



CyberCorps[®]: Scholarship for Service (SFS)

Program Information and Guidance

Welcome

Congratulations and Welcome to the CyberCorps®: Scholarship for Service (SFS) program! As a recipient of this scholarship, you will become part of the next generation of cybersecurity professionals trained to meet the needs of the cybersecurity mission for the Government.

This document provides guidance to assist you in successfully completing your academic scholarship and transitioning from academic life to a professional career in the Government.

With each year, SFS strives to improve program administration, advance its policies and procedures, and increase the number of agencies that hire SFS Participants. Accordingly, the guidance set forth within this document is subject to change. As changes are made, they will be distributed to SFS PI's and participants and posted on OPM's SFS Website at sfs.opm.gov.

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SFS PROGRAM OFFICE CONTACTS

The primary method of communication between the SFS Program and participants is through email at sfs@opm.gov. Participants should add this email address to their contacts to prevent important correspondence from entering SPAM/Junk folders, as emails are sent regularly by the SFS office. Participants **must** always keep their contact information current with the OPM SFS Program Office.

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1. ORGANIZATIONAL OVERVIEW

The SFS program is managed by the National Science Foundation (NSF), in collaboration with the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM), the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and, in accordance with the Cybersecurity Enhancement Act of 2014 (Public Law No: 113-274) and the National Defense Authorization Act FY 2018. In addition to the NSF's Program Office, the United States Office of Personnel Management (OPM) maintains an SFS Program Office and administers the SFS program by providing placement assistance, coordinating student compliance, and ensuring students stay the course through all three phases of the program.

2. INTRODUCTION

The SFS Program trains the next generation of information technology professionals, industry control system security professionals, and security managers to meet the needs of the cybersecurity mission for government. SFS scholars may receive full scholarship support for a maximum of three years over a lifetime. Actual benefits may vary by academic institution. Questions on benefits of your scholarship should be addressed directly to your PI.

In return for this scholarship, participating scholars are required to serve in a qualifying position at an approved organization for the period equivalent to the length of the scholarship, or one year, whichever is longer. An academic year of scholarship support establishes a requirement for one calendar year of work. Because it is a **scholarship-for-service** program, the Program has additional and different requirements than many traditional scholarships. Participants must satisfy **ALL** Program requirements.

Participants are responsible for being familiar with and regularly checking the website for information regarding Participant requirements, policy updates, deadlines, and other SFS events during all three phases; creating a profile; posting and keeping their resumes updated until they have secured a position to meet their service commitment; tracking their applications via the job search activity report; and reporting both the internship and post-graduation service commitment.

2.1 Registration

All new Participants must register at sfs.opm.gov and create a profile. To register you will be required to enter a registration access code which you will find in the welcome email you received with this document. If you didn't receive it or it has expired please email sfs@opm.gov. Please register and post your resume as soon as possible. Until all steps below are completed, you will NOT be recognized as a current participant. To register please do the following:

- Connect to the SFS web site at sfs.opm.gov

- Select *Current SFS Students* from the home page.
- Select *Registration* from the Current SFS Student Menu.
- Enter the Registration Access Code provided to you in the welcome email you received with this guidance document.
- Complete and submit the registration form.
- Once the registration is approved you will receive an email providing you first-time login instructions.
- The first time you log in you will be required to change your temporary password and set up your password security questions. Once you have done this you will have access to the student area of the SFS system.
- After you change your password and complete your profile, select *Create/Revise Resume* from the Student menu to complete your resume.

Your resume will not be available for agencies to view until your resume is complete.

2.2 Updating Participant Profile

Participants must review their profile and resume at least quarterly and update all information as needed. This includes contact information, changes in academic expectations such as graduation date, resume, etc.

2.3 Tips on Creating Your Resume

Making a good first impression is very important when looking for employment. With this as a backdrop, please keep in mind that the first thing Federal agencies may see when they consider using the SFS program as a source of cybersecurity talent is the resume you have posted on the SFS website. Therefore, you should make sure that your resume has enough information to enable agencies to decide on how well you may fit in their organization. We have received advice and suggestions from agencies on how to structure your resume to include information they like to view. Additional guidance can also be found at usajobs.gov under “help” and “What should I include in my resume?” to create an outstanding resume. Below is a list of helpful tips that will improve the contents of your resume:

- a. If you have previous experience in Information Technology (IT), or Computer Science, especially the Information Assurance (IA) or Cybersecurity side, be sure you include it. Make sure you provide salary information, supervisory contact information, beginning and ending dates (mm/yyyy), and hours per week.
- b. Make sure your resume shows your current degree program (e.g., BS, MS, PhD), major, and expected graduation date (month/year).
- c. Under “Job Related Training courses” include all courses you have, are, or will be taking that are IT/IA related; include completion date if known.

- d. Under “Job Related Skills” include skills that are IT/IA related such as knowledge of specific computer software/hardware, policy writing for IA, etc.
- e. Under “Job Related Certificates and Licenses” include certificates you have or will have when you finish the program such as NSTISSI 4000-series standards or any certifications recognized under DoD Directive 8140 (8570). For each, include the completion date.
- f. Under “Job Related Honors, Awards, Memberships, Etc.” include job-related honors, awards, and special accomplishments, for example, publications, memberships in professional or honor societies, leadership activities, public speaking, performance awards, and the fact that you are a SFS recipient.
- g. Under “Supplemental Information,” enter your general areas of interest (e.g., computer forensics, policy writing, etc.). Be sure to include all areas of interest that you may have; do not limit yourself to one. Explaining what you are interested in both helps you get into a position you will enjoy and helps the agencies to forward your resume to the right managers. Talk about cybersecurity related projects you have done; provide ANY other information you feel may be relevant to Federal agencies reviewing your resume.
- h. Proofread for spelling, grammar, and content.

Please remember, it is very important and **required** that your resume be complete and is updated anytime there is a change and at least once every 3 months.

3. QUALIFYING AGENCIES

As described in the Cyber Security Enhancement Act, 2014 and the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) FY18, internships (if applicable) and post-graduation commitments must be served at one of the following places and may need prior approval:

- Federal Executive Agency
- Congress, including any agency, entity, office, or commission established in the legislative branch (i.e. GAO)
- An interstate agency
- State, local, or Tribal government
- State, local, or Tribal government-affiliated non-profit that is critical infrastructure as defined in section 1016(e) of the USA Patriot Act

3.1 Offer Approval Process

1. All employment offers from **non- executive branch federal agencies** for both internships and post-graduate employment must be reviewed and approved. Please follow the below steps to request an exception:

- Log into the student portal of the SFS website
- Navigate to the “Report a Commitment Section”
- Select “Add New Commitment”
- Complete the information requested
- Upload a copy of your tentative/conditional job offer letter/email (NOTE: you may need to convert your email to a pdf prior to upload). If the offer letter isn’t clear that the position is a cybersecurity position, attach a description of duties for the position.
- Upload a statement supporting your reason for requesting an exception.
- Once the tentative offer has been reviewed by your PI and the SFS PO, you will receive notification to log back in and (if approved) complete submission of your final/firm job offer. See section 7.3 for information on submitting your final job offer.
- You will be able to track the status of your exception request throughout the process by navigating to the Report a Commitment Section and then selecting “View New Commitment Listing”

4. SCHOLARSHIP INFORMATION

The actual amount of the SFS award and how it is paid to the participant varies depending on the awardee institution, the length of the scholarship, and the degree being conferred.

4.1 Amount of award

The scholarship may provide a stipend and cover expenses normally incurred by full-time students in the institution, and could include tuition and education related fees, and a professional allowance (research support, travel, professional certifications, etc.) Questions concerning specifics on your scholarship funding should be addressed to your Principal Investigator (PI).

Participants should always contact their PI regarding any funding questions or concerns.

4.2 Limitations and Restrictions Accepting Other Scholarships, Grants, etc.

Generally, there are no issues receiving the SFS in combination with other scholarships, grants, etc., provided the other does not specify how it is to be used. Additional scholarships may reduce the amount of funding from the SFS Scholarship. Reduction of funds received under the scholarship will not change the service commitment requirement. Prior to accepting other scholarships, grants, etc., please discuss with your PI.

4.3 Tax Information

Portions of the SFS scholarship may be taxable. This will depend on how the University disbursed them to you. Additionally, tax liabilities also depend largely on individual circumstances such as marital status, home ownership, state of residence, applicable exemptions, and other considerations. For guidance on what is or is not taxable you should contact your University and you are STRONGLY encouraged to seek assistance from a licensed tax professional that can provide advice regarding individual tax liabilities. The SFS Program Office (PO) cannot provide advice regarding tax liabilities. For advice regarding tax liabilities, please consult [IRS.gov](https://www.irs.gov) and a licensed tax professional.

4.4 Repayment Requirements

If a Participant is dismissed for failure to comply with any Program requirement or withdraws from the Program prior to completion of all three phases, the Participant shall be liable to the United States as provided in Public Law 113-274. See Section 9, Repayment Requirements.

5. GENERAL PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

Participants must actively and continually participate in Program activities by communicating with the PO as required, checking email and the SFS website, participating in activities set forth by your academic institution and the SFS Program Office, meeting all SFS Program Office and academic institution requirements, and maintaining full-time enrollment status in the academic institution for which Program funding is received.

5.1 Participant Communication and Profile Updates

The primary method of communication is through email at sfs@opm.gov. Participants should do the following:

- Regularly check email.
- Designate SFS-related emails as non-SPAM material or regularly check SPAM email folders.
- Keep profile and contact information current with the PO and their PI during all phases of the program.
- Regularly check the SFS website, sfs.opm.gov. Information regarding Participant requirements, deadlines, job opportunities, and other SFS events are located on the website.

5.2 Participants Must be Geographically Mobile

Participants are required to be geographically mobile and relocate for completion of the Internship and post-graduation commitment anywhere within the United States. The SFS Program does not provide relocation assistance. Participants should check with their PI and/or hiring agency to see if there is any relocation assistance or guidance available.

5.3 Survey Completion

Public Law 113-274, Section 302, directs the program to report on the success of the program including retention of SFS participants in the public sector workforce after they have completed their service commitment. As outlined in your service agreement, the PO will send out periodic surveys to Participants. These surveys provide the PO with important information to make improvements and ensure the ongoing success of the program.

Surveys generally occur no more than once a year but may on occasion occur more frequently. NSF currently uses OPM to distribute, collect, and analyze Participant surveys. We will never request sensitive personal information on surveys such as Social Security numbers, checking account information, or credit card information. The PO typically sends Participants an email in advance of the survey invitation so that Participants know the survey will be sent out. If a Participant is unsure of whether a survey is a legitimate SFS Program survey, the Participant should contact the PO for clarification. The surveys will be required during all three phases and up to 8 years after completion of the post graduate service commitment.

5.4 Institution Program Requirements

In addition to SFS program requirements, your institution will have additional requirements you will have to meet. For more information on requirements specific to your institution, please contact your PI.

5.5 Completion of All Program Phases

During their lifecycle with the Program, Participants complete the following three (3) Program phases:

- Phase 1 - Academic Phase
- Phase 2 - Service Commitment; and
- Phase 3 - Retention

6. PHASE 1: ACADEMIC PHASE

During Phase 1, Participants complete requirements leading to timely degree completion as approved by the PI when the scholarship was awarded. Degree should be completed within the timeframe established by the PI. Phase 1 requirements include maintaining full-time enrollment, good standing with the academic institution, and any additional requirements set forth by your university. Participants must also satisfy Program Office reporting requirements such as updating contact information, posting a resume for agency use, reporting internship commitments, and responding to surveys.

6.1 Working During the Academic Phase

The SFS scholarship provides full tuition and stipend payments so that Participants can focus full-time on their studies. Working outside the program during the academic phase must be approved by the participant's PI, be related to cybersecurity, and provide meaningful cybersecurity experience. Additionally, it could result in forfeiture of part or all the stipend. All questions concerning working during the academic phase should be addressed directly with your PI.

6.2 Academic Standing

The Participant is responsible for maintaining good academic standing, full-time student status, a minimum Grade Point Average (GPA) as set by the awardee institution, the timely completion of the degree for which funding was received, and other related requirements as outlined by the participants institution.

6.3 Requirement to Maintain Full-Time Status

Participants must maintain full-time enrollment status during all regular academic terms except for the final term. Participant's in their final term prior to graduation may not be required to maintain full-time enrollment if it is not necessary to complete their degree requirements. Requests to be enrolled less than full-time for any academic term must be submitted to your PI.

6.4 Internship Requirement

All Multi-Year Participants are required to complete at least one meaningful internship with an approved organization.

- Internships should be at least ten (10) weeks long. Internships less the ten (10) weeks must be approved by the PO.
- Internships are usually completed during the summer months. However, Participants may complete Internships at different times of the year provided they are not in school and if approved by the PI.

- Doctoral students may be allowed to replace their summer internship with a research activity if approved by the PI and the PO.
- Participants are responsible for reporting their internship commitment. This can be done on the SFS website via the “Report a Commitment” section at sfs.opm.gov. The following information will be needed:
 - Agency name
 - Start date
 - Position Title
 - Series/grade or salary
 - Supervisor name, phone number, and email address
 - Final Job Offer Letter
 - Position Description or other document outlining the duties of your position
- Positions that are not under the Executive Federal Branch require prior approval. This information must be submitted to sfs.opm.gov via the “Report a Commitment” section and must include a copy of the internship job offer letter. (see section 3.1 for specific details)

6.5 Job Search Activity Report:

The SFS Participant profile includes a resource to help participants track their job applications for both internships and post-graduation jobs.

- Connect to the SFS system at sfs.opm.gov
- Select *login* from the current SFS student section of the home page and log in using the Primary Email address and password for your online account.
- Select Job Search Activity Report from the student menu.
- Complete and submit job search activity. Users can go in at any time and add new entries, or edit old entries, but it must be done at least once quarterly.

7. PHASE 2: SERVICE COMMITMENT

Following completion of Phase 1, academic degree requirements, the participant will work full time in a qualifying position at an approved organization for a period commensurate with the length of the scholarship, or one year, whichever is longer. The basic Service Commitment ratio is one (1) calendar year for each Academic Year of the Participant’s award.

7.1 Qualifying Positions

All positions must be with a qualifying organization and may need prior approval as outlined in Section 3 of this guidance document. In addition to being with an approved organization, the position must include Cybersecurity tasks and duties.

To determine if a position will qualify, a participant can send a summary of the position to the sfs@opm.gov mailbox for review. This could be a position description, copy of the job announcement, or summary of the position from the agency.

7.2 Service Commitment Start Date

The start of a Participant's Service Commitment is based on the date the Participant begins **full-time** employment with the hiring agency after completion of Phase 1 and submission of the Graduation and Hiring Reporting Requirements. No time will be counted until after the Participant's completion of Phase 1 is approved by the Program Office.

Time spent working during Phase 1 will NOT be applied toward the fulfillment of the Service Commitment.

7.3 Reporting the Service Commitment

Participants are responsible for reporting their post-graduation service commitment. This can be done on the SFS system via the "Report a Commitment" section at sfs.opm.gov. The following information will be needed:

- Agency name
- Start date
- Position Title
- Series/grade or salary
- Supervisor name, phone number, and email address
- Final Job Offer Letter
- Position Description or other document outlining the duties of your position

We understand there may be instances where you are unable to report your commitment due to agency requirements. In these cases, or if you have questions or concerns on reporting your commitment via your SFS profile, please contact the PO directly at SFS@opm.gov.

REMINDERS:

- Be sure and have a copy of your final job offer letter/email and your position description prior to logging in to report the commitment.
- Positions that are not with the executive branch of the government require prior approval. See section 3.1 for specific details information on requesting approval

7.4 Salary & Benefits

The salary level a Participant receives during Phase 2 depends on the hiring agency and the Participant's qualifications. Salary levels may differ by geographic location to accommodate for costs of living. Federal salary levels for science and engineering professionals are generally higher than those for other federal jobs. In general, participants with a bachelor's degree and superior academic achievement may be appointed at the GS-7 level. Master's degree recipients may be appointed at the GS-9 level and recipients of a doctorate degree may be appointed at the GS-11 level. Further information regarding federal employee salary levels may be found at [OPM.gov](https://www.opm.gov). The PO does not participate in salary or benefit negotiations. Participants are solely responsible for negotiating post-graduation salary, benefits, and relocation costs directly with the hiring agency *but should do this carefully as to not lose the job opportunity*.

7.5 Service Commitment Completion

Upon completion of all Phase 2 requirements, the participant must submit documentation to the PO for employment verification. Documentation must be submitted via email to sfs@opm.gov for review. This can be done using the Employment Verification form found in the resources section of the SFS Student Portal, employment verification document from the agency, or a SF-50. Documentation must show start and end dates so the commitment can be verified. Once verified, the PO will issue a "service commitment phase complete" *email communication* to the Participant. This *communication* serves as written confirmation that the Participant has completed all Phase 2 requirements, including the Service Commitment, and outlines Participant Phase 3 requirements. The service commitment complete *communication* will be issued **after** the PO has confirmed that the Participant successfully completed the Service Commitment.

7.6 Failure to Secure a Qualifying Position

If a Participant has not secured a qualifying position upon graduation, the participant will continue to search for employment with a participating agency in a qualifying position.

If participant has not secured a qualifying position within 18 months of graduation, the participant understands that this could result in forfeiture of the scholarship award and require repayment. See Repayment Requirements, Section 9.

8. PHASE 3: RETENTION PHASE

Upon successful completion of the Service Commitment, the Participants will then enter Phase 3 – Retention Phase. During the retention phase, participants are required to keep contact information current with the Program Office and respond to an annual survey for 8 years after the service obligation is complete as outlined in Section 5.3.

9. WITHDRAWAL/DISMISSAL FROM PROGRAM

Participants are responsible for completing all Phases of the program in good faith and utilizing their best efforts to satisfactorily complete each phase.

9.1 Dismissal

If a Participant fails to properly complete any phase of the Program, he/she **may be dismissed from the program and may be responsible for prompt repayment of the Entire Award Amount**, including all cash award, tuition, approved related educational expenses, internship/site visit support payments, professional allowance Stipends, and all other funds expended by the U.S. Government under the Participant's award according to the policy of each Participating Institution.

9.2 Early Withdrawal

If at any time a Participant believes that he/she cannot meet Program requirements and/or decides they no longer want to continue participation in the program, it is the Participant's responsibility to contact his/her PI and initiate withdrawal from the Program in order to stop Program funding and the continual increase of financial liability. The longer a Participant remains in the Program, the greater the potential financial liability if Program requirements are not met, as funds will continue to be expended on the Participant's behalf under the award.

If a Participant voluntarily withdraws from the program prior to completing all phases of the Program she/he **may be responsible for prompt repayment of the Entire Award Amount**, including all cash award, tuition, approved related educational expenses, internship/site visit support payments, professional allowance stipends, and all other funds expended by the U.S. Government under the Participant's award under the Participant's award according to the policy of each Participating Institution.

9.3 Repayment

Repayment arrangements will be made directly with the awardee institution and will be pro-rated accordingly to reflect partial service completed, if any. The participant can repay the scholarship in full immediately or the award can revert to an educational type loan as outlined in the awardee institutions' program. Repayment amounts will be made directly to the institution who will then forward the funds to the National Science Foundation to be returned to the Department of Treasury. If funding is not returned as instructed to the Participating Institution, the Participant may be reported to the Department of Treasury for collection.

9.4 Exceptions

As provided in Public Law 113-274, the Director of the National Science Foundation may provide for the partial or total waiver or suspension of any service or payment obligation by an individual in the SFS program. Such a waiver might apply whenever compliance by the individual with the obligation is impossible or would involve extreme hardship to the individual, or if enforcement of such obligation with respect to the individual would be unconscionable. Please contact PO with any questions about the process, necessary forms and supporting documentation.

10. SECURITY CLEARANCES

A security clearance is an authorization issued permitting an individual access to sensitive and classified information.

10.1 Security Clearance Process Overview

All participants must be able to obtain at minimum a SECRET level security clearance. Depending on the needs of the hiring agency the clearance level required may be higher than SECRET. This section provides information on security clearances that may be helpful.

- The agency that selected you will begin the clearance process.
- Participants must complete security investigation paperwork, submit to fingerprinting, and undergo a background investigation regarding citizenship, financial history, criminal background, drug and alcohol use, and foreign contacts and associations. In some cases, the agency may also require a polygraph.
- The length of time required for processing clearance requests varies depending on the type of clearance requested, the individual's background, and the agency for which the clearance is requested. The investigation can take anywhere from one (1) month to a couple of years. The average time frame is approximately three-six months.
- There are multiple levels of clearances that grant access to different types of information.

The nature of the work performed exposes personnel to material which, if disclosed without authorization, could be reasonably expected to cause serious damage to national security.

10.2 Activities that May Result in Clearance Denial or Revocation

Conditions that could increase the amount of time it takes to process the security clearance and/or may be disqualifying include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Disorderly or criminal conduct;
- Dependent involvement in criminal offense;
- Attempted suicide or suicidal gestures;
- Recurring incidents of a discreditable nature;
- Financial irresponsibility (i.e. bankruptcy, excessive indebtedness, or bounced checks);
- Theft of government or personal property;
- Alcohol or drug abuse, including illegal drugs;
- DUI/DWI;
- Security violation;
- Child or spousal abuse;
- Assault;
- Arrest by civil or military authorities;
- Outside employment or volunteer activities that conflict with an individual's responsibility to protect classified material;
- Certain foreign travel;
- Unauthorized disclosure or retention, or negligent handling of classified information; or
- Involvement in activities or sympathetic association with persons which/who unlawfully practice or advocate the overthrow or alteration of the U.S. by unconstitutional means;
- Marriage to a foreign national;
- Close and continuing association with foreign nationals.

10.3 Denial of Participant Application for Security Clearance

If a Participant is denied a security clearance and as a result is unable to secure employment to meet the service commitment, he or she may be required to promptly repay the Entire Award Amount. See Section 9.3, Repayment Requirements.

10.4 Revocation of Participant Security Clearance

If a Participant is granted a security clearance that is revoked at any time prior to completion of Phase 2, the Participant may be required to promptly repay the Award Amount. The amount owed will be prorated based on time already served to fulfill the service commitment. See Section 9.3, Repayment Requirements

For additional information regarding security clearances, please visit

<http://www.OPM.gov/investigations>. You may also view the Security Questionnaire at [www.https://www.opm.gov/forms/pdf_fill/sf86.pdf](https://www.opm.gov/forms/pdf_fill/sf86.pdf).

11. DEFERRAL OF OBLIGATION

A participant may request approval to defer his/her obligation to the Government to further their education. Requests to defer the obligation may be approved for up to two years. An additional deferral may be considered for Doctoral candidates but are reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

Other types of deferrals may be approved on a case-by-case basis. Requests for all deferrals must be submitted via the participants PI and then approved by the PO. Please contact the PO or your PI with any questions about the process, necessary forms and supporting documentation.

12. CAREER FAIRS

Over the course of the academic school year, the Scholarship for Service (SFS) Program in conjunction with the National Science Foundation (NSF) and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) plan and host at least one virtual event and, when possible, one in-person event. The virtual career fair is usually held in October while the on-ground/in-person career fair is held in early January in the Northern Virginia/Washington D.C. commuting area. Participants are informed of the career fairs via e-mail by their PI as well as the SFS Program Office.

13. RESOURCES

There are many resources available on the SFS website, sfs.opm.gov. These have been made available to assist in successful completion of the SFS program. There are links to job opportunities, list of Federal (executive and non-executive) agencies, links to resume writing and interviewing videos, etc.

14. CLOSING

Please remember to remain in contact with your PI and the SFS Program Office and keep your SFS Profile current and report all required commitments (Internship and Post Graduate Commitments). For additional questions you may contact the SFS Program Directly at sfs@opm.gov.

Congratulations again and welcome to the SFS Program!