

Program Director Associations Guide for Residency Applicants

Orthopaedic Surgery

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 Orthopaedic Surgery 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

None noted.

Away Rotations

Away Rotation Details	Specialty Recommendation
Away rotations in the specialty¹	Strongly Recommended Purpose: important to being considered, but not always required given certain circumstances
Number of away rotations in the specialty	At least 1, No more than 3

Additional Guidance: Orthopaedic surgery encourages each applicant to arrange a fourth-year rotation schedule that allows them to confirm their interest in Orthopaedic Surgery and also gain broad-based experience in other areas of medicine that interest them. AOA/CORD acknowledges: The financial burden of doing multiple away rotations and that there is unequal access to away rotations at different medical schools. AOA/CORD recommends a limit of 4 medical student rotations, inclusive of all rotations (home and away). AOA/CORD strongly recommends students consult with advisors to determine number and location for away rotations. AOA/CORD is recommending that all programs participate in a voluntary system of Universal Away Rotation Offer Days. Please see the guidelines on the [AOA/CORD website](#).

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

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)

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

Additional Guidance: AOA/CORD recommends that all programs consider COMLEX-USA or USMLE exams when engaging in holistic application review. We recommend that programs do not require USMLE examination when COMLEX-USA score is available. Additionally, we encourage all programs to offer transparency about how they consider these scores in application review.

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	None

Additional Guidance: None noted.

Geographic Preferences

Orthopaedic Surgery programs **will not** receive applicants' geographic preferences in the 2027 ERAS application season. While applicants may enter geographic preference information in their MyERAS application if applying to other specialties, these preferences will not be shared with Orthopaedic Surgery programs.

Program Signals

Program Signals Details	Specialty Recommendation
Number of signals	30
Signal home institutions?	Yes
Signal programs where they completed away rotations?	Yes

Additional Guidance: None noted.

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

Letters of Recommendation or Evaluation

LOR Details	Specialty Recommendation
Required number of LORs	At least 3, No more than 4
Required letter writers⁵	At least two should be from the field of orthopaedic surgery. These can be from your home institution and/or an institution where you completed an away rotation.
Is there a specialty-specific standardized letter?⁶	Yes
Specialty-specific standardized letter required?⁷	Recommended

Additional Guidance: At least two should be from the field of orthopaedic surgery. These can be from your home institution and/or an institution where you completed an away rotation. AOA/CORD recommends that programs should carefully consider eliminating the requirement for a Chair letter as part of the holistic review, recognizing that applicants are from differing types of institutions. Applicants should review the program’s profile in the [AOA/CORD Orthopaedic Residency Information Network \(ORIN\)[®]](#) and/or program websites to which they plan to apply. Programs encourage all applicants/recommendation writers to use [the AOA/CORD Electronic Standardized Letter of Recommendation \(eSLOR\)](#).

Guidance for Applicants from Transitional Year/Prelim Programs: None noted.

Guidance for IMG Applicants: None noted.

Research/Scholarly Activity

Research is an important component of the evaluation process. Quality research and an understanding of research methods are important to programs.

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

⁷ If yes, is the specialty-specific standardized letter of evaluation recommended or required?: Recommended; Required

Supplemental Information

Supplemental Application Materials	Specialty Recommendation
Supplemental application materials required? ⁸	No

Additional Guidance: None noted.

Applicant Communications

Pre-Interview Communication Guidance: The specialty does not have a formal position on pre-interview communication. Please check individual Program websites for program-specific application requirements.

Post-Interview Communication Guidance: Orthopaedic Surgery strongly discourages any post-interview communication from the Program Director, Department Chair, or faculty on the Selection Committee.

Interviews

Interview Details	Specialty Recommendation
Universal interview offer date(s)	November 16, 2026, 12:00pm ET, November 19, 2026, 12:00pm ET
Typical interview offer window	–
Interview scheduling platform	–
Interview format ⁹	In-person

Additional Guidance: Orthopaedic surgery is encouraging the use of Universal Interview Offer Day. This year, interview offers for all participating programs will be on November 16, 2026, 12:00pm ET. When interview offers are extended, there will be a 24-hour moratorium on accepting interviews. Following this moratorium, applicants will have 48 hours to schedule interviews. If an applicant declines/does not respond by Thursday, November 19, 2026, 12:00pm ET, the program may extend an invitation to another applicant.

⁸ Does the specialty require applicants to submit supplemental application materials (e.g., use of other assessments, supplemental videos or essays)?: Yes; No

⁹ 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)

AOA/CORD recommends that programs should make their own individual decisions about whether to host virtual or in-person interviews for the 2026-2027 cycle. Programs should not offer hybrid interviewing (i.e. some interviews held virtually and some in-person within the same program's match cycle) for the main applicant pool (non-home students and non-rotators). If a program chooses to conduct in-person interviews, a virtual format should only be considered for interviewing home students or those who have done an in-person rotation. Programs should publish their decision to proceed with virtual or in-person interviews on the program's website and in the program's profile in ORIN.

Open Houses / Second Looks

Open Houses: Open Houses are program specific. Please check individual Program websites or the [Orthopaedic Residency Information Network or ORIN](#) for more information.

Second Looks: Orthopaedic Surgery strongly discourages any post-interview communication from the Program Director, Department Chair, or faculty on the Selection Committee. Second Looks should only be allowed after the Rank Order List has been submitted and certified by the Program and should not affect Rank Order decisions.

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

Match Platform

Orthopaedic Surgery participates in the National Resident Matching Program (NRMP).

Additional Guidance: None noted.