

Program Director Associations Guide for Residency Applicants

Neurological 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 Neurological 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	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

None noted.

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 2 or 3, No more than 3

Additional Guidance: 1 Home and 1-2 External AI rotations.

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: 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 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.

Program Signals

Program Signals Details	Specialty Recommendation
Number of signals	25
Signal home institutions?	No specialty guidance
Signal programs where they completed away rotations?	No specialty guidance

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
Required letter writers⁵	Someone within the specialty (e.g., faculty, attending), Physician preceptor at an away rotation (e.g., program director, faculty)
Is there a specialty-specific standardized letter?⁶	Yes
Specialty-specific standardized letter required?⁷	Recommended

Additional Guidance: In alignment with the published data and the SNS recommendation to undertake 1 Home and 1-2 External AI rotations, the SNS recommends that each applicant obtain the following recommendations:

- One (1) Home program: SNS Standardized Home Letter of Evaluation (SLOE)
- One to two (1) External programs: SNS Standardized Away Letters of Recommendation (SLOR) at each program
- One (1) letter of any kind

At each program, letters using the SLOE/SLOR standardized format may be written by an individual or by an evaluation committee, which will commonly involve the department chair, PD, and/or core education faculty who have worked with each applicant. SLOE/SLORs should provide a fair and balanced evaluation of each applicant. Importantly, the comparator group should include all students who have rotated with the department in the past 3 years. Narrative comments can be included within the template or attached to it as a companion, traditional narrative letter.

The final letter will often come from any individual mentor at the home or external rotation programs who knows the applicant well, from a clinical, research, or non-neurosurgical perspective. It may be appropriate for this letter writer to use the SLOR template or to write a traditional free-form letter. This can be determined at their discretion.

In alignment with AAMC recommendations, the SNS recommends that all faculty who review applications, write LOE/LORs, and participate in interviews should undergo implicit bias training every 12 months.

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

Guidance for IMG Applicants: 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

Research/Scholarly Activity

None noted.

Specialty-Specific Essays

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

- Describe a time when you had to make a quick decision. What did you consider when making the decision? Who did you consult or not and why? (1000-character limit)
- Describe a specific situation where you received negative feedback about your performance. How did you adjust your behavior? What did you learn from this situation? (1000-character limit)
- Describe a specific situation when your workload was overwhelming. What specific actions did you take to manage your workload? What was the outcome? (1000-character limit)

Specialty-Specific Personal Statement

Neurological Surgery Leadership has also asked all candidates to follow this prompt when writing their personal statement for the 2027 season:

- Neurosurgery is an arduous but rewarding career track. Describe your vision for your future career as a neurosurgeon. Discuss the challenges you foresee for your career as a neurosurgeon. Discuss the competencies and experiences you have had that prepare you for that future career and to face those challenges effectively.

Supplemental Information

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

Additional Guidance: None noted.

Applicant Communications

Pre-Interview Communication Guidance: Compliance with match standards.

Post-Interview Communication Guidance: Compliance with match standards.

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

Interviews

Interview Details	Specialty Recommendation
Universal interview offer date(s)	any Friday in October after 4pm EST
Typical interview offer window	–
Interview scheduling platform	Thalamus Core
Interview format ⁹	No specialty guidance

Additional Guidance: None noted.

Open Houses / Second Looks

Open Houses: None noted.

Second Looks: None noted.

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

Match Platform

Neurological Surgery 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)