

Program Director Associations Guide for Residency Applicants

Ophthalmology

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 Ophthalmology 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

Ophthalmology has published a statement:

To address the challenges faced by applicants and programs, Ophthalmology established a coordinated interview invitation release during the 2025–26 Match with 4 batch release dates. For the 2026–27 Match, invitations will be issued in 2 batches on October 13 and 20.

To allow applicants time to evaluate their invitations, there will be a 24-hour period before invitations can be accepted. Invitations must be accepted within the program's specified response time, which ranges from 48 hours to 120 hours (5 days) from time of receipt. Programs may release interviews either all at once or across the 2 dates, and they may extend invitations only up to the number of available interview slots. Applicants may cancel interviews at any time.

Ophthalmology will continue its preference signaling program, with the signal limit increasing from 10 to 15.

Unmatched applicants will be notified by email on January 22, three days before full match results are released on January 25. Matched applicants will not receive any communication on January 22.

The ACGME requires all ophthalmology programs to offer a PGY-1 year in either an integrated or joint format:

- Integrated programs: Applicants who match into an ophthalmology program with an integrated PGY-1 year are automatically matched into the program's integrated intern year. Applicants do not need to enroll in the NRMP, as they are already matched into the affiliated integrated program.
- Joint programs: An applicant who matches into an ophthalmology program with a joint PGY-1 year is guaranteed a position in the joint internship but is NOT automatically matched into that position. Applicants should contact each joint ophthalmology residency program for guidance on how to proceed to be matched into the joint PGY-1 year. This may include participating in the NRMP match.

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	No specialty guidance

Additional Guidance: None noted.

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: Applicants must upload a USMLE Step 1 score report or a COMLEX Level 1 report to complete the application. In addition to providing these results, applicants will be asked to report the number of times the exam has been taken. Completion of USMLE Step 2 (CK) or COMLEX-USA Level 2-CE is not required at the time of application submission, but may be required by individual programs. The timing of Step 2/Level 2 is up to the applicant, after consultation with medical school advisors. If Step 2/Level 2 has been taken before submission, applicants must enter the exam details in the Personal Information form and upload the Step 2/Level 2 score report.

Osteopathic applicants should note that some training programs require both a USMLE Step 1 score report and a COMLEX Level 1 report. Applicants should review the requirements of each program before applying.

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	San Francisco Match Central Application Service (CAS)
Supplemental Offer and Acceptance Program (SOAP)	No specialty guidance
When programs start reviewing applications³	Date applications are released to programs by the application service
Application materials accepted after the deadline⁴	- Letters of recommendation: Recommendation to have all application materials submitted by September 1, 2026 (date applications are released to programs). - MSPE: Recommendation to have all application materials submitted by September 23, 2026. - USMLE Step 1 or COMLEX-USA Level 1 transcripts: Recommendation to have all application materials submitted by September 1, 2026 (date applications are released to programs). - USMLE Step 2 CK or COMLEX-USA Level 2 CE transcripts: Recommendation to have all application materials submitted by September 1, 2026 (date applications are released to programs).

Additional Guidance: Recommendation to have MSPE submitted by September 23, 2026, and all other application materials submitted by September 1, 2026 (date applications are released to programs).

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

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: None noted.

Letters of Recommendation or Evaluation

LOR Details	Specialty Recommendation
Required number of LORs	No more than 3
Required letter writers ⁵	Someone within the specialty (e.g., faculty, attending)
Is there a specialty-specific standardized letter? ⁶	No

Additional Guidance: It is recommended for applicants to obtain 2 letters from Ophthalmology. Currently, there is no standard format for recommendation letters in Ophthalmology. There is no specific recommendation for a Chair letter, although applicants should review program websites for specific recommendations.

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

Research/Scholarly Activity

Most applicants engage in research and/or other scholarly activity while in medical school. There is no specialty specific guidance on the quantity, nature, or how research is evaluated. Please review individual programs for further details.

Supplemental Information

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

Additional Guidance: None noted.

Applicant Communications

Pre-Interview Communication Guidance: There is no specialty-wide guidance on pre-interview communication. Please refer to individual programs for specific details.

Post-Interview Communication Guidance: There is no specialty-wide guidance on post-interview communication. Please refer to individual programs for specific details.

Interviews

Interview Details	Specialty Recommendation
Universal interview offer date(s)	October 13, 2026, 12pm PT October 20, 2026, 12pm PT
Typical interview offer window	–
Interview scheduling platform	San Francisco Match
Interview format ⁸	Virtual

Additional Guidance: None noted.

⁷ Does the specialty require applicants to submit supplemental application materials (e.g., use of other assessments, supplemental videos or essays)? Yes; No

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)

Open Houses / Second Looks

Open Houses: Individual programs may offer an open house between December 28th, 2026 and January 13th, 2027. More information on open houses is listed on the SF Match website. Please contact individual programs for specific details.

Second Looks: None noted.

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

Match Platform

Ophthalmology participates in the San Francisco Match.

Additional Guidance: None noted.