

2024 SUPPORTING STATEMENT

Generic Clearance for Application Information and Follow-up Information for Fellowships, Scholarships, Internships, and Training Programs OMB # 0503-NEW

Terms of Clearance:

A. Justification

- 1. Explain the circumstances that make the collection of information necessary. Identify any legal or administrative requirements that necessitate the collection. Attach a copy of the appropriate section of each statute and regulation mandating or authorizing the collection of information.**

This is a new generic information collection request seeking approval for 3 years. The request “Generic Clearance for Application Information and Follow-up Information for Fellowships, Scholarships, Internships, and Training Programs” supports the Office of Partnerships and Public Engagement’s (OPPE) mission to connect rural and underserved communities to the education, tools, and resources available to them through Department of Agriculture programs and initiatives. OPPE coordinates outreach activities, including fellowship programs, scholarship programs, internship programs, and new initiatives that the Secretary of Agriculture deems appropriate on behalf of the Department’s agencies, offices, divisions, and units (7 U.S.C. 6934(c)).

Application and supporting documentation involving fellows, scholars, interns, and trainees are necessary for OPPE to effectively coordinate services provided by the Department. In addition, follow-up surveys administered to fellows, scholars, interns, and trainees upon completion of their respective programs are necessary to ensure that USDA is designing and implementing these programs effectively.

Applicants may possess a variety of degrees including, but not limited to, high school, post-baccalaureate, graduate, and doctorates. Potential applicants may apply for a variety of USDA opportunities by submitting applications, resumes, curriculum vitae (CV), reference letters, and other related documentation to OPPE or directly to USDA offices. This information is necessary to evaluate the eligibility, merits, and quality of potential candidates and will also assist in matching potential candidates to various fellowships, scholarships, internships, and training programs.

This proposed generic collection will allow diverse USDA programs to mature and change the application content, while also accepting the development of new fellowship, scholarship, and training programs. Similarly, this proposed generic collection will allow programs to tailor their information collection instruments to meet the needs of their respective programs.

This information collection will also enable USDA to collect qualitative participant feedback in an efficient, timely manner, in accordance with the Administration's commitment to providing career pathways to Federal positions. Participant feedback

surveys will provide useful insights on perceptions and opinions but will not be statistical surveys that yield quantitative results that can be generalized to the population of study. This feedback will provide insights into participant perceptions, experiences, and expectations; provide an early warning of issues with participant placement; or focus attention on areas where communication, training, or changes, in operations might improve program participation and conversion to Federal service. These collections will contribute directly to the improvement of program management.

Finally, this generic clearance process allows programs an abbreviated PRA clearance process to gather a tailored pool of candidates to meet the education needs of a rapidly changing workforce and assess the extent to which programs are meeting participant needs. In addition, this clearance would allow for central administration of the PRA Clearance process, form sharing among programs, and potentially fewer online application and participant feedback systems at USDA.

2. Indicate how, by whom, how frequently, and for what purpose the information is to be used. Except for a new collection, indicate the actual use the agency has made of the information received from the current collection.

This generic clearance will permit OPPE to more efficiently collect applications and related documentation so that potential candidates may receive consideration for programs of their choice. It is important to ensure that applications are targeted, streamlined, and work in conjunction with the respective outreach efforts of USDA agencies and mission areas.

In addition, these generic applications would allow OPPE to make changes and modify application information and related documentation in a rapid fashion to accommodate changing needs, programs, and specialties. The information collected would be used to assess the candidates and their potential match for the various fellowship, scholarship, and training programs.

A proposal for every program application and feedback survey would be made through the Supporting Statement A Request Template (Attachment 1).

The purpose of the proposed information collection activity is to:

- Assure that prospective candidates meet basic eligibility requirements;
- Assess their potential as future agriculture professionals;
- Determine where mutual project and program interests exist;
- Make decisions regarding which applicants will be recommended and approved for a variety of scholarships, fellowships, and trainings;
- Assess the extent to which program recipients meet their intended goals and outcomes; and
- Determine what changes may need to be made in designing or implementing these programs.

Application information is for internal use to make decisions about candidates invited to visit and participate in USDA fellowships, scholarships, internships, and trainings.

Applications are accepted at various times during the fiscal year: annually, three (3) times a year, in the spring, summer, fall consistent with academic semesters, or on a rolling basis.

Specific application information collected varies depending on the position, program, and length of the program. Most applications collect information about personal information, citizenship information, educational history, academic or research interests, employment history and experience, and motivation in pursuing academic or career goals at USDA can assist in the review of the application. In addition to an application, a cover letter, resume, CV, transcript, work and/or writing samples, personal statement, diversity statement, tax forms (if claiming financial disadvantage), and contact information for references may be requested. Reference letters may be requested from academic advisors, counselors, professors, and other professionals to provide confirmation of an applicant's degree and expected graduation date and/or previous experience.

Feedback collected under this generic clearance is for internal use to inform future program design and assess performance. Specific information that is collected varies depending on the position, program, and length of the applicable program. Most participant feedback surveys collect information about the participant's placement experience, the extent to which the program supported their respective goals, and the participant's plans to pursue an agriculture-related career or postsecondary education. Follow-up surveys are typically administered within 30 days of the conclusion of a fellowship, scholarship, or training program. Scholarship programs that are implemented over a 4-year period that consist of multiple internship opportunities may implement a follow-up survey one (1) year upon completion of the entire program, in addition to the surveys implemented upon completion of each year of the program, to assess participant perceptions of value and improve program operations.

All applications and participant feedback collections will be voluntary, low-burden, non-controversial, and will not raise issues of concern to other Federal agencies.

3. Describe whether, and to what extent, the collection of information involves the use of automated, electronic, mechanical, or other technological collection techniques or other forms of information technology, e.g., permitting electronic submission of responses, and the basis for the decision for adopting this means of collection. Also, describe any consideration of using information technology to reduce burden.

Individuals can complete an application and provide feedback online through an electronic information collection system, or through fillable PDFs submitted through email.

Information collected is restricted to USDA account holders who are the designated program officials who recommend or approve awards and to administrative, human resources, and financial officials who prepare the necessary documentation to arrange for stipend payments and to activate the approved awards. These authorized individuals will access their emails or the folders with restricted access through USDA credentials. The information collected, including the applicant/participant data, are stored on government-issued desktop computers and information systems that are protected at all entry points by firewalls and intrusion detection devices.

USDA will make every attempt to enable applicants to submit their application and participant feedback using up-to-date information technology to reduce burden.

4. Describe efforts to identify duplication. Show specifically why any similar information already available cannot be used or modified for use for the purpose described in item 2 above.

OPPE administers student fellowship, scholarship, internship, and training programs, and new initiatives and programs that the Secretary of Agriculture deems appropriate (7 U.S.C. 6934(c); 7 U.S.C. 2279c) on behalf of the Department's agencies, offices, divisions, and units.

OPPE has consulted with several staff offices and agencies and determined that there is no approved generic information collection that could be revised to meet the purposes of this proposed collection.

This proposed generic collection would cover the different programs within USDA that recruit individuals and have specific application questions, different time frames for applications, and different applicant requirements and accommodate the changing needs, programs, and specialties within the USDA.

5. If the collection of information impacts small businesses or other small entities, describe any methods used to minimize burden.

No small businesses or other small entities will be affected by this information collection.

6. Describe the consequence to Federal program or policy activities if the collection is not conducted or is conducted less frequently, as well as any technical or legal obstacles to reducing burden.

Applications and participant feedback surveys are voluntary information collections that may be completed at different times of the year, and with different frequency. The specific generic information collection will state when the candidate may apply and when the participant feedback will be collected.

7. Explain any special circumstances that would cause an information collection to be conducted in a manner:

There are no special circumstances relating to the guidelines of 5 CFR 1320.5 that would impact the information collection.

8. If applicable, provide a copy and identify the date and page number of publication in the Federal Register of the agency's notice, soliciting comments on the information collection prior to submission to OMB. Summarize public comments received in response to that notice and describe actions taken by the agency in response to these comments.

The 60-day Federal Register notice soliciting comments was published on April 24, 2024 (89 FR 31132). 1 comment unrelated to this information collection was received, and no changes were made to the Notice.

No outside agency was consulted.

Describe efforts to consult with persons outside the agency to obtain their views on the availability of data, frequency of collection, the clarity of instructions and recordkeeping, disclosure, or reporting form, and on the data elements to be recorded, disclosed, or reported.

USDA has consulted with representatives from fellowship, scholarship, and internship programs on the continued need for streamlined applications and participant feedback. Representatives have indicated preferences for user-friendly electronic submissions and a “one-stop shop” for application submission and participant outcomes. USDA staff have also indicated interest in assessing participant perceptions of their experiences to improve onboarding and retention.

9. Explain any decision to provide any payment or gift to respondents, other than remuneration of contractors or grantees.

No payments or gifts will be provided to respondents.

10. Describe any assurance of confidentiality provided to respondents and the basis for the assurance in statute, regulation, or agency policy.

There is no assurance of confidentiality provided to the applicants, however their information will be kept private, to the extent provided by law. Personal identifiable information (PII) is collected, maintained, and stored on secured computers requiring password entry to access. Information collected is available only to USDA program officials who recommend or approve awards and to administrative, human resources, and financial officials who prepare the necessary documentation to arrange for stipend payments and to activate, renew, and terminate approved awards. These individuals are assigned login credentials and the online tools these individuals use to access applicant data are restricted to USDA-approved users.

11. Provide additional justification for any questions of a sensitive nature, such as sexual behavior or attitudes, religious beliefs, and other matters that are commonly considered private. This justification should include the reasons why the agency considers the questions necessary, the specific uses to be made of the information, the explanation to be given to persons from whom the information is requested, and any steps to be taken to obtain their consent.

These applications do collect Personally Identifiable Information (PII), including but not limited to name, contact information, education, socioeconomic status, and employment history. In addition, sensitive questions are asked including race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, birth year, and disabilities. All questions are voluntary and used to assess equitable access. In addition, responses to these questions allows USDA offices to accommodate special needs.

12. Provide estimates of the hour burden of the collection of information. The statement should:

- **Indicate the number of respondents, frequency of response, annual hour burden, and an explanation of how the burden was estimated. If this request for approval covers more than one form, provide separate hour burden estimates for each form and aggregate the hour burdens in Item 13 of OMB Form 83-I.**
- **Provide estimates of annualized cost to respondents for the hour burdens for collections of information, identifying and using appropriate wage rate categories.**

The estimated annualized cost to the respondents (applicants, references, and participants) is \$767,000. It is anticipated that there will be 15,000 applicants and it will take approximately 1 hour to complete an application. In addition, it is expected that applicants will obtain two reference letters and official transcripts.

For applicants, the Median Hourly Wage Rate was obtained from Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), title “All-Occupations” 00-0000, https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_nat.htm#00-0000 since they will have various education levels. For professional references, the Median Hourly Wage Rate was obtained from Occupation Title (25-0000) Educational Instruction and Library Occupations since they may be secondary or postsecondary teachers.

Category of Respondents	Number of Respondents	Number of Responses per Respondent	Average Time per Response in Hours	Total Annual Burden Hours
Individuals (applicant)	15,000	1	1	15,000
Individuals (professional reference)	30,000	2	0.5	15,000
Individuals (program participant)	5,000	1	0.1667	833
Total				30,833

Category of Respondents	Total Annual Burden Hours	Hourly Wage Rate	Respondent Cost
Individuals (applicant)	15,000	\$22.26	333,900
Individuals (professional reference)	15,000	\$27.64	414,600
Individuals (program participant)	833	\$22.26	\$18,550
Total			\$767,000

13. Provide estimates of the total annual cost burden to respondents or record keepers resulting from the collection of information, (do not include the cost of any hour burden shown in items 12 and 14). The cost estimates should be split into two components: (a) a total capital and start-up cost component annualized over its expected useful life; and (b) a total operation and maintenance and purchase of services component.

- A) There are no other capital or maintenance costs to respondents.
- B) Total operation maintenance and purchase of services: \$536,000.

14. Provide estimates of annualized cost to the Federal government. Also, provide a description of the method used to estimate cost and any other expense that would not have been incurred without this collection of information.

USDA anticipates transitioning to a new technology platform, accommodating new respondents, adding and deleting questions for different program needs, reformatting and modifying instructions to minimize burden, and updating and tailoring technical functions. Costs are based on actual costs for systems development, operations, and maintenance costs to develop an application program. The table below shows the annualized cost to the federal government of developing, maintaining, and operating the supporting technology for this collection.

The estimated annualized cost to develop the system is \$250,000. The estimated annualized cost to operate and maintain the system is \$143,000. The estimated annualized cost over the next three years is \$536,000.

Item	Cost Categories	Annualized Cost to Federal Government
Operations & Maintenance (O&M) Cost	Project Management (10 percent of one (1) GS-14 Step 5 team lead).	16,000
	Program Staff (10 percent of two (2) GS-13 Step 5).	27,000
	System Maintenance and IT Support*	\$100,000
Development Cost	System Development and Implementation	\$250,000
Total O&M Cost		\$143,000

15. Explain the reasons for any program changes or adjustments reported in Items 13 or 14 of the OMB Form 83-1.

This is a new, generic application.

16. For collections of information whose results are planned to be published, outline plans for tabulation and publication.

There are no plans for tabulation or publication.

17. f seeking approval to not display the expiration date for OMB approval of the information collection, explain the reasons that display would be inappropriate.

There is no request for exemption from displaying the expiration date for OMB approval.

18. Explain each exception to the certification statement identified in Item 19 "Certification for Paperwork Reduction Act."

There are no exceptions to the Certification for Paperwork Reduction Act Submissions.