



AAMC

| Electronic Residency
Application Service®

MyERAS® Application Updates and Program Signaling: Guide for Applicants

SPRING 2023

The AAMC (Association of American Medical Colleges) is a nonprofit association dedicated to improving the health of people everywhere through medical education, health care, medical research, and community collaborations. Its members are all 157 U.S. medical schools accredited by the [Liaison Committee on Medical Education](#); 13 accredited Canadian medical schools; approximately 400 teaching hospitals and health systems, including Department of Veterans Affairs medical centers; and more than 70 academic societies. Through these institutions and organizations, the AAMC leads and serves America's medical schools and teaching hospitals and the millions of individuals across academic medicine, including more than 193,000 full-time faculty members, 96,000 medical students, 153,000 resident physicians, and 60,000 graduate students and postdoctoral researchers in the biomedical sciences. Following a 2022 merger, the Alliance of Academic Health Centers and the Alliance of Academic Health Centers International broadened the AAMC's U.S. membership and expanded its reach to international academic health centers. Learn more at aamc.org.

© 2023 Association of American Medical Colleges. May not be reproduced or distributed without prior written permission. To request permission, please visit aamc.org/reproductions.

Contents

Introduction	1
Selected and Most Meaningful Experiences.....	1
Tips for completing the Experiences section.....	2
Impactful Experiences.....	3
How do I know if I should respond to the Impactful Experiences question?	3
How are experiences shared with programs?	3
Geographic and Setting Preferences	3
How are geographic and setting preferences shared with programs?.....	4
How will programs use geographic and setting preferences?	4
Tips for completing the Geographic and Setting Preferences sections	5
Program Signals for Residency Applicants.....	6
What are program signals?.....	6
How do I send a signal to a specific track (e.g., preliminary, categorical)?	6
What is tiered program signaling?.....	6
How are signals shared with programs?.....	6
How will programs use program signals?	7
Tips for sending program signals	8
Contact ERAS Client Technical Support Team	9
References	9

Introduction

For two ERAS® application cycles, the AAMC researched and refined new MyERAS® content via a supplemental ERAS application. Beginning in the ERAS 2024 application cycle, residency and fellowship applicants will see an updated Experiences section and a new Geographic Preferences section. Residency applicants applying to select specialties will also be able to indicate interest in an individual residency program via a program signal to participating programs.

This guide helps residency and fellowship applicants prepare for and understand the recently updated and new sections of the MyERAS application. It is designed to be used with the [ERAS Applicant Worksheet](#), the MyERAS Residency User Guide, and the [Supplemental ERAS Application Data and Reports](#).

Selected and Most Meaningful Experiences

The Selected Experiences section of the MyERAS application helps you communicate who you are as an applicant. The information provided should convey to programs the qualities, skills, and interests you will bring to a graduate medical education program. Your responses will help programs get to know who you are, what motivates you, and what you are passionate about. Be authentic and honest to help ensure that program directors can effectively evaluate whether you will thrive in their programs.

The updated experiences section has two parts:

1. **Selected Experiences.** Identify and describe *up to 10 experiences* that communicate who you are, what you are passionate about, and what is most important to you. For each experience, you will be asked to:
 - a. Provide descriptive information, including position title, organization name, approximate start and end dates, frequency of participation, location, and setting.
 - b. Select an experience type, primary focus area, and key characteristic, as applicable.
 - c. Briefly describe your major activities, responsibilities, and any important context within the 1,020-character limit.
2. **Most Meaningful Experiences.** From your 10 selected experiences, you will identify *up to three* most meaningful experiences. For each of these three experiences, you will be asked to write a short 300-character description, reflecting on the experience, and explaining *why* it was meaningful and *how* it influenced you.

CONSIDER THESE DATA FROM THE ERAS 2023 CYCLE*

- Seventy percent of respondents to the 2023 Program Director Survey reported that meaningful experience responses helped them get a better picture of each applicant.
- More than 80% of respondents to the 2023 Program Director Survey used the key characteristics and primary focus areas.

Tips for completing the Experiences section

- **Reflect and identify experiences that communicate who you are, what you are passionate about, and what is most important to you.** Programs are not interested in one type of applicant. Most programs are seeking a diverse group of applicants who have varied experiences, are passionate about different areas, and have complementary characteristics to create a well-rounded team.
- **Consider your experiences as a complete set. Use them to paint a picture of yourself.** You may tag an experience type, primary focus area, and key characteristic to each experience. You do not need to tag every experience to a primary focus area and key

characteristic. As a set, your experiences should communicate what is most important or has most impacted you and the qualities you will bring to a residency or fellowship program. For instance, if you have a hobby or an extracurricular activity that you have dedicated significant time and effort to, you may want to include it as one of your experiences.

- **Focus your three most meaningful experiences descriptions on *why* the experiences were meaningful and *how* they affected you.** Programs are looking for you to show introspection in your most meaningful experiences descriptions. If you tag a characteristic and/or focus area to a most meaningful experience, your description should explain why you chose the characteristic and/or focus area. For each experience, programs will see the most meaningful experiences descriptions alongside all the information in the selected experiences section, so you should describe *what* you did as part of the roles, responsibilities, and context in your description.
- **Use the experiences section to complement the other parts of your application.** Ideally, your most meaningful experiences descriptions should not repeat the same information from your MSPE Noteworthy Characteristics and/or personal statement. While there may be overlap in the experiences mentioned across the application, consider how to provide additional insight or emphasize how these experiences have shaped who you are and what is important to you.

* Data listed on this page are from one or more of the six reports available to applicants and advisors on the [Supplemental ERAS Application Data and Reports](#) page.

Impactful Experiences

Program directors are interested in learning more about other impactful experiences applicants may have encountered or overcome on their journey to residency. The experiences described can be from any point in time; they do not have to be during medical school or related to the field of medicine. This question is designed to give applicants the opportunity to provide additional information about their background or life experiences that is not captured elsewhere in the application (e.g., information written in this question should not be the same as what is included in the personal statement).

Applicants are encouraged to consider whether this question applies to them. In 2023, 56% of residency applicants responded to this question. Programs do not expect all applicants to complete this question. It is intended for applicants who have overcome major challenges or obstacles. Some applicants may not have experiences that are relevant to this question, and other applicants may not feel comfortable sharing personal information in their application. Please keep in mind that any information shared within the application may also be discussed during interviews.

How do I know if I should respond to the Impactful Experiences question?

The following examples can help you decide whether you should respond to the question and what kinds of experiences are appropriate to share in your MyERAS application. Please keep in mind that this is not a complete list:

- **Family background** (e.g., first generation to graduate college).
- **Financial background** (e.g., low-income family, worked to support family growing up, work-study to pay for college or medical school).
- **Community setting** (e.g., food scarcity, poverty or crime rate, lack of access to medical care).
- **Educational experiences** (e.g., limited educational opportunities, limited access to advisors or mentors).
- **Other general life circumstances** (e.g., loss of a family member, serving as a caregiver while working or in school).

How are experiences shared with programs?

All selected, most meaningful, and/or impactful experiences entered into your MyERAS application will be seen by programs across all specialties to which you apply. When viewing your application, programs will see experiences listed by experience type and then in chronological order with most meaningful experiences above all experiences. Additionally, programs can sort experience types, focus areas, and key characteristics to help identify applicants who align with their mission.

Geographic and Setting Preferences

The Geographic and Setting Preferences sections of the MyERAS application give applicants the opportunity to communicate their preference or lack of preference for geographic divisions and urban, suburban, or rural settings.

The Geographic Preferences section has two parts:

- **Geographic Preferences.** You will be asked to indicate your preferences (or lack of preference) by selecting up to three U.S. Census divisions and then to describe your preferences or lack of preference.
- **Setting Preferences.** You will be asked to indicate your preferences (or lack of preference) for an urban, suburban, or rural setting and then to describe your setting preferences or lack of preference.

How are geographic and setting preferences shared with programs?

The same geographic and setting preferences will be seen by programs across all specialties to which you apply.

For geographic division preferences:

- If you select a particular geographic division, then only the programs you apply to in that division will see your response. All other programs you apply to outside your preferred divisions will not see any information about your geographic preferences.
- If you select “I do not have a division preference,” then all programs to which you apply will see your response.
- If you do not respond to or skip this question, no information will be provided to any program.

For setting preferences:

- If you indicate a preference or lack of preference for setting, your preference (or lack of preference) and corresponding explanation will be shared with *all programs to which you apply*.
- If you do not respond to or skip the question, no setting preference information will be shared with any programs.

How will programs use geographic and setting preferences?

Programs are instructed to use geographic and setting preferences as pieces of information to consider during the application review and interview selection process only, because applicants may change their preferences throughout the interview season. To assist with application evaluation, programs can filter applicants based on geographic division and/or setting preferences. Although programs have been advised that signals are not to be used in isolation as a screening tool, some programs may use them during screening.

The following data on programs’ use of geographic division and setting preferences are based on survey responses collected during the ERAS 2023 cycle:

- Some programs may give priority to applicants with a preference for their division, and some (47% of respondents) may feel that applicants who show a preference for their region are more likely to accept an offer to interview at their programs.
- Most program directors (82% of respondents) used the Geographic Preferences section during their admissions process and reported that it helped them identify applicants whom they would have otherwise overlooked (59% of respondents).
- Program directors used applicants’ geographic preferences during various stages of the application process:
 - As a screening tool before a more thorough application review (86% of respondents).
 - To send interview invitations to every applicant who selected their region (58% of respondents).
 - To include in a composite filter to conduct holistic review (74% of respondents).
 - As part of a holistic application review to decide whom to interview (94% of respondents).
 - As a tiebreaker to help decide whom to interview (88% of respondents).
 - To prepare for the interview (70% of respondents).

For more detailed information on how programs and specialties used geographic and setting preferences in the ERAS 2023 cycle, refer to [Supplemental ERAS 2022-2023 Application Cycle: Results of the Program Director Reaction Survey](#).

If you have questions about how a program you are applying to is using these data in the upcoming ERAS cycle, please contact the program directly.

Tips for completing the Geographic and Setting Preferences sections

- **Both program directors and applicants report that geographic location is one of the most important factors in residency program selection.**^{1,2} The Geographic and Setting Preferences sections of the MyERAS application offer you a structured process for expressing your preferences to complete residency or fellowship training in particular areas of the country and/or in an urban, suburban, or rural setting. Think about where your support systems are located and where you can build a strong support system as you complete your residency and/or fellowship training. Programs emphasize the importance of a social support system throughout residency training and look for evidence of a social support system through the geographic information and geographic preferences an applicant shares.
- **Be honest when sharing your geographic preferences.** Before geographic preferences, programs were left to make inferences about where you may want to live or work in the future. Geographic preferences allow you to clearly communicate exactly where you want to be and why you want to be there. Alternatively, it offers you the opportunity to share with programs that you have no geographic preference and are willing and able to go anywhere.
- **If you have no preference regarding where you receive residency or fellowship training geographically, you should select “I do not have a division preference” and explain why you do not have a preference.** In the ERAS 2023 cycle, most participating programs reported interpreting “I do not have a division preference” to mean that you are willing to go anywhere. However, it is important to note when an applicant’s geographic preference aligned with the program’s location, the likelihood of an interview invitation was higher than when selecting no preference for all specialties that participated in geographic preferences except orthopedic surgery. In orthopedic surgery, the likelihood of an interview invitation was similar for applicants who indicated no geographic preference or indicated a geographic preference within the program’s region.

CONSIDER THESE DATA FROM THE ERAS 2023 CYCLE*

Geographic preferences

- Most applicants indicated a geographic division preference.
- Approximately one-third of applicants indicated no geographic preference, 90% of whom provided a description of their lack of preference.
- Approximately 96% of geographic preferences were paired with a description of the chosen geographic preferences.

Setting preferences

- Most applicants indicated a setting preference.
- Approximately 85% of setting preferences were paired with a short essay describing the setting preference.
- Of those applicants who reported no setting preference, about 80% wrote a short essay describing why they did not have a setting preference.

* Data listed on this page are from one or more of the six reports available to applicants and advisors on the [Supplemental ERAS Application Data and Reports](#) page.

Program Signals for Residency Applicants

What are program signals?

Program signals offer applicants the opportunity to express interest in individual residency programs at the time of application. Program signals are intended to be used by residency programs as one of many data points in deciding whom to invite to interview.

IMPORTANT DETAILS

- Applicants should signal all programs that they are the most interested in using the allotted number of program signals, *including home and away rotation programs*.
- For the ERAS 2024 application season, program signals will not be available to fellowship applicants.
- Program participation within each specialty is optional. Some programs within each specialty may decide not to participate. A list of participating specialties and the number of program signals offered by specialty will be available on [this AAMC webpage](#). In early July 2023, individual program participation will also be updated. In the interest of protecting applicants from sending signals to programs that have no interest in considering program signals as a part of their application review, applicants will not be able to send a program signal to a program that is not participating.

Applicants can send program signals for *each* specialty to which they intend to apply. The number of available signals varies by specialty. Specialties determined the number of signals based on their goals for signaling, their number of programs, and the average number of applications submitted per program in their specialty.

How do I send a signal to a specific track (e.g., preliminary, categorical)?

Program signals cannot be sent to specific tracks. Instead, program signals are received at the institution level, meaning that all program tracks at an institution for a given specialty will see the same signal information.

What is tiered program signaling?

Certain specialties decided to use a tiered program signaling approach to better understand applicants' level of interest. Tiered signaling offers applicants two levels of signals: gold and silver.

- Gold signals are designed to identify an applicant's "most preferred" programs.
- Silver signals are designed to identify an applicant's "preferred" programs.

How are signals shared with programs?

Only programs you signal and to which you apply will see your signals. For tiered signaling, programs signaled will see whether you sent a Gold or Silver signal. If you do not signal a program, signal a different program, or skip this question, the program will receive no information.

How will programs use program signals?

Programs are instructed to use program signals as one piece of information to consider during the interview selection process only, because applicants may change their preferences after interview season. To assist with the admission process, programs can filter applicants based on program signals. Although programs have been advised that signals are not to be used in isolation as a screening tool, some programs may use them during screening.

The following data on program signals are based on survey responses aimed at understanding programs' use of the program signals data collected during the ERAS 2023 cycle:

- Seventy-five percent of program directors agreed that program signals helped them identify applicants whom they would have otherwise overlooked.
- Program directors reported using applicants' signals during various stages of the application process:
 - As a screening tool before a more thorough application review (88% of respondents).
 - To send interview invitations to every applicant who signaled their program (61% of respondents).
 - To include in a composite filter to conduct holistic review (78% of respondents).
 - As part of a holistic application review to decide who to interview (91% of respondents).
 - As a tiebreaker to help decide whom to interview (86% of respondents).
 - During the interview to learn more about why an applicant signaled their program (64% of respondents).

For more detailed information on how programs and individual specialties used program signals in the ERAS 2023 cycle, refer to [Final Results of the Program Director Survey](#).

If you have questions about how a program you are applying to is using these data in the ERAS 2024 cycle, please contact the program directly.

Tips for sending program signals

- **Use the maximum allotted program signals per specialty to which you apply.** You should use all the signals available to you.

- **Decide which programs you want to signal based on your unique situation.**

Consider the strength of your application, your ultimate career goals, and personal circumstances, along with a program's relative competitiveness, mission, and goals. Applicants are encouraged to work with faculty and resident mentors as they consider where to send their signals.

The following resources may also be helpful as you consider where to signal:

- [Supplemental ERAS Application Program Signal Reports.](#)
- [Residency Explorer™ tool.](#)
- [Results of the 2022 NRMP Program Director Survey.](#)
- [Residency Preference Exercise.](#)

- **Understand that sending a program signal resulted in a higher probability of interview invitation for all participating specialties.** However, programs varied widely in how they used signals, and sending a signal did not guarantee an interview invitation.

CONSIDER THESE DATA FROM THE ERAS 2023 CYCLE*

Applicants considered the following factors when selecting programs to signal:

- Alignment of program strengths with career interests (67%).
- Location of program/geographic preference (66%).
- Strength of the program's clinical training (54%).
- Program reputation/prestige (45%).
- Program culture/resident camaraderie (42%).
- Strength of program's research training (25%).
- Advice from faculty or resident mentors (21%).

* Data listed on this page are from one or more of the six reports available to applicants and advisors on the [Supplemental ERAS Application Data and Reports](#) page.

Contact ERAS Client Technical Support Team

Please complete [this form](#) to submit a request or inquiry to the ERAS Client Technical Support Team who are available Monday-Friday, 8 a.m.-6 p.m. ET.

ERAS for Applicants: 202-862-6264

References

1. Kim JK, Morrison B, Bylund J, Rasper A, Dropkin BM. Influencing factors of preference signaling in the 2022 urology residency match. *Urology*. 2023 Feb. 18;S0090-4295(23)00158-9. doi:10.1016/j.urology.2022.12.050. Online ahead of print. PMID: 36805414.
2. Luu Y, Gao W, Han J, Mihalic A, Vandergriff T. Personal connections and preference signaling: a cross-sectional analysis of the dermatology residency match during COVID-19. *J Am Acad Dermatol*. 2023 Feb. 4;S0190-9622(23)00168-8. doi:10.1016/j.jaad.2023.01.032. Online ahead of print. PMID: 36746275.



**Association of
American Medical Colleges**

655 K Street, NW, Suite 100, Washington, DC 20001-2399

T 202 828 0400

aamc.org

23-007Q (04/23)