How to Apply for a Postdoctoral Research Fellowship in Biology in FastLane

Postdoctoral Research Fellowships in Biology (PRFB) NSF 20-602

Deadline: November 18, 2020

Contacts for Competitive Areas 1 & 2:
Phone: 703 292-8470
Email: bio-dbi-prfb@nsf.gov

Contact for Competitive Area 3:
Phone: 703 292-4400
Email: dbipgr@nsf.gov

I.   Important Proposal Preparation Information.

Be sure you are eligible. An individual is eligible to submit an application for a postdoctoral fellowship if all of the requirements below are met. If you fail to meet any eligibility criterion, your application will be returned without review.

You must:

- be a U.S. citizen (or national) or permanent resident of the United States (i.e., have a "green card") at the proposal deadline;

- present a research and training plan that falls within the purview of NSF's Directorate for Biological Sciences (BIO) and a focus in one of the selected areas, as described in this solicitation;

- have earned or plan to earn the doctoral degree in an appropriate field prior to the beginning of the fellowship;

- select sponsoring scientists, departments, and institutions that offer a significant opportunity to broaden your prior research focus and training;

- not have served in any position that requires the doctoral degree for more than 12 full time months prior to submission of the application (deadline); and

- not have submitted the same research to another NSF postdoctoral fellowship program.

General Document Preparation Guidelines: Prepare all documents according to guidelines in the program solicitation and the NSF Proposal and Awards Policies and Procedures Guide (PAPPG), Proposal Preparation Instructions. A brief summary of the requirements is given

below. These requirements apply to all uploaded sections of an application, including supplementary documents.

Please note: A Collaborators and Other Affiliations (COA) document is not required.

The application must be clear, readily legible, and conform to the following requirements:

1.   Use one of the following typefaces identified below:

   •   Arial (not Arial Narrow), Courier New, or Palatino Linotype at a font size of 10 points or larger;

   •   Times New Roman at a font size of 11 points or larger; or

   •   Computer Modern family of fonts at a font size of 11 points or larger

   •   A font size of less than 10 points may be used for mathematical formulas or equations, figure, table or diagram captions and when using a Symbol font to insert Greek letters or special characters. Applicants are cautioned, however, that the text must still be easily readable.

2.   No more than 6 lines of text within a vertical space of one inch.

3.   Margins, in all directions, must be at least an inch.

4.   Proposal Pagination Instructions: Proposers are advised that FastLane does not automatically paginate parts of proposals and applications. Each section of the proposal that is uploaded as a file must be individually paginated prior to being uploaded.

For assistance with submitting to FastLane, the FastLane Help Desk is available from 7 AM to 8 PM ET except Federal holidays and weekends. Call 1-800-673-6188 or e-mail fastlane@nsf.gov. E-mails are answered on Saturdays.

Instructions for Uploading a File in FastLane

Within the form, select Browse and find your document. Double click on document. Select Upload File. A screen will tell you when the document has been successfully uploaded.

Select Proofread PDF. View the converted file, and then navigate back to select either Accept or Cancel. If you accept the document, you can now either select Display Current to view the document or select Go Back and return to the Form Preparation screen.

Submission Tips:

1. Print, read, and carefully note all the requirements and directions in the Program Solicitation.

2. Register as an independent researcher at www.fastlane.nsf.gov. (Instructions below in II.)

3. Begin EARLY.

4. READ your application **(as a printout)** before submitting.

5. Check the grammar and spelling on all documents.

6. Don't wait until the last minute; submit before the deadline.

II.   How to Register as an Independent Researcher

This program is not for individuals affiliated with institutions. It is for individual researchers only. You must register as an independent researcher.

Go to www.fastlane.nsf.gov and select the Postdoctoral Fellowships and Other Programs tab. Select Individual Registration. You will be routed through research.gov. Once you have an NSF ID, make your submission through FastLane.

You cannot submit an application without registering.

NOTE: Please use an email address that will not change when you switch institutions, so you can use it over the long term. (Most applicants use gmail.)

After submission, you should get a summary page reviewing your responses. Verify the information and edit as necessary. Be sure to write down your NSF ID number as you will need it in the next step.

III.   Step by Step Instructions to Prepare Application after registering as an independent researcher.

A.   Begin your application.

Again, access www.fastlane.nsf.gov and select Proposals, Awards and Status. Sign in using the 'PI/Co-PI Login' tab, enter your Last Name, NSF ID, and password. (Do not use a login or password that might have been assigned to you by a grants office when you applied to another NSF program.) You are required to change your password the first time you login.

You will be routed to the 'Research.gov' desktop. In the 'Prepare & Submit Proposals' tab, select Prepare Proposals in FastLane. Select Proposal Functions and then Proposal Preparation. The PI Information screen appears. Check your information and update as necessary. The organization must be you as an independent researcher. Your organization code must begin with "P." If needed, select Edit PI Information to update your information. When completed, select Save.

Select Prepare Proposal. On the Proposal Actions screen the first time you login, select Create Blank Proposal. On subsequent logins, select your temporary proposal, then Edit.

Note: Once you login, there is a NAVIGATION column on the right side of the screen to help you move through the application. (At any time in the process of preparing the proposal, if you select PRINT, you will be taken to the Print Menu and can click on any section to see a pdf version of the current version. Select Go Back to return working on the forms.)

B.   Form Preparation

1.   Prepare Cover Sheet. COMPLETE THIS FORM FIRST. Select GO next to Cover Sheet. The Cover Sheet Components Form screen appears first.

   a) Check Awardee and Performing Institutions. Check that the awardee organization information is correct.

   This must be you as an individual researcher, not a university or college. (Correct if necessary. Return to the PI Information screen by selecting Go Back. Select Edit PI Information. Select Change Institution.

   Type your last name into box and select Locate. Select you as an Independent Researcher with an institution code beginning with "P". Then Save.)

   Enter the host institution and its address information in the fields "NAME OF PRIMARY PLACE OF PERF" and "ADDRESS OF PRIMARY PLACE PERF, INCLUDING 9 DIGIT ZIP CODE if in the U.S." If you have more than one host institution, list the primary one here and list both in your project summary (see below).

   b) Select GO next to 'Announcement/Program Solicitation/Program Description No.', then highlight 'NSF 20-602 Postdoctoral Research Fellowships in Biology' and click Select.

   c) Select NSF Unit, by choosing the appropriate BIO division and Program.

   For Competitive Areas 1 or 2 select "DBI-Division of Biological Infrastructure". And then select a program:

- Competitive Area 1 (Broadening Participation of Groups Underrepresented in Biology)
    - Select " Broadening Participation of Groups Underrepresented in Biology"

- Competitive Area 2 (Integrative Research Investigating the Rules of Life Governing Interactions Between Genomes, Environment and Phenotypes)
    - Select "Biology Postdoctoral Research"

For Competitive Area 3, select "IOS-Division of Integrative Organismal Systems" and then select "NPGI PostDoc Rsrch Fellowship" for the Plant Genome Postdoctoral Research Fellowships.

NOTE: Do not select more than one Competitive Area, as your proposal will ONLY be considered in your top choice.

Click Go Back

d) Click on 'Go remainder of cover sheet". You will get a message that the rest of the Cover Sheet has been 'automatically filled in and saved'. Click OK

e) The remainder of the cover sheet will be auto filled using information from the Application Form; therefore, be sure to **completely** fill out the Application Form. Also remember to, include a **TITLE.** It will not appear on the coversheet, but it is important for assigning your proposal to appropriate reviewers. The budget forms also are autogenerated based on the information in the Application Form (and depend on the 'Proposed duration').

2.   Prepare the Application Form (GO 'Application Form', button in right column)

Filling in the Application Form is required, or your application is incomplete and will be returned without review. Most of the fields are self-explanatory. Notes for some fields identified by letters follow:

H. Current Position: Type of Institution: Describe, for example, PhD granting, Museum, Research Center, etc.

I-K None of this information is required (the form will say 'Do not wish to provide'). **DO NOT FILL OUT THESE FIELDS.**

O. Proposed Sponsoring Scientific Advisor: For applicants with multiple sponsoring scientists, there is room for only one name. So, put in the primary sponsor whose lab you will start in. You must list your sponsors and their institutions in the Project Summary.

Q. Expected Starting Date: The date must be on the first day of a month. The earliest start date is June 1, 2021 and the latest start date is March 1, 2022. Next, select the duration. There is a known bug in the system and budget number on the coversheet may not reflect what you select. When you submit this will be corrected, so check again after submission. In rare cases, it is not automatically corrected, in which case contact the help desk.

S. For applications that involve Live Vertebrate Animals: In the Other Information section, you must select the box labeled Vertebrate Animals. If you are offered a fellowship, you must submit the required approvals before the fellowship can be awarded. Likewise, for applications that involve Human Subjects: In the Other Information section, select the box labeled Human Subjects. If you are selected for a fellowship, you will need to submit the required approvals before the fellowship can be awarded.

For applications with international cooperative activities: Please enter the country name(s).

T. Short term international experience: If you are going on brief (less than nine months) collecting trips or training etc., please enter the international institution and sponsoring scientist.

3.   Prepare Project Summary (limited to one page) of Proposed Fellowship Activities, including both research and training.

Select GO next to Project Summary. This is an abstract of the proposed research and training. You must clearly address and identify in separate statements using the three boxes: (1) an overview of your proposed fellowship activities; (2) intellectual merit; and (3) broader impacts of the activities. Without these 3 sections, your application will be returned without review. **List your sponsoring scientist(s) and institution(s) in the overview.** Upload text in the proper boxes. Do not use the Supplementary Document option for the summary. Do not use jargon and abbreviations in the summary. It should be understandable by scientists not in your specialized field.

Warning: the text conversion program used in FastLane may not recognize special characters, such as apostrophes, hyphens, quotes, etc. After filling the boxes, save the summary and use the print function to look for inappropriate characters and codes. Make the corrections directly in the text box. (**Print or save as a PDF** and check the final version to ensure the summary has the correct formatting.)

4.   Prepare Project Description (Research and Training Plan). [6-page limit, including all figures, tables, etc.]

Select GO next to Project Description and upload file. The bibliography is saved under References Cited and does not count toward the six-page limit.

The research and training plan presents the research that you will conduct and the training that you will receive during the fellowship period and how they relate to your career goals. Include in the research and training plan:

a) a ***brief and informative*** introduction or background section;
b) a statement of research objectives, methods, and significance;
c) training objectives and plan for achieving them (these may include scientific as well as other career preparation activities);
d) an explanation of how the fellowship activities will enhance your career development and future research directions as well as describing how this research differs from your dissertation research, thus providing you an opportunity to broaden your scientific horizon;
e) a justification of the choice of sponsoring scientist(s) and host institution(s);
f) a timetable with goals with benchmarks for major anticipated outcomes;
g) **a separate section headed "Broader Impacts"** within the narrative that describes in detail the broader impacts of the proposed activities. If your proposal lacks this section it will be returned without review; and
h) for each competitive area, a description of how the research and training proposed align with the focus of the competitive area, as described in the solicitation.

5.   References Cited.

Save the Bibliography here. Select GO next to References Cited. Select Go Back to return to the Form Preparation screen.

6.   Biographical Sketch [2-page limit].

NSF requires a biographical sketch (limited to two pages) using an [approved format](https://www.nsf.gov/bfa/dias/policy/biosketch.jsp) (https://www.nsf.gov/bfa/dias/policy/biosketch.jsp). Detailed information about the content is available in the [Proposal and Award Policies and Procedures Guide (PAPPG) Chapter II.C.2.f](). Use one of the approved templates and follow the instructions for each section.

7.   Current and Pending Support.

NSF requires the use of an NSF [approved format](https://www.nsf.gov/bfa/dias/policy/cps.jsp) (https://www.nsf.gov/bfa/dias/policy/cps.jsp) to provide a list of current, pending and planned applications to other fellowship programs. Further instructions are available in Proposal and Award Policies and Procedures Guide (PAPPG), Chapter, II.C.2.h. If you have none to report upload the form without making any entries.

8.   Add/Delete Letter of Reference Writers.

Two (2) reference reports are required --- one from the doctoral advisor and one from another scientist who knows you well. This should NOT be your proposed sponsor. Select GO next to Add/Delete Letter of Reference Writers. Select Add References. Type in all requested information for the Reference Writer. The fields preceded by an asterisk are required.

Select Add Reference to save the reference information. The next screen will ask if you want an e-mail sent to this person with the Temporary Proposal Number and the password. You will have to select Yes or No. If you do not select Yes, make sure to contact each Letter of Reference Writer and give each the Temporary Proposal Number and the Password.

Reference letters must be submitted before you submit your application to FastLane. They cannot be added later. Therefore, they must be received prior to the deadline. Be sure to give your reference letter writers sufficient time to enter their letters prior to the deadline. If, at the last minute, one is not able to submit a letter, substitute another letter writer.

9.   Status: Letters of Reference.

Check this function (main menu, left column) before the deadline to see if each Letter of Reference Writer has begun and then submitted his/her comments. The Letter of Reference Writer must submit prior to the deadline or your application is incomplete and will be returned without review. The Letter of Reference Writer should select Postdoctoral Fellowships and Other Programs and select Letter of Reference Writer under Who Are You? The Temporary Proposal Number and password are needed to login.

C.   Supplementary Documents

There are four subsections under Supplementary Documents. More than one document can be uploaded within these forms. DO NOT include any documents not specifically required. Select GO next to Supplementary Docs and the proper subsection to upload the information. Select Go Back to return to the Form Preparation screen.

Documents to be uploaded into Supplementary Docs fields:

- Data Management Plan: All applications must include a supplementary document of no more than two pages labeled "Data Management Plan". Please refer to the Biological Sciences data management guidance (https://www.nsf.gov/bio/biodmp.jsp). Upload to Supplementary Documents – Data Management Plan.

- Mentoring Plan: This is the sponsoring scientist(s) statement (only one, regardless of the number of sponsoring scientists, 3-page limit) described in the program solicitation NSF 20-602 and a 2-page CV for the sponsor (or one for each sponsor if there is more than one sponsor). Upload to Supplementary Documents – Mentoring Plan.

- Other Supplementary Docs: An abstract of your Doctoral Dissertation Research (1-page limit) is required for the review process to determine whether the proposed work is significantly different than the thesis work. Upload a thesis abstract to Supplementary Documents – Other Supplementary Docs.

Final steps

When the application is complete, print out all the forms to double check conversions and be sure that everything has been included. When satisfied that all documents are within the page limits and print out well, return to the Proposal Actions screen, and select Submit. The screen shows the question, "Do you wish to proceed with the submission?". Select Continue. If some parts of the proposal have not been saved, they will be listed along with a Go Back button. Otherwise, the screen will state, "All required forms are saved, you can submit your application." Scroll down and read the information under Certification for Authorized Organizational Representative or Individual Applicant. Keep scrolling down and reading until the Sign and Submit button appears. Select Sign and Submit. The next screen will show your official NSF proposal number. Please note this number and use it for all correspondence with NSF about your application.   You must sign the application.

If you do not see the Submit button, select Allow SRO Access button. Select GO next to Allow SRO to view, edit, and submit proposal. Return to the FastLane homepage and go to the Research Administration page. **If you don't receive the proposal number or you cannot see the status of this proposal number under Proposal Status on FastLane, your application has not been submitted. Go through the steps again and make sure the proposal has been submitted to NSF.** If you still have not received acknowledgement of your submission and the proposal number, contact the Help desk for assistance.

IV. Research Administration Functions.

You may need to access Research Administration functions in FastLane after submitting your proposal to make changes to your information, withdraw the proposal, or request NSF approval. Select Research Administration (in the upper row of FastLane functions). On the login screen, type your last name, NSF ID, and password. Select Login.

Accounts Management: This function will let you change the organization information such as the address and contact information. If you move, it is important to update your contact information.