

Program Director Associations Guide for Residency Applicants

Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation

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 Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation 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

Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation has published a statement:

<https://www.physiatry.org/resource/aap-position-statement-on-resident-recruitment/>

Away Rotations

Away Rotation Details	Specialty Recommendation
Away rotations in the specialty ¹	Optional, Not Expected Purpose: to gain additional exposure or confirm interest in specialty before applying
Number of away rotations in the specialty	–

Additional Guidance: Minimum of one PM&R rotation strongly encouraged. If completed at home institution via required or elective clerkship, away rotation is not required.

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: None noted.

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

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	Complete applications (all letters and board scores) are strongly encouraged by MSPE release date. However, waivers will vary by program. Confirm with individual programs as needed. Delays will likely result in delayed or missing interview offers.

Additional Guidance: None noted.

Program Signals

Program Signals Details	Specialty Recommendation
Number of signals	20
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: 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	Someone within the specialty (e.g., faculty, attending)
Is there a specialty-specific standardized letter?⁶	Yes
Specialty-specific standardized letter required?⁷	Recommended

Additional Guidance: SLOE (Standardized Letter of Evaluation) found at <https://www.physiatry.org/resources/standardized-letter-of-evaluation/>

Guidance for Applicants from Transitional Year/Prelim Programs: Applicants currently in a Transitional or Preliminary program are strongly encouraged to include a letter from current Program Director.

Guidance for IMG Applicants: None noted.

Research/Scholarly Activity

PM&R-relevant research, quality improvement or community service projects, and leadership in extracurricular activities are valuable ways to gain insight into the specialty and maximize personal and professional growth. Refer to individual programs' websites for clarification of minimums or details.

Supplemental Information

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

Additional Guidance: None noted.

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

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

Applicant Communications

Pre-Interview Communication Guidance: Policies are institution specific. Specialty recommends reviewing individual programs' websites for details.

Post-Interview Communication Guidance: Policies are institution specific. Specialty recommends reviewing individual programs' websites for details.

Interviews

Interview Details	Specialty Recommendation
Universal interview offer date(s)	–
Typical interview offer window	September 2026 - January 2027
Interview scheduling platform	–
Interview format ⁹	No specialty guidance

Additional Guidance: Virtual or in-person interviews are equally acceptable but Hybrid formats within an institution are discouraged.

Open Houses / Second Looks

Open Houses: Institutions are encouraged to delay open houses and second looks until after their rank lists have been certified to minimize applicant concern for mandates and/or biases towards attendance.

Second Looks: Institutions are encouraged to delay open houses and second looks until after their rank lists have been certified to minimize applicant concern for mandates and/or biases towards attendance.

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

Match Platform

Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation participates in the National Resident Matching Program (NRMP).

Additional Guidance: None noted.

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)