

Program Director Associations Guide for Residency Applicants

General 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 General 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.

Table of Contents

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

Specialty Guidance for the 2026–2027 Cycle

Specialty-Specific Resources

General Surgery has published a statement: <https://www.apds.org/recruitment-requirements>

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

Additional Guidance: Applicants should complete at least one away rotation in General Surgery. They should attempt to complete this rotation in time to request a letter of recommendation from that experience to help support their application.

Use of USMLE and/or COMLEX-USA Scores

License Exam Details	Specialty Recommendation
USMLE transcripts required for DO applicants?²	Yes, USMLE scores are required for all applicants

Additional Guidance: Supported by the evidence, APDS strongly supports treating COMLEX-USA as equivalent to USMLE for DO applicants in General Surgery. However, applicants should be advised that many programs continue at present to require 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 applications³	Date applications are released to programs by the application service
Application materials accepted after the deadline⁴	No specialty guidance

Additional Guidance: None noted.

Program Signals

Program Signals Details	Specialty Recommendation
Number of signals	15
Signal home institutions?	Yes
Signal programs where they completed away rotations?	Yes

Additional Guidance: Applicants are encouraged to use their 15 signals to indicate their top 15 choice programs regardless of personal experience or connection to the program.

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
Required letter writers ⁵	No specialty guidance
Is there a specialty-specific standardized letter? ⁶	No

Additional Guidance: No specific specialty guidance. Should be someone who has directly worked with the applicant and can provide an accurate account of their work-ethic and merit.

Guidance for Applicants from Transitional Year/Prelim Programs: No specific guidance.

Guidance for IMG Applicants: No specialty guidance.

Research/Scholarly Activity

Most programs, but not all programs, will require at least one piece of peer reviewed published work to demonstrate the ability to complete the preparation, editing, and completion of a project and manuscript.

Most programs will value a lesser number of strong publications over the quantity of publications.

Volunteer work, quality improvement projects, and international experiences will also be considered as meaningful work.

Supplemental Information

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

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 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: Applicants are expected to respond to interview invitations within 48 business hours of invitation.

Post-Interview Communication Guidance: Thank you letters or post-interview communication is acceptable but not required.

Interviews

Interview Details	Specialty Recommendation
Universal interview offer date(s)	Wednesday October 21, 2026, Thursday October 22, 2026, Friday October 23, 2026
Typical interview offer window	–
Interview scheduling platform	–
Interview format ⁸	No specialty guidance

Additional Guidance: None noted.

Open Houses / Second Looks

Open Houses: This is highly program and institution dependent.

Second Looks: Second Looks are optional and are dependent on program mission and goals.

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

Match Platform

General Surgery 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.

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)