

2026 FOSTER YOUTH INTERNSHIP PROGRAM®

Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute



Application Information + Instructions

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Learn about Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute's (CCAI) Foster Youth Internship (FYI) Program®.

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

Applicants must meet all of the eligibility criteria to be considered for a position in the program.

APPLICATION DETAILS

Read about the application components in advance of submission. Part one of the application is due Nov. 2. Full applications are due Dec. 3.

TIPS FOR WORKING ON AN APPLICATION

Interested applicants are strongly encouraged to fully read this "Application Information + Instructions" document before working on their application. Before applying, please confirm you meet all of the eligibility requirements. It is also recommended applicants write their responses in a separate document - to revise, revisit, and edit - before logging on to complete and submit the online application. If you have questions after carefully reviewing this document and the information available on CCAI's website, please contact Lisette DuFore Benz at lisette@ccainstitute.org.





February 2 - May 22, 2026
Remote four-month preparatory onboarding

May 25 - July 10, 2026
Seven weeks in Washington, D.C.

Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute's (CCAI) Foster Youth Internship (FYI) Program® is a competitive national internship for students and recent graduates with lived experience in foster care who are interested in federal policy and advocacy. Participants research and write a federal child welfare policy report and are placed in the Washington, D.C. legislative offices of Members of the U.S. Congress.

The 2026 Foster Youth Internship Program® includes both a (1) **remote four-month preparatory onboarding process** from February 2 - May 22, 2026 (predominantly independent curriculum, approx. 10-15 hrs/mo. or 30-45 hours total) and an (2) **in-person, full-time internship in Washington, D.C.** for seven weeks from May 25 - July 10, 2026. The participant **MUST** be available for and commit to the entirety of the program (both the remote preparatory and in-person) to qualify.

ABOUT THE FYI PROGRAM

The Foster Youth Internship (FYI) Program® began in 2003 as an effort to raise awareness to federal policymakers about the needs and unique perspectives of individuals who have experienced the U.S. foster care system. CCAI works with congressional offices to secure a congressional internship for each participant. In addition, CCAI organizes an orientation, advocacy trainings, networking, and various other professional development opportunities. These combined experiences allow the participants to create a policy report that is presented to U.S. Congress, Administration, Department of Health and Human Services, and released to policymakers and advocates across the country. As a result of the program, federal policymakers learn firsthand the experiences of youth in foster care and go on to use their new knowledge to inspire legislative change to federal child welfare policy. Participants benefit both personally and professionally, gaining experience and skills that will bolster their careers for years to come.

This is an immersive seven-week, educational, and civic experience in Washington, D.C. with a comprehensive onboarding to ensure participants are well-prepared for effective advocacy and leadership development in the nation's capital. Participants are not considered employees of CCAI nor their congressional office. CCAI provides a monthly stipend during the remote preparatory onboarding (February 2 - May 22) and weekly stipend while in Washington, D.C. (May 25 - July 10), and covers major expenses, such as housing in Washington, D.C., transportation to/from Washington, D.C., and public transportation to/from the congressional office internship. Participants are responsible for some smaller expenses. Interns are required to live in dormitory-style housing assigned by CCAI for the duration of the program and to adhere to the guidance and regulations of the program.

CONGRESSIONAL INTERNSHIP

Each congressional office placement differs. CCAI does not guarantee that the intern will be assigned projects that are related to child welfare. Office responsibilities will likely include:

- Open, sort, and deliver mail
- Answer phones, greet constituents, run errands, deliver priority letters, and acquire signatures
- Copy, file, fax, data entry, and work on small legislative projects
- Work directly with congressional staff to research issues and compose constituent correspondence
- Attend committee hearings, sit in on meetings, attend press conferences, and take notes
- Provide constituent services and give tours of the U.S. Capitol
- Attend and assist with congressional briefings and meetings, including various events organized by CCAI

POLICY REPORT

By applying to and later agreeing to be a part of the FYI Program, you are agreeing to be fully engaged in the intensive congressional policy report writing process of the program. This involves selecting a topic in a timely manner, performing in-depth research, working closely with an advisor, writing, and extensively editing the report. The process involves, but is not limited to, adhering to all report deadlines set forth by CCAI; attendance at and full participation in all mandatory CCAI meetings and briefings; being respectful toward other interns, advisors and the CCAI staff; being open to new ideas and suggestions; and completion of the report and entire internship program.

ELIGIBILITY

Applicants must meet ALL of the following eligibility criteria to be considered for a position in the program. The education requirement is due to the general skills expected of congressional interns working on Capitol Hill and researching and writing federal policy. However, please reach out to CCAI if you feel you may be untraditionally qualified.

- 1) Applicants **are expected** to have strong writing, grammar, and research skills.
- 2) Applicants **are required** to have a strong interest in improving federal child welfare policy.
- 3) Applicants **are required** to have spent at least 12 consecutive months and/or at least a total of 20 months in United States foster care during any point in their lives *and* be willing to share their experiences to raise awareness and effect change.
- 4) Applicants **are required** to have completed at least four (4) semesters at an accredited institution of higher learning, such as a college, university, or vocational school by the start of the internship on May 25, 2026.
- 5) Applicants **are required** to be currently pursuing a degree at an accredited institution of higher learning, such as a college, university, or vocational school prior to the internship (i.e., currently pursuing May 25, 2026) OR have attained a degree at an accredited institution of higher learning such as a college, university, or vocational school within the past year at the start of the program (i.e., degree attained on or around May 25, 2025).
- 6) Applicants **are required** to fully participate in the entirety of the program to include: (1) remote participation in the preparatory onboarding process from February 2 - May 22, 2026, estimated 10-15 hours per month, to ensure sufficient preparation and success in Washington, D.C. and (2) be in Washington, D.C. for the entire duration of the in-person program from May 25 - July 10, 2026 and participate in all mandatory events, including some weekends and evenings. Because of the unique group dynamic, as well as important orientations, training, and end-of-program events, selected participants will not be allowed to arrive to the FYI Program late or leave early. Those considering applying for the 2026 FYI Program with known conflicts with the program dates are encouraged to apply the following year.

COLLEGE CREDIT

Many colleges and universities allow students to obtain academic credit for internships. Ask your academic advisor to determine if you are eligible to receive academic credit for the FYI Program. Former program participants have been successful in getting appropriate credit for participation in the FYI Program for both bachelor's and master's degree programs. Once selected, CCAI can assist with next steps as your site supervisor.

WANT TO LEARN MORE? JOIN US FOR AN INFO SESSION ON ZOOM!

Three 60-min informational sessions will be hosted virtually this fall to help candidates learn more about the program and application process. If interested, please RSVP [here](#)!

Info Session #1: September 19, 2025 at 2PM EST

Info Session #2: October 3, 2025 at 12PM EST

Info Session #3: October 28, 2025 at 12PM EST

If you have questions after carefully reviewing this application and the information available on CCAI's website about the Foster Youth Internship Program®, please contact Lisette DuFore Benz at lisette@cccainstitute.org or (202) 544-8500 ext. 12.

APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS

COMPLETED APPLICATIONS (PART 1 & PART 2) MUST BE RECEIVED NO LATER THAN DECEMBER 3, 2025.

To be considered as an applicant for the 2026 Foster Youth Internship (FYI) Program®, you must complete both parts of the application in their entirety, including both letters of recommendation.

APPLICATION OUTLINE & TIMELINE

The 2026 Foster Youth Internship (FYI) Program® application consists of two parts. Part one of the application is available via online form [here](#) and will be accepted until **November 2, 2025**. Part one of the application assesses eligibility, interest, and qualification and should take an estimated 30 minutes to complete. On a regular and rolling basis, part one applications will be reviewed thoroughly. Applicants are strongly encouraged to submit a part one application sooner than later within the deadline window to maximize potential time for part two.

Part one applicants with proven eligibility, interest, and qualification will be invited via email to complete part two (2) of the application. Part two applicants will be notified on a rolling basis, no later than **November 7**, and have until **December 3, 2025** to submit a full application to CCAI. Part two (2) of the application assesses specific legislative interests, writing ability, and references and should take an estimated two to three hours to complete. During this stage, CCAI will also schedule a brief phone call with prospective applicants to answer any questions and provide a platform to learn more about both the applicant and CCAI/FYI Program.

When CCAI receives a completed application in its entirety (both parts one and two), CCAI will send a confirmation email to the applicant within five business days. Applicants will be notified the evening of **January 9, 2026** whether the selection committee has chosen to move forward with their application. The next step in the application process will be an interview via Zoom. Interviews will only be conducted with the top 15-20 applicants during the week of **January 12-16, 2026**. The 2026 class of Foster Youth Interns will be notified by **January 21, 2026** of their acceptance into the program.

NOTE: CCAI has a zero-tolerance policy for plagiarism. Plagiarized applications, including the use of artificial intelligence (AI), will result in automatic dismissal of consideration for the program as plagiarism is an unethical violation of academic integrity. Applicants are required to use their own original ideas and work both on this application and, if selected, during the program.



PART ONE

ACCEPTED ON ROLLING BASIS | DUE NOV. 2

APPLY HERE



GENERAL BACKGROUND

This section of the application is designed to gather information on the applicants including their general background information (name, pronouns, age, etc.), academic information (status, name of institution, graduation date, etc.), congressional member information, policy interests, information related to experience in foster care, and more.

SHORT RESPONSE QUESTIONS

Answer each question in 150 words or less:

1. Why do you want to participate in CCAI's Foster Youth Internship Program? Why this program and why now?
2. Tell us three words that best describe you and why.
3. Please describe your ideal working style and learning environment.
4. Tell us one thing that is not on your resume that you would like us to know.
5. How would you define nonpartisanship?

RÉSUMÉ

All applicants should highlight their most relevant academic, work experience, and community involvement, and the dates involved. If a section is not applicable, write N/A.

For the resume, do not submit more than one page. Only the first page of resumes will be reviewed. Please submit in PDF format with the file saved as: Last Name, First Name_Resume.



PART TWO

TO BE COMPLETED ON INVITATION | DUE DEC. 3

RESEARCH ESSAY

Your essay must include all three of the following: (1) how your life experiences have shaped your interest in and skills for this specific internship program, (2) how this experience fits with your goals and future aspirations, and (3) based on your personal experience in foster care, what is one legislative change you would want to make to the child welfare system that addresses a significant barrier for children reaching permanency? Supporting research is required, and applicants must cite sources in APA format. Essays submitted without research and/or not in APA citation form, will be disqualified. Do not submit more than four pages; only the first four pages will be considered. Essays must be double-spaced, use 12-point Times New Roman font, use proper spelling and grammar, numbered pages, and saved in PDF format as Last Name, First Name_Essay. ALL essay guidelines must be followed. CCAI has a zero-tolerance policy for plagiarism. Plagiarized applications will result in automatic dismissal of consideration for the program. Please submit in PDF format with the file saved as: Last Name, First Name_Essay.

SHORT RESPONSE SCENARIOS

Answer each of the following questions in 250 words or less:

- 1) CCAI is the nonprofit of the largest bipartisan, bicameral caucus in the U.S. Congress. Bipartisanship is deeply important and at the core of CCAI and its programs and understanding bipartisanship is critical to success in the Foster Youth Internship Program®. CCAI works with all political parties – ranging from very conservative to very liberal, and all offices in-between. It is not atypical for participants to be placed in a congressional office that does not align with their personal ideologies and/or political party. Please explain what bipartisanship means to you and how you would handle interning in an office with congressional staff and interns who may have different views than you do.
- 2) The Foster Youth Internship Program® is a highly collaborative program. Working in a team setting allows for innovation from diverse perspectives, increased productivity, effective problem-solving, inspired creativity, and learning opportunities as each member utilizes their own and others' skills. Tell us about your top two strengths and top two areas of growth.
- 3) The Foster Youth Internship Program® is a competitive congressional internship that demands high motivation and commitment from participants. As part of the program, CCAI also organizes an intensive policy research and report publication, retreats, advocacy trainings, and various networking opportunities. Discuss your time management, ability to implement corrective measures to stay on track, and maintain professionalism in this scenario.

ACADEMIC TRANSCRIPT

The academic transcript can be official or unofficial but must reflect your most recent semester from your current *or* most recent institution of higher learning. Please submit in PDF format with the file saved as: Last Name, First Name_Transcript.

TWO RECOMMENDATIONS

Each application requires two recommendations. Ideally, both recommendations should be professional in nature (e.g., from a professor, faculty member, current or former supervisor, etc.). However, we understand this may not always be possible—so one of your two recommendations may be personal (e.g., from a mentor, advisor, coach, etc.) if needed. Your recommenders are asked to complete an online recommendation form available [here](#), which will include several skill evaluations. Please note that in addition to the written recommendation, CCAI will follow up with each reference by phone. All recommendation forms are due by **December 3, 2025** and it is the applicant's responsibility to both (1) send the online recommendation form to each recommender and communicate the deadline and (2) confirm with their recommenders that their recommendation has been submitted to CCAI. Allow plenty of time for the recommenders to write the letter, as well as time to follow up with them directly.

REC. FORM

