.

Specialty-Specific Essays

Applicants to Anesthesiology are required to complete the following questions in MyERAS before they can submit their application to Anesthesiology programs. Responses to these questions will be shared only with Anesthesiology programs.

- Describe a time when you faced adversity, how you overcame it, and any lessons learned from it. (500-character limit)
- Describe a time when you made a difficult decision in a complex situation (not necessarily related to medicine). How did you make your decision, and what was the result? What did you learn from this experience? (500-character limit)
- Describe your ideal career as an attending. (500-character limit)

Supplemental Information

Supplemental Application Materials	Specialty Recommendation
Supplemental application materials required? ⁷	No

Additional Guidance: None noted.

Applicant Communications

Pre-Interview Communication Guidance: It is not recommended to use letters of interest prior to receiving an interview offer. Please utilize the signaling process to express program interest.

If an applicant receives a rejection email, further communication asking for an interview should be avoided.

⁷ Does the specialty require applicants to submit supplemental application materials (e.g., use of other assessments, supplemental videos or essays)? Yes; No

Post-Interview Communication Guidance: Post-interview or pre-rank list communication is also not necessary for applicants. If an applicant would like to send a thank you note or a letter of interest, they are welcome to do so. Applicants should understand that the Program Director may not respond, and this correspondence will not be utilized to influence interview/rank list outcomes.

Interviews

Interview Details	Specialty Recommendation
Universal interview offer date(s)	No specialty guidance
Typical interview offer window	October - January
Interview scheduling platform	–
Interview format⁸	Virtual

Additional Guidance: Anesthesiology programs usually interview from late October to mid-January.

- There is no universal release date for Anesthesiology interviews or deadline by which all interviews will be offered.
- Please refer to individual program websites or coordinators for more information and for platforms utilized for interview offers/scheduling.
- The Association of Anesthesiology Core Program Directors recommends that all Anesthesiology programs conduct virtual interviews for this application cycle, although individual programs may choose to conduct interviews in-person depending on the unique needs of their program.

Open Houses / Second Looks

Open Houses:

- Open houses prior to ERAS application opening may be provided by individual programs. Please see program websites/social media for additional information. The American Society of Anesthesiologists website has a list of many planned open houses. Attendance and participation at open houses are optional and purely for applicant information. They will not be utilized to determine interview offers.
- The ASA residency open house at the Anesthesiology Annual meeting is not a recruiting opportunity for 4th year applicants. Active applicants should not expect to meet program directors or discuss interview offers during this session.

⁸ Which interview format does the specialty recommend that programs use?: Virtual; In-person; Hybrid (an applicant chooses either an in-person or virtual interview format); Hybrid (an applicant completes both virtual and in-person interviews)

Second Looks: Second look opportunities after interviews (but before rank lists are due by applicants) may also be available to applicants depending on the individual program. Please see program websites for additional information.

- Attendance at these events is optional and should not affect rank list determination by programs.
- It is strongly encouraged that programs consider a voluntary lock of their rank order list prior to hosting their second look events to reinforce the optional nature of these programs. o Program leadership may choose not to participate in any second look events to avoid bias or equity issues for applicants.

NRMP Voluntary Rank Order List (ROL) Lock Pilot Initiative: No

Match Platform

Anesthesiology participates in the National Resident Matching Program (NRMP) and Military Match (i.e., Joint Service Graduate Medical Education Selection Board, Military Selection Board).

Additional Guidance: None noted.