Postdoctoral Fellowships

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Today’s Goals

- Purpose of postdoc fellowships
- Sources and types of postdoc fellowships
- Planning your project
- Writing your proposal
- Understanding how your proposal will be reviewed
What is a Postdoc Fellowship?

Training

Experience
Goals for a Postdoctoral Fellowship

To become an independent researcher.

- Learn new skills.
- Learn how a laboratory functions.
- Form collaborations.
- Publish.
Why Should I Want a Fellowship?

- Stamp of approval: instant recognition, good on your CV.
- Guaranteed funding.
- Freedom.
- Path to a job.
- The biggest predictor of an R01 is an NRSA and of an NSF grant is an NSF fellowship.
How is it Different than Other Grants?

- What is the applicant’s potential?
- Is the mentor a good fit?
- Is the institutional environment good for training?
- Is the training or career development plan good?
- How will it influence the trainee’s course to independence?
Types of Postdoctoral Fellowships

**Student-held awards**
- Award is portable.
- Example: NIH F32

**Institution-held awards**
- Awarded to departments, programs, etc.
- Fellows selected by department, program, or faculty.
- Example: NIH T32

**Investigator-held grants**
- E.g., Funded by a PI’s R01 grant or NSF grant
Types of Postdoctoral Fellowships

- Government
- University
- Industry
- National Laboratories
- Foundations
Types of Postdoctoral Fellowships

- Mentored
- Independent
- Career Development
- Early-Stage vs. Late-Stage
- Transitional
Deciding Where to Search

- Use a database.
- Go directly to the sponsor’s website.
- Sign up for email alerts.
Finding Fellowships to Apply For

- UC Berkeley
  [http://www.spo.berkeley.edu/Fund/biopostdoc.html](http://www.spo.berkeley.edu/Fund/biopostdoc.html)
  [http://www.spo.berkeley.edu/fund/socpostdoc.html](http://www.spo.berkeley.edu/fund/socpostdoc.html)

- Pivot - Community of Science (COS)

- Grants.gov

- UCLA Graduate & Postdoctoral Extramural Support (GRAPES) Database
  [https://grad.ucla.edu/funding/](https://grad.ucla.edu/funding/)

- Science Careers
  [http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org](http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org)
Fellowships for International Postdocs

- Look for industry, professional organization sponsors (not U.S. gov’t).
- Look to your home country.
- EducationUSA:
  - https://educationusa.state.gov
Fellowships for International Postdocs

- National Postdoc Association:
  - [http://www.nationalpostdoc.org/?page=International](http://www.nationalpostdoc.org/?page=International)

- International Scholarships:

- International Education Financial Aid (IEFA):
  [http://iefa.org/](http://iefa.org/)

- Institute of International Education:
Which One?

- Choose a mechanism that makes sense based on:
  - The research that you are proposing.
  - Where you currently are in your career.
  - How much training you need to become independent.
Which One?

1. Do you have the support of your mentor/PI?

2. Is your research in line with the agency’s/RFA’s mission?

3. Are you eligible to apply? (nationality, years in postdoc, etc.)

4. Do you have time to do the training activities you need?
5. Do you have collaborators/consultants to make up for areas where you lack experience and training?

6. How much preliminary data do you have?

7. Do you have time to write a competitive proposal before the deadline?
Timeline for Proposal Preparation

Source: NIAID
Timeline for Proposal Preparation

NIH Grants

- **National Research Service Award (NRSA) Fellowships**: support for independent research projects.
- **Career development awards**: specific preparation for careers in biomedical research.
- **Research supplements**: money added to a grant to train people from underrepresented groups and scientists who've had a career hiatus for family reasons.
- **NRSA institutional research training grants**: support institutional training programs for graduate students or postdocs.
NIH Grant Continuum

Graduate Student → Ph.D. → Faculty Position

- F30
- F31
- F32
- K01
- K22
- K99/R00 (K99 phase or R00 phase)
Ruth L. Kirschstein National Research Service Awards (NRSA) for Individual Postdoctoral Fellows

- Can only have 3 years of NRSA postdoctoral training in aggregate.
- Provides stipend, tuition/fees, “institutional allowance” for insurance, equipment, supplies, books, and travel.
Mentored Career Development Awards

The Ks:

- Provide mentored research experiences to gain additional expertise in a *new* research area or in an area that will significantly enhance research capabilities.

- Protected time at the beginning of your independence.
Mentored Career Development Awards

- Mentored Research Scientist Development Award (K01)
- Mentored Clinical Scientist Development Award (K08)
- Mentored Patient-Oriented Research Development Award (K23)
- Mentored Quantitative Research Career Development Award (K25)
- Career Transition Award (K22)
- Pathway to Independence (PI) Award (K99/R00)
NIH Pathway to Independence Award

- “designed to foster the transition of new investigators to research independence”

- 5 years of support in 2 phases:
  - Phase 1: ≤2 years support for postdocs with no more than 4 years of postdoc training.
  - Phase 2: ≤3 years support in a tenured-track position, contingent upon review of progress during Phase 1.
Career Changers: K25

- Mentored experiences for scientists from quantitative and engineering backgrounds interested in pursuing health-related research.
- Postdocs to Senior Faculty eligible to apply.
NSF Postdoctoral Fellowships

- Not universal across fields.
- Can be:
  - Individually held.
  - Funded by a PI’s grant.
  - Institutionally held.
NSF Postdoctoral Fellowships

- Atmospheric and Geospace Sciences Postdoctoral Research Fellowships (AGS-PRF)
- Mathematical Sciences Postdoctoral Research Fellowships (MSPRF)
- NSF Astronomy and Astrophysics Postdoctoral Fellowships (AAPF)
- NSF Earth Sciences Postdoctoral Fellowships (EAR-PF)
- Postdoctoral Research Fellowships in Biology
- SBE Postdoctoral Research Fellowships (SPRF)
Postdoctoral Research Fellowships in Biology

http://www.nsf.gov/funding/pgm_summ.jsp?pims_id=503622

For FY 2015 and beyond, BIO programs are:

1. Broadening Participation of Groups Underrepresented in Biology
2. Research Using Biological Collections
3. National Plant Genome Initiative (NPGI) Postdoctoral Research Fellowships
NSF Postdocs

Link for application and instructions:

https://www.fastlane.nsf.gov/servlet/fastlane.pdoc.DisplayProgramType
Other Federal Agencies

DOE

– Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy (EERE) Postdoctoral Research Awards

http://energy.gov/eere/education/eere-postdoctoral-research-awards

DOD

– Breast Cancer Research Program

http://cdmrp.army.mil/funding/bcrp.shtml
California Programs

University of California President’s Postdoctoral Fellowship Program

- http://ppfp.ucop.edu/info/

California Alliance Postdoc Fellowship Program (Berkeley, UCLA, Stanford, Caltech)

- https://www.california-alliance.org/postdocfellowships
Foundation Fellowships

- Damon Runyon Cancer Research Foundation Fellowship
  [https://www.damonrunyon.org/for-scientists/application-guidelines/fellowship](https://www.damonrunyon.org/for-scientists/application-guidelines/fellowship)

- Helen Hay Whitney Foundation Research Fellowship

- American Association of University Women
Preparing the Application

- Assess your strengths and weaknesses.
- What resources are available?
- Who is going to be your sponsor? Mentoring team?
- What is the added value of the fellowship to your career development?
Individual Development Plan

- Identify:
  - Your unique training and career goals.
  - What you need in order to improve upon and achieve those goals:
    - Specific skills and strengths.
    - Approaches and time frames (e.g., courses, technical skills, teaching, supervision).
UC Berkeley IDP

- [http://vspa.berkeley.edu/idp-graduate-postdocs](http://vspa.berkeley.edu/idp-graduate-postdocs)
Individual Development Plan

http://myidp.sciencecareers.org/
### National Postdoctoral Association (NPA) Core Competencies Self-Assessment Checklist

Rate your current level of development in each of the following, with 1 being "Needs attention" and 9 being "extremely competent."

For more information on these competencies, please visit www.nationalpostdoc.org/competencies.

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Define Your Research Question

- A gap in knowledge in your field.
- A problem whose solution will be a big step forward for the field, rather than an incremental step.
- A problem that is going to matter to more people than just you.
- A project that is feasible for you at this point in your career.
Choosing Your Research Topic

1. Assess the field and its literature.
2. Identify the important research questions in your field.
3. Identify areas for further exploration.
4. Could your study fill a gap? Lead to greater understanding?
Choosing Your Research Topic

5. If this study been done before, is there room for improvement?

6. Is the timing right for this question to be answered? Is it a hot topic, or is it becoming obsolete?

7. Does it fit with the mission of a funder?

8. Most importantly, will your study have a significant impact on the field?
Preparing Your Application

Your potential

Your ideas

Added value

YOU
What are They Looking For?

- **Candidate:**
  - Good letters of recommendation
  - Published
  - Good grades
  - Good GREs
  - Potential
What are They Looking For?

- **Sponsor:**
  - Record as a researcher and trainer
  - How well-known
  - Productivity
  - Funding
  - A good fit for your research
What are They Looking For?

- **Environment/Institutional Commitment:**
  - The right resources and facilities
  - Intellectual community
  - Formal training mechanisms in place
What are They Looking For?

- **Training plan:**
  - Well laid out
  - Detailed
  - Fits with career goals and needs
What are They Looking For?

- **Research:**
  - How good is it
  - Novelty
  - Relevance
  - High impact
  - Value added for candidate
  - Feasible
  - What will the candidate learn
What are They Looking For?

- **Training potential:**
  - How much will you gain?
  - What will you get that’s new that you wouldn’t otherwise get?
Proposal Sections

- Format varies with sponsor.
- Follow instructions exactly.
- Don’t try to get around length limits by using tiny fonts, small margins, or appendices.
  - Many agencies reject such grants without review.
  - Even if they don’t, the reviewers will be extraordinarily displeased.
Typical Application Components

- CV/Biosketch
- GRE scores
- Transcript
- Personal Statement
- Research Plan
- Training Plan
- Sponsor Statement
- Letters of Reference
NSF SBE Application Format

- An introduction or background section;
- A statement of research objectives, methods, and significance;
- A brief description of planned teaching or instructional activities, if any, with justification of why and how this activity is valuable for the Fellow;
- A statement of training objectives and career goals for the Fellow, and an explanation of how this project will help achieve those goals;
- A justification of the choice of Sponsoring Scientist (Mentor), co-Mentors and host institution;
- A specific section describing either the Broadening Participation or the Interdisciplinary nature of the project, as appropriate for Track I or Track II.

Broader Impacts of the Proposed Activities
NIH F32 Format

- Research Training Plan
  - Specific Aims
  - Research Strategy
    - Significance
    - Innovation
    - Approach

- Respective Contributions
- Selection of Sponsor and Institution
- Responsible Conduct of Research
- Goals for Fellowship Training and Career
- Activities Planned Under This Award
- Doctoral Dissertation and Research Experience
- Sponsor and Co-Sponsor Information
NIH K99 Format

- Candidate Information
  - Candidate’s Background
  - Career Goals and Objectives
  - Plan for Career Development/Activities
  - Training in the Responsible Conduct of Research

- Statements and Letters of Support
  - Plans and Statements of Mentors/Co-Mentors
  - Letters of Support

- Environmental and Institutional Commitment to Candidate
  - Description of Institutional Environment
  - Institutional Commitment to the Candidate’s Research Career Development

- Research Plan
Writing Your Proposal

- This is not just a research grant.
  - Research must be doable, but within your expertise.
  - The research should teach you something.
  - Generate preliminary data for your next grant as an independent faculty member.

- This grant is about you.
Personal statement

• How did you get to where you are now?
• Where do you want to go?
  — What motivates you?
  — What experiences or interests do you bring to your work?
  — What might people learn from you?
Training Plan

- Plan specific steps with set milestones to meet the objectives of your IDP.

- Structure it around “core competencies.”
Training Plan

Core Competencies

- Communication skills
- Professionalism
- Research skill development
- Leadership and management skills
- Discipline-specific conceptual knowledge
- Responsible conduct of research

http://www.nationalpostdoc.org/?CoreCompetencies
Start with Specific Aims/Objectives:

- The most important page of your research plan.
- Start with a brief problem statement to introduce your research question and state why it is important.
Research Plan

Specific Aims/Objectives:

• Limited to 2-4 aims.
• Declarative (use short bullet points).
• Hypothesis-based.
• Not inter-dependent but supportive of each other.
SPECIFIC AIMS/OBJECTIVES
Insert preamble that describes the unmet need and/or gaps in our knowledge and why this is an important topic of study.

Our long-term goal is to understand _____. The specific objective of this proposal is to _____. The central hypothesis is that _____. We formulated this hypothesis, in part, based upon our strong preliminary data, which shows that _______. The rationale for the proposed research is that once it is known how _____ we can ______. We will pursue these studies in three Specific Aims:

Aim 1  INSERT TEXT.
Our working hypothesis for this Aim is that _____.

Aim 2  INSERT TEXT.
We will test the hypothesis _____.

Aim 3  INSERT TEXT.
In these studies, we will examine the prediction that _____.

The proposed work is innovative because it capitalizes on _____. At the completion of this project, we expect that the combined work proposed in Aims 1 and 2 will _____. We also expect that Aim 3 will establish _____.

BRDO
Background and Significance

- Outline the scientific background and context.
- Review prior work and literature.
- Establish importance and novelty.
- Identify gaps and opportunities.
Preliminary Data will be reviewed to:

- Evaluate the basis of the project:
  - Ability to develop and test hypotheses.
  - Ability to design rigorous experiments.
  - Expertise with experimental techniques.
  - Expertise in data analysis.
  - Rigor in interpreting the data.
  - Ability to present findings clearly and effectively.

- Predict the chance of success.
Research Plan

- Rationale
- Methods
- Potential Pitfalls and Alternative Approaches
- Timeline and Milestones
Research Plan

Rationale

- Describe the overall concept of your proposal and the principles and ideas underlying its design and topic.
Research Plan

**Methods**

- How will you explore or solve your research problem?
- Don’t provide all the details—provide enough information for reviewers to determine what you are proposing to do, not to replicate.
Research Plan

Potential Pitfalls and Alternative Approaches

- Discuss the limitations of each approach, how they may affect your results and data, and propose alternatives.

- State what you will do if results are negative, how negative findings will also advance the field, and what you will do next.
Timeline/Milestones

- Provide a timeline for the training and research.
- Indicate when you will assess the course and direction of the training and research efforts.
- Indicate possible alternative paths that may be followed at critical junctures.
- Describe future research that will result from this funding.
- Describe future career plans.
Letters of Reference

- Most important factor is that the reference is absolutely glowing.

- Second most important factor is how well the referee knows you.

- Provide them with all of the information that they need to write the letter (e.g., your research plan, personal statement, CV, a training plan, etc.).

- Follow up and make sure they sent in your reference letter.
Writing Strategies

Start early.

Find examples.

Have others review it.

Revise it.
Proposal Organization

- Develop a logical outline (presentation sequence).
- Use section headings to help reviewers find things.
- Use both major and minor section headings.
- Create a detailed table of contents.
- Use figures.

**Figure 1.** Road map to International House.
Keep the Reviewers in Mind

- Organize and make reviewers happy:
  - Make it easy for them to understand things.
  - Make it easy for them to find things.
  - Make it easy for them to be your advocate.
  - Don’t make them work hard.
Reviewers want:

**Short and simple text.**

- Start with basic ideas and move progressively to more complex ones.
- State the key points directly, and write basic concepts as nontechnically as possible.
The Editing Process

- Look carefully at what you write.
  - Does it say what you want it to say?
  - Do you need to use so many words to say it?
  - Have you organized your information so that people know what is most important?

- Have others read it!
Review Criteria

- Will be itemized in the program announcement.
- This section will also describe the review process.
NIH Review Criteria

K99:
- Candidate
- Career Development Plan/Career Goals and Objectives
- Research Plan
- Mentor(s), Co-Mentor(s), Consultant(s), Collaborator(s)
- Environment & Institutional Commitment to the Candidate

F32:
- Fellowship Applicant
- Sponsors, Collaborators, and Consultants
- Research Training Plan
- Training Potential
- Institutional Environment & Commitment to Training
NSF Peer Review Criteria

- **Intellectual Merit:** The potential to advance knowledge.

- **Broader Impacts:** The potential to benefit society and contribute to the achievement of specific, desired societal outcomes.
Critical Review Areas

- *Letters of reference* that are highly individualized and talk about your particular strengths.
- *Institutional environment and commitment to training* is critical. Is this the kind of place that is conducive to career advancement of young investigators? Are there highly trained, experienced faculty doing research in this institution?
- *Involvement of the Mentor/Co-Mentors* in developing the research and training plans.
- *Mentors’ past success* in training fellows.
- “*Added value*” of the fellowship to your career.
Places to look for help

- NIAID All About Grants Tutorial:
- Your mentor.
- Program officer.
- Current fellowship holders.
Useful Websites

- Berkeley Postdoc Association:  
  - [http://postdoc.berkeley.edu/](http://postdoc.berkeley.edu/)

- National Postdoctoral Association:  
  - [www.nationalpostdoc.org](http://www.nationalpostdoc.org)

- Science Careers:  
  - [http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org/](http://sciencecareers.sciencemag.org/)
Resources

Lots of guidance found here:
http://vcresearch.berkeley.edu/brdo/resources-and-training-proposal-development