

Program Director Associations Guide for Residency Applicants

Plastic Surgery - Integrated

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 Plastic Surgery - Integrated 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.

Table of Contents

Specialty-Specific Resources.....	2
Away Rotations.....	2
Use of USMLE and/or COMLEX-USA Scores.....	2
Application Process	3
Geographic Preferences.....	3
Program Signals.....	3
Letters of Recommendation or Evaluation	4
Research/Scholarly Activity	5
Specialty-Specific Essays.....	5
Supplemental Information.....	5
Applicant Communications	5
Interviews.....	6
Open Houses / Second Looks	6
Match Platform.....	6

Specialty Guidance for the 2026–2027 Cycle

Specialty-Specific Resources

Plastic Surgery - Integrated has published a statement: We recommend use of the resources available in ACEPS both on the website: <https://aceplasticsurgeons.org/Resources/?dID=1> and on the Instagram account: [@acepsedu](https://www.instagram.com/acepsedu)

Away Rotations

Away Rotation Details	Specialty Recommendation
Away rotations in the specialty ¹	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 4

Additional Guidance: Students with a home program are encouraged to complete no more than 3 rotations in plastic surgery (home program plus two away rotations). Students without a home program are encouraged to complete no more than 3 away rotations in plastic surgery. We recommend students spend additional months in medical school taking electives in subjects that will prepare them to do well in residency, including radiology, infectious disease, trauma surgery, and ICU care.

Use of USMLE and/or COMLEX-USA Scores

License Exam Details	Specialty Recommendation
USMLE transcripts required for DO applicants? ²	No specialty guidance

Additional Guidance: While USMLE scores are not required, most programs are less familiar with COMLEX scoring. Candidates to a specialty as competitive as plastic surgery are encouraged to take the USMLE.

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 applications ³	Date applications are released to programs by the application service
Application materials accepted after the deadline ⁴	No specialty guidance

Additional Guidance: None noted.

Geographic Preferences

Plastic Surgery - Integrated 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 Plastic Surgery - Integrated programs.

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.

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

Additional Guidance: 20 signals is enough for candidates to signal both home programs and rotation programs. In most situations, students who do not signal a program will not have their application reviewed by that program.

Letters of Recommendation or Evaluation

LOR Details	Specialty Recommendation
Required number of LORs	At least 3, No more than 4
Required letter writers⁵	No specialty guidance
Is there a specialty-specific standardized letter?⁶	Yes
Specialty-specific standardized letter required?⁷	Required

Additional Guidance: All three required letters should use the digital SLOE online form submission process through the AAMC’s Letter Writer Portal (LWP). A PDF version of a previous standardized letter will not meet this requirement. Although there are no requirements about which specialty the letters writers are from, most letters should come from academic plastic surgeons who have worked with the candidate closely and can speak to clinical performance through direct observation. If candidates had a substantial experience outside of plastic surgery (PhD program, career before medical school, etc.) they are encouraged to submit a letter from their advisor/mentor/director from those experiences as a fourth supplemental letter even though the writer of the letter is not a plastic surgeon.

Guidance for Applicants from Transitional Year/Prelim Programs: One letter should come from the program director or faculty mentor of the preliminary year program to address clinical performance in the prelim year.

Guidance for IMG Applicants: While there are no requirements, IMG candidates are encouraged to identify mentors or sponsors in the community of academic plastic surgeons in the USA who can speak to their candidacy for a US based residency.

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

Research/Scholarly Activity

Most successfully matched candidates to plastic surgery have a solid foundation in research, with several publications on their CV. There is no minimum number or type of research that is needed. These research experiences help the student gain critical thinking skills and an ability to evaluate the literature. They may also help students cultivate a strong relationship with a mentor who helps advocate for them in the application process. In the current application climate, not having research and publications on a CV would put a candidate in a very disadvantaged position. In very unusual circumstances, a candidate without research experience might be considered if they had a very impressive achievement in some other arena such as running a business.

Specialty-Specific Essays

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

- Describe a specific situation when a team you were on had to collaborate to achieve an outcome and there was a disagreement. How did you specifically contribute to the solution? (500-character limit)
- Describe a specific situation where you experienced a setback. How did you overcome this challenge? (500-character limit)
- Describe a time when you had to make an important decision quickly. What did you consider when making the decision? (500-character limit)

Supplemental Information

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

Additional Guidance: None noted.

Applicant Communications

Pre-Interview Communication Guidance: The number of students email program directors is enormous, and this tact is unlikely to help an applicant (and risks annoying a program director). Applicants who are interested in a program may find better results by asking a trusted mentor to reach out on their behalf.

⁸ 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: These are against the policy set forth by ACEPS and should not be done. Applicants who are interested in a program may find better results by asking a trusted mentor to reach out on their behalf.

Interviews

Interview Details	Specialty Recommendation
Universal interview offer date(s)	Single release date in early November
Typical interview offer window	–
Interview scheduling platform	Thalamus Core
Interview format ⁹	In-person

Additional Guidance: Please check the ACEPS page for important dates and information: <https://aceplasticsurgeons.org/Resources/?dID=1>

Open Houses / Second Looks

Open Houses: These are no longer being used in plastic surgery.

Second Looks: These are not currently offered in plastic surgery.

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

Match Platform

Plastic Surgery - Integrated 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)