



2026 Merritt Scholars FAQ

1. Who is eligible to apply to this program?

Applicants must:

- Be an undergraduate student in their sophomore, junior or senior year; or a graduate student who will be enrolled in Fall 2026.
- Physically attend a university located in the following states:
 - o California
 - o Arizona
 - o Colorado
 - o Oregon
 - o Nevada
 - o Utah
 - o Washington
- Have proven interest in affordable housing via employment, internship, coursework, or advocacy.
- Provide a written recommendation from an affordable housing professional, or a professor who teaches a course directly related to affordable housing.

Early-career professionals not enrolled in a degree-granting institution by Fall 2026 are not eligible to apply.

2. What does the selection process look like?

The application form will be open from early February to end of April. Applicants will complete a comprehensive questionnaire, designed to assess their commitment to the affordable housing sector, along with essays and letters of recommendation.

Select applicants may be invited to a phone interview as part of the process. After selections are made, applicants will be notified by June.

3. What is expected of the recommenders?

As part of the application, applicants will provide their recommender's contact information. This will prompt the SmarterSelect platform to automatically send a brief questionnaire to the recommender's email, inquiring about their relationship with the applicant, their abilities and interest in housing, and their overall fit for the program. Recommenders may also attach a letter of recommendation and supporting materials.

4. The program requires enrollment in a degree granting institution by Fall 2026. Would someone who is currently applying or awaiting acceptance to begin a program in Fall 2026 be eligible?

Yes, as long as applicants state this clearly on the application and notify the Merritt team upon acceptance and commitment to the program. Selected Merritt Scholars must provide proof of enrollment once available, as scholarships are disbursed directly to the school at the start of the program.

5. What is expected of selected Merritt Scholars throughout the course of the program?

Scholars are required to attend all in-person and virtual events from June 2026 to May 2027. This includes:

- Virtual training and industry leader engagement sessions
- Orientation in Oakland (August 2026)
- One local housing conference in the fall, depending on location - examples include:
 - the SCANPH Conference in Los Angeles in September
 - the NPH Conference in October in San Francisco
 - the San Diego Housing Federation Conference in October in San Diego
 - the CCRH Rural Housing Summit in November in Monterey
- Team building day and Merritt's Annual Partner Celebration in Oakland (November 2026)
- Housing California conference in Sacramento (March 2027)
- Graduation in Los Angeles (May 2027)

In-person engagements may require travel, with all associated costs-including transportation, accommodations, and daily stipends-fully covered by Merritt.

Mentorship is also a key component of the program! Scholars are expected to meet with their assigned mentor 1-on-1 for a minimum of three times during the program.

6. Can someone with limited experience or coursework in affordable housing apply for the program?

Yes. Although demonstrated commitment to the affordable housing industry is the most critical factor, applicants without direct experience may still be considered if their essays and recommendations clearly convey strong interest in the field.