

REU: A Secret to Getting Paid to do Science Research over the Summer



The information below was written by the [Brandeis Science Communication Lab](#).

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What is a REU?

REU (Research Experiences for Undergraduates) is a NSF (National Science Foundation) Paid Summer Internship. There are other summer programs that are not NSF funded, but the same principles apply.

- NSF internship for undergraduates who work in the research programs of the host institution
- Work on a specific research project, under faculty and other researchers
- Paid ~\$5,000/10 weeks, with free housing, travel, and food
- Must be a citizen or permanent resident who will still be a college student after the summer REU
- ~700 REU Sites around the country and each site accepts only 6-10 students

What is involved in an REU application?

Each REU Site (or a small collection of REU Sites) has their own online application that may include:

- Personal information
- Unofficial transcripts
- CV/Resume
- Two strong letters of recommendation from college professors/former employers
- Personal statement or essay questions
- Due dates: most REU programs have a February deadline BUT many have rolling admission, so it helps to submit your application earlier if it is weaker (less competition)

What makes an application stand out?

- Strong academic background
 - As & Bs in science classes and calculus (if weak, address this in essays)
- Desire to pursue a research career
 - The NSF measures the success of an REU by how many REU alumni become PhD or MD/PhD students (not MD students). Therefore, if applicants are open to a PhD, they should state that goal to increase the likelihood of being accepted/getting an offer.
- CV/Resume: Provide *context*, *details* and *motivation* behind work experiences and organized participation. Not a laundry list!
- Two strong letters of recommendation from professors/former employers
 - One letter must be from a science professor
 - Make the acquaintance of faculty so your letter writers can write something personal and say more than "So-and-so took my 200 person class and got a 85% on the first test and a 91% on the final exam."
- Essays must be proofread, ~2-3 paragraphs in length, and answer the specific questions asked
 - Have energy and enthusiasm for the work. Show curiosity to learn more
 - Correlate previous work to the specific REU Program
 - State how participation in the specific REU program will benefit your future academic and professional careers
 - When describing any previous research/ coursework, state the meaning of the experience
 - Do not convey in any way these sentiments: "this will be great for me" or "my career" or "I need (or think I do) this for medical/dental school"

Resources:

- List of [NSF REU Sites](#).
- Make a [CommLab appointment](#) to make your application stand out.