

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The ASCEND^R Fellowship is a one-year, cohort-based professional development program designed to prepare doctoral STEM students for careers aligned with national security priorities. Through professional development, networking, and continued engagement in their existing research, fellows gain exposure to the strategic, organizational, and technical dimensions of the Department of War (DoW) science and technology enterprise.

The fellowship is intended for doctoral STEM students at participating HSRU Alliance institutions who are actively engaged in a research project aligned with DoW priorities. Applicants must have a faculty research mentor and propose a feasible research plan to be carried out during the one-year fellowship period.

To learn more about the program's eligibility requirements and view the list of participating institutions, visit: ascendr.hsruc.edu/fellowship

APPLICATION COMPONENTS

I. Letter of interest (1-2 pages)

- a. Applicants should submit a concise letter describing their motivation for applying to the ASCEND^R Fellowship and how participation aligns with their academic and professional goals.
- b. The letter should address:
 - i. **Motivation and interest:** Why the applicant is interested in the ASCEND^R Fellowship, including their interest in learning about the Department of War (DoW) science and technology enterprise and its career pathways.
 - ii. **Professional development goals:** What the applicant hopes to gain from the fellowship's professional development, networking, and cohort-based learning opportunities, and how these experiences will support their academic and career goals.
 - iii. **Contribution to the cohort:** How the applicant's experiences, perspectives, or interests will contribute to collaborative learning and engagement with other fellows.

II. Proposed Research Plan (3-5 pages + references)

- a. Applicants must submit a 3–5 page research plan (excluding references) that presents a clear, feasible, and defense-relevant project to be conducted over the one-year fellowship period.
- b. The research plan should be written in clear, concise language and be understandable to experienced researchers who may not be experts in the applicant's specific field.
- c. The plan should include:
 - i. A brief background and rationale
 - ii. Specific aims or research questions

- iii. Methodology and anticipated outcomes
 - iv. A timeline with key milestones.
- d. The proposed work must be achievable within the applicant's institutional resources and should be developed in collaboration with the proposed faculty mentor.

III. Curriculum Vitae (CV)

- a. Applicants should provide a current CV that highlights academic training, research experience, technical skills, publications, presentations, and any relevant professional or leadership activities.
- b. The CV should provide an overview of the applicant's academic and research background, accomplishments, and experiences relevant to their stage of doctoral study. Applicants are encouraged to include any prior experience or coursework related to national security or defense-related topics, although such experience is not required.

IV. Two letters of support (one from the proposed faculty research mentor/dissertation advisor)

- a. Applicants must submit two letters of support, including one from their proposed faculty research mentor.
 - i. **Faculty research mentor/dissertation advisor letter:** Should address the applicant's research abilities and readiness to undertake the proposed project, the feasibility of the research plan, and the mentor's commitment and ability to provide guidance, resources, and support throughout the fellowship period.
 - ii. **Second letter of support:** Should address the applicant's academic or research accomplishments, initiative, leadership potential, and readiness to benefit from the fellowship's professional development opportunities. Recommenders are encouraged to provide specific examples that demonstrate the applicant's strengths and potential.

V. Unofficial transcript

- a. Applicants must submit their most recent unofficial transcript demonstrating a minimum cumulative GPA of 3.5 on a 4.0 scale (or equivalent) and full-time enrollment status.

KEY DATES

- Application opens - October 19, 2026
- Application deadline - Jan 31, 2027
- Award announcements - Early April 2027
- Fellowship Period: August 2027 – June 2028