

# John S. McCain Strategic Defense Fellowship Program

## Choose Service. Become a McCain Fellow.



# Overview



- What is the McCain Fellowship Program?
- What Will You Give as a McCain Fellow?
- What Will You Gain as a McCain Fellow?
- Where Can Your McCain Fellowship Experience Take You?
- Application Requirements & How to Apply
- Recruitment Needs





# What is the McCain Fellowship Program?



The John S. McCain Strategic Defense Fellowship Program is a 1-year Department of Defense (DoD) development program for recent advanced degree program graduates from across multiple academic disciplines. In accordance with the National Defense Authorization Act of Fiscal Year 2019, this program provides the DoD Components with the ability to recruit and develop future leaders from across the United States. Fellows are provided with challenging developmental opportunities and flourish into problem solvers, strategic thinkers, and future leaders. The Program instills a spirit of public service and a commitment to the larger DoD community.

**Application period will be open from  
December 1, 2025, through January 6,  
2026.**

Contact us at [whs.mccainfellows@mail.mil](mailto:whs.mccainfellows@mail.mil).

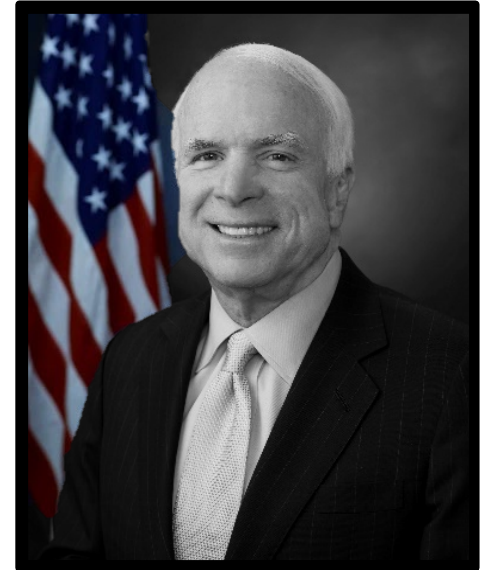


# What Will You Give as a Fellow?



***“Nothing in life is more liberating than to fight for a cause larger than yourself, something that encompasses you, but is not defined by your existence alone.” - John S. McCain***

McCain Fellows give to a greater cause. They bring new ideas, fresh perspectives, and a diverse array of experience in taking on challenges that are of particular importance to safeguarding our Nation. Those selected are energized and excited to support the Department of Defense mission. Fellows demonstrate leadership, foster pride in their work, and deliver valuable service and commitment in support of the American people and interests around the world.



# What Will You Gain as a Fellow?



Beyond salary and benefits, the John S. McCain Strategic Defense Fellows Program provides valuable return on investment for a Fellow's commitment and hard work. A Fellow's one-year appointment provides a fast-paced opportunity to gain experience and develop. In addition to working as designed employee of a Department of Defense headquarters staff, Fellows will have the opportunity to participate in developmental activities as identified by their Sponsoring Components.

## Key Fellowship Benefits:

- A full-time job with salary and benefits
- Potential for a career within the Department of Defense
- Learning and development opportunities
- Mentorship
- Incentives
  - **Student Loan Repayment Incentive:** Up to \$10,000.
  - **Professional Development Training Incentive:** Up to \$5,000 during the 12-month fellowship.





# Where Can Your McCain Fellowship Experience Take You?



Part springboard and part training ground; the McCain Fellowship experience is foundational and can take you anywhere you want to go with your career. While the John S. McCain Strategic Defense Fellowship Program is relatively young, many alumni have continued their Federal service within the Department of Defense. Others have leveraged the opportunity to land positions in other Federal agencies, the private sector, academia, and the non-profit world.



# Application Requirements & How to Apply



## Key Applicant Information

- Applicants must be recent graduates or soon to be graduates. An advanced degree must have been earned no earlier than two (2) years of a Fellow's appointment date.
- Applicants are evaluated on their technical and professional excellence, character, commitment to public service and academic achievement.
- The Cohort 5 application period will be open in December 2025.

## Application Package:

- Resume
- Two letters of recommendation (*from previous employers, professors, coaches, etc.*)
- An endorsement letter or recommendation letter from the applicant's graduate institution
- Unofficial transcripts of educational achievement at the undergraduate and graduate levels
- An academic writing sample (*i.e., published article, dissertation, thesis, etc.*)
- A compelling narrative

**PLEASE NOTE THAT  
IN ACCORDANCE  
WITH OPM  
REQUIREMENTS,  
RESUMES MAY BE  
NO LONGER THAN 2  
PAGES**

For more information and to access the job announcement when it opens, visit <https://www.whs.mil/About-WHS/Directorates/Human-Resources-Directorate-HRD/Careers/Specialized-Employment-Programs/John-S-McCain-Strategic-Defense-Fellowship-Program/>.

# Recruitment Needs



## Job Series:

- 0130 – Foreign Affairs
- 0201 – Human Resources
- 0301 – Miscellaneous Admin & Program Analysis
- 0343 – Management and Program Analysis
- 0501 – Financial Administration & Program
- 1515 – Operations Research
- 2210 – Information Technology

