



NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION
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NSF 17-124

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for SBE Postdoctoral Research Fellowships (SPRF) Program

1. Can I submit the proposal as an individual, i.e. not via my university or institution?
2. Do I need to be affiliated with the postdoctoral institution at the time of submission? If not, can I propose more than one institution?
3. Do I need to be a U.S. citizen to apply for the SPRF program?
4. Can I propose to continue the fellowship at the same institution where I have completed my doctoral degree or currently hold an appointment as a postdoctoral fellow?
5. My doctoral degree is not in the SBE sciences but my research has a social science component, can I apply?
6. Do I need to submit a Budget Justification even though the Stipend and Research and Training Allowance are set amounts?
7. Can I have more than one sponsoring scientist (mentor)? If yes, do they have to be at the same institution?
8. Can I choose a foreign institution (and a mentor at that site) for my postdoctoral work?
9. How are the SPRF proposals reviewed?
10. My project has elements from both the Fundamental Research and the Broadening Participation tracks. Which track should I choose to submit to? Is one track better than the other in terms of success rate? Can I submit my proposal to both tracks?
11. Do I need to be a member of an underrepresented group in the SBE sciences to be eligible for the Broadening Participation track?
12. My project does not require any data collection or analysis. Do I still need the Data Management Plan (DMP)?
13. I would like to submit letters of recommendation or reference, is this allowed?
14. I do not have my dissertation defense scheduled. What is the latest date I could defend and still be eligible to apply?
15. I applied to the SPRF program and my proposal was declined, can I reapply?
16. I received an award but need to take family leave, what can I do?
17. How do I obtain health insurance if the award is not made to the institution?
18. I am not yet affiliated with my host institution but need to provide an IRB/IACUC approval before NSF will make an official award, what can I do?
19. Can I teach any classes at my host institution while participating in the Fellowship?
20. I am in the process of applying for a job, how does this impact the Fellowship?

1. Can I submit the proposal as an individual, i.e. not via my university or institution?

Yes, SBE Postdoctoral Research Fellowships are awards to individuals. Proposals are submitted directly by the Fellowship candidate to NSF and the awards are made directly to the Fellow. Attempts to submit the SPRF application via your institution's sponsored research office (SRO) will not be successful. The Fellowship candidate serves as his/her own SRO and Authorized Organizational Representative (AOR) for all research administration functions in FastLane or Grants.gov.

2. Do I need to be affiliated with the postdoctoral institution at the time of submission? If not, can I propose more than one institution?

At the time of submission, candidates must identify one host institution at which they will be affiliated with by the time of the award. The sponsoring scientist (mentor) should also be affiliated with the same institution and be listed as a Co-PI on the cover page of the proposal.

3. Do I need to be a U.S. citizen to apply for the SPRF program?

Per the eligibility criteria in the solicitation, you must be a U.S. citizen, national, or legally admitted permanent resident alien of the United States as of the application deadline. Of note, individuals covered under Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) do not meet the citizenship requirements.

4. Can I propose to continue the fellowship at the same institution where I have completed my doctoral degree or currently hold an appointment as a postdoctoral fellow?

It is anticipated that the research will be conducted at an institution other than your doctoral-granting institution. However, if you choose to remain at your current institution, include an explanation in the Research and Training Plan on how this choice benefits your research and career development.

5. My doctoral degree is not in the SBE sciences but my research has a social science component, can I apply?

No, per the solicitation, Fellows must hold a doctoral degree in the SBE sciences to be eligible.

6. Do I need to submit a Budget Justification even though the Stipend and Research and Training Allowance are set amounts?

Yes, you are required to submit a budget justification detailing how you anticipate spending the \$15,000 Research and Training Allowance. The more specific you can be, the better the justification will serve you in terms of planning for your expenses. However, the Research and Training allowance request should equal \$15,000.

7. Can I have more than one sponsoring scientist (mentor)? If yes, do they have to be at the same institution?

Yes, but when more than one sponsoring scientist is proposed, one must be named lead sponsor and information from all sponsors must be integrated into a single postdoctoral mentoring plan. The lead sponsoring scientist must be affiliated with the same institution as the Fellow but co-sponsoring scientists or mentors can be affiliated with different institutions.

8. Can I choose a foreign institution (and a mentor at that site) for my postdoctoral work?

Though you and your sponsoring scientist must maintain a U.S. affiliation throughout the award period, the proposal may include an international component for which you may request additional travel expenses and identify a co-sponsoring scientist (mentor) at the foreign institution. All expenses should be detailed in the Budget Justification.

9. How are the SPRF proposals reviewed?

SPRF proposals are reviewed in a multi-disciplinary panel with a mix of in-person panelists and ad hoc reviews. The tracks may be reviewed in the same panel or in separate panels based on the number of total applications received and other program considerations. The SPRF program follows NSF's merit review principles and proposals are reviewed against two criteria: Intellectual Merit and Broader Impacts. Both criteria are given full consideration in the review and decision making process.

10. My project has elements from both the Fundamental Research and the Broadening Participation tracks. Which track should I choose to submit to? Is one track better than the other in terms of success rate? Can I submit my proposal to both tracks?

Some proposals may contain elements of both tracks, in such cases it is up to you to choose which track to submit your proposal. Success rates vary based on the number of applications received and cannot be provided. You can only submit your proposal to one track during the application cycle.

11. Do I need to be a member of an underrepresented group in the SBE sciences to be eligible for the Broadening Participation track?

No, the goal of the SPRF-BP track is to prepare underrepresented SBE scientists and others who share NSF's diversity goals for positions of scientific leadership in academia, industry, and government. You are eligible for the SPRF-BP track through 1) your individual characteristics (membership in a group underrepresented in the SBE sciences) or 2) the goals of your research which will **help broaden or inform efforts to broaden the participation of underrepresented groups.**

12. My project does not require any data collection or analysis. Do I still need the Data Management Plan (DMP)?

Yes, all proposals must include a supplementary document that describes plans for data

management and sharing of the products of research, or asserts the absence of the need for such plans. The DMP will be evaluated as part of the standard merit review process.

13. I would like to submit letters of recommendation or reference, is this allowed?

No, letters of recommendation will neither be accepted nor taken into consideration as part of the review process.

14. I do not have my dissertation defense scheduled. What is the latest date I could defend and still be eligible to apply?

The last date to successfully defend the dissertation and complete all degree requirements is 10 months after the application deadline (regardless of degree conferral date). A letter from the doctoral institution certifying completion will be required prior to award.

15. I applied to the SPRF program and my proposal was declined, can I reapply?

You can re-apply if you continue to meet the eligibility criteria as described in the program solicitation and you should indicate that your application is a "resubmission". Revised applications are welcome to include an opening paragraph in the Project Description outlining how the weaknesses noted in the prior reviews have been addressed. However, no extension on the page limit will be provided.

16. I received an award but need to take family leave, what can I do?

Within the fellowship period, up to two-months of the fellowship duration may be used for paid leave. You can also take up to two-months of unpaid leave and request a no-cost extension.

17. How do I obtain health insurance if the award is not made to the institution?

Most host institutions have worked with Fellows to provide health insurance through group plans. Please communicate with your host institution early on to iron out the details in case you need to make alternate plans.

18. I am not yet affiliated with my host institution but need to provide an IRB/IACUC approval before NSF will make an official award, what can I do?

Though we prefer that the approval lists the Fellow as the PI, we can also accept an approval that lists your sponsoring scientist as the PI, given he or she is listed as a Co-PI on your proposal cover page, and the approval references your specific project title. In cases where you are unable to obtain an approval, we can also accept a [determination notice](#).

19. Can I teach any classes at my host institution while participating in the Fellowship?

Yes, per the solicitation, Fellows may teach no more than one course at a time. The course must be directly related to the doctoral degree or area of research. Fellows must demonstrate how the teaching experience benefits his or her future career development.

20. I am in the process of applying for a job, how does this impact the Fellowship?

If you plan to start a job position before the Fellowship award commences, you will need to decline the Fellowship and a note will be made in your electronic file. If you accept a position that starts part way through the Fellowship, but before the award is made, a reduced tenure award (e.g., 12-months) can be made under certain circumstances. If you accept a position that starts part way through the Fellowship, but after the award is made, the award will be terminated once you are no longer devoting full-time effort to the Fellowship. Moreover, Fellowship funds cannot be taken with you to your new position and you may be responsible for returning disbursed funds to NSF.