

# What M4s should know about new supplemental applications

SEP 8, 2021

## Brendan Murphy

Senior News Writer

---

A new supplemental residency application aims to give programs and applicants in three specialties an additional tool for finding the right fit. The application will be used by internal medicine, dermatology and general surgery.

It is distinct from the standard Electronic Residency Application Service (ERAS) application and the intent is to offer parties in the application process more information on how applicants' interests and experiences align with a program's environment, mission and goals. The supplemental application window is the same as the standard application window, meaning it opened Sept. 1 and closes Sept. 30.

Though the supplemental application is being billed as another tool in the evaluation toolbox for residency programs, it remains to be seen how it fits into the evaluation equation.

"I'm not sure how we are going to use it," said Amy Halverson, MD, noting that the application is a new element in the residency-selection process. Dr. Halverson, who is interim director of the general surgery program at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine.

"We want to find wonderful people," she said. "We want diversity. We look for people with a special spark."

For those still finalizing the list of programs to which they plan to apply, FREIDA™—the AMA's comprehensive residency and fellowship database—captures more than 12,000 Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME)-accredited residency and fellowship programs.

One major benefit of FREIDA is that it includes a personalized search experience, with more than 35 filters that allow users to sort programs by location (either list or map view), program type, application information, demographics, benefits, osteopathic recognition, special tracks and more.

## They are optional

As indicated by the name, the supplemental applications aren't required, and according to the Association of American Medical Colleges, the supplemental application takes about an hour to complete. All sections and questions within the supplemental application are optional.

They are also optional for programs, so not every program in the three specialties will be participating—and no preliminary (one-year) general surgery programs are participating in the supplemental application process.

One question applicants interested in the specialties using the tool may have: Will they be dinged if they opt out of the supplemental application?

"If you don't do it, it's not an automatic out. We have not decided how we are going to use it," Dr. Halverson said. "People have to see what it is and how the answers come out."

Learn which factors applicants weigh most when picking residency programs

## Express explicit interest

The application breaks down into four sections: past experience, geographic information, preference signaling and work preferences. Both geographic information and preference signaling give applicants a chance to express additional interest.

The geographic information section offers applicants the chance to express the context of their geographic interest in a program. That could mean that the region is of interest to them or that an applicant has an interest in rural or urban medicine. It will only be offered as part of the supplemental application for dermatology and internal medicine programs.

Preference signaling, which has been used in other specialties as a tool for residency selection in recent years, is a process in which applicants express additional interest in a residency program at application time. Depending on the specialty, you can signal interest in up to five programs—up to three in dermatology and up to five in general surgery and internal medicine.

If you do signal interest in a residency program, that program will be notified. If you do not, that program will not know whether or not you participated in the signaling portion of the supplemental application.

## **Personal statement remains key**

Dr. Halverson advised applicants to make sure to tell their story in the personal statement, regardless of whether they opt into the supplemental application.

“My one piece of advice to students is that if there’s something special about you, put it in your personal statement,” she said, advising against leaving that remarkable information for the supplemental application.

Residency applicants “need to make sure, from my standpoint, that they sell themselves in their personal statement,” Dr. Halverson said.

Get information on the six steps in the residency-application process.