

EDF Climate Corps Work Authorization FAQ

Below are frequently asked questions about work authorization as it applies to the EDF Climate Corps fellowship. This information is being provided to the best of Environmental Defense Fund's ability and is not legal advice. Please consult the USCIS website, your university International Student Office, or independent counsel if you have questions.

Can international students apply?

We welcome applications from anyone who fits the program criteria. In 2026, 30% of fellows were international students. For US fellowships, candidates must be eligible to work in the United States during the summer. See our Work Authorization Protocol for more information.

What kinds of work authorization do Climate Corps fellows typically have?

Foreign national Climate Corps fellows who must apply for work authorization typically do so through one of the three immigration programs listed below. Because these programs involve different eligibility standards, application requirements, and processing times, Climate Corps has compiled suggested actions and timelines for each program below. It is the applicant's responsibility to seek authorization from the correct immigration program, and to do so early enough to receive the required work authorization before their start date.

Typically, an international student's educational program or academic institution hosts an International Students and Scholars Office, which assists a student with their application to the below programs. Students should contact their Designated School Official (DSO) in these offices after applying to Climate Corps, alerting them that they have applied to a paid employment program outside their educational program.

The three most common immigration programs utilized by International Students are the Curricular Practical Training (CPT), Optional Practical Training (OPT), and J-1 Visa programs.

Curricular Practical Training (CPT)

This option is for students who will continue their educational program once their employment with a non-academic institution is completed.

Students should contact their DSO as soon as possible if submitting an application to Climate Corps to alert them that they are applying to a program outside their academic institution. Applicants determine from their DSO whether they are eligible to participate, as well as what is required to obtain valid CPT work authorization once they receive a confirmation letter from their host organization.

After a match is confirmed, fellows should work with their host organization to obtain an employment confirmation letter that meets their university's requirements. Fellows should immediately pursue a CPT once this letter is received. Fellows are recommended to confirm in writing to EDF once they have obtained work authorization. It is recommended you secure your CPT work authorization before the start of June. Any delay to this process should be immediately flagged with your Climate Corps Engagement Manager.

Optional Practical Training (OPT)

This option is for students who will be or have recently graduated from their educational program and might join Climate Corps or another employer within 90 days of completion of their employment program.

It is recommended to plan to apply for OPT as soon as is feasibly possible. Applicants for OPT may file their I-765 application up to 90 days before the end of their educational program. In order to be able to apply for OPT at this early date, students should speak with their DSO about obtaining the appropriate forms in early January. Moving to the interview stage does not guarantee that an offer will be made, but as the OPT process can take up to four (4) months candidates are strongly encouraged to begin this process no later than the end of February. It is recommended you secure your CPT work authorization before the start of June. Any delay to this process should be immediately flagged with your Climate Corps Engagement Manager.

J-1 Visas

Students are encouraged to reach out to their J-1 program to learn about the process to acquire work authorization after they submit their application. As the J-1 work authorization process can take over two (2) months candidates should begin this process in March.

Do I need to apply for a Social Security Number?

We highly encourage every applicant to apply for a Social Security number after they receive their work authorization as many host organizations in the US will require this. If you do not have a Social Security number, please inquire with your educational institution's International Students and Scholars Office on how you can acquire one. This process can take two (2) months.

What if I can't get work authorization by the time my fellowship starts?

Host organizations may rescind an offer if a fellow fails to obtain and/or verify valid work authorization prior to the first day of employment. If a host organization chooses to rescind an offer because a fellow failed to obtain and/or verify their work authorization, EDF will not be able to assist with alternative fellowship arrangements with another host organization.