



NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION
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NSF 18-019

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for NSF 18-507 (Replaces NSF 16-503), National Science Foundation Research Traineeship (NRT) Program

1. What is an NRT trainee?
2. What is an NRT traineeship?
3. Can international students be NRT trainees?
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7. If master's and doctoral students are included in one NRT project, how much overlap in their training is expected and/or preferred?
8. Does the mention of pedagogy and mentoring training for faculty members mean that the NRT will fund professional development for faculty?
9. Can a project propose funding for the improvement of a training model that is not entirely new but is certainly not (yet) broadly adopted?
10. Does the fact that "Education" is not included in the "NRT" title mean that NRT will fund more proposed hands-on training and less classroom instruction?
11. Referring to the "Key features of NRT Projects" (Section II.C of the solicitation), are we being asked to develop evidence-based strategies to broaden participation of students from diverse backgrounds, or are we being asked to apply evidence-based strategies that are already in practice?
12. Are there preferred types of formative assessments (Section II.C of the solicitation) that we would include as central to the traineeship, or are these formative assessments open as part of the new model we are proposing?
13. Is there a limit on cost of education that can be charged to the grant?
14. Will NRT proposals with only external evaluators receive more preference than proposals that include internal evaluators?
15. Can I propose an NRT project for a non-research-based Professional Master's program?
16. Does the limit on the number of submissions per organization apply to subawardees and non-lead organizations on collaborative proposals?
17. Can NRT projects include international partners?
18. Will we need Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval of the evaluation activities and instruments described in our proposal?
19. Will a project that focuses on a master's only program receive lower preference than projects involving doctoral students only or both doctoral and master's students?

20. Will proposals that do not meet the eligibility requirements for submission be returned without review?
 21. Is there a list of national priority interdisciplinary research themes?
 22. Can a project focus on a research theme other than those identified in the high priority areas?
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1. What is an NRT trainee?

An NRT "trainee" is a research-based STEM graduate student (M.S. or Ph.D.) who is accepted into the institution's NRT program and is expected to complete all the required program elements as described in the proposal. NRT trainees can be NRT-funded or non-NRT-funded; they do not have to receive stipend and tuition support directly from the NRT award. They can be supported from a variety of sources including research assistantships, teaching assistantships, fellowships, scholarships, or other funding.

2. What is an NRT traineeship?

An NRT traineeship is focused on students and their technical and broader professional development. In the case of NRT, a traineeship involves a strong institutional commitment to mentoring STEM graduate students and the development of their technical and transferable professional skills (e.g., teamwork, ethics, communications, teaching, leadership, and project management) for a variety of STEM careers within or outside academia. NRT includes a focus on the students' overall development as STEM professionals, in addition to their conducting cutting-edge interdisciplinary research.

3. Can international students be NRT trainees?

Yes, they can be NRT trainees and fully participate in any NRT program elements (e.g., courses, workshops, and internships). However, NRT stipends and customary costs of education for stipend-supported trainees are restricted to U.S. citizens, nationals, and permanent residents.

4. If I forgot to submit a letter of intent during the submission window, can I get a waiver to submit a full proposal in February.

No, a valid letter of intent MUST be submitted by the deadline to be eligible for full proposal submission. There is approximately a 2-week submission window for each annual competition. The PI prepares the letter but the official submission (via the AOR) must be completed before the deadline. A letter from a prior award cycle is not valid.

5. Is there greater funding available for the priority research areas identified in the solicitation?

No, there is no set allocation for a priority area. Funding is anticipated to be allocated in each area, including proposals submitted outside the identified priority areas.

6. Can we propose research that addresses more than one priority area?

Although NRT proposals may include research and training efforts that contribute to more than one priority area, each project should identify a main area (e.g. HDR, INFEWS or other) by using the appropriate title prefix. The research area should be identified in the Project Title at the time of submission using the appropriate prefix (e.g. "NRT-HDR:" or "NRT-INFEWS:" or "NRT:" for other research areas).

7. If master's and doctoral students are included in one NRT project, how much overlap in their training is expected and/or preferred?

The training approach is left up to the proposer to develop. Potentially, training in specific methodologies could be suitable for both master's and doctoral students together. However, some training might be better suited for master's or doctoral students separately.

8. Does the mention of pedagogy and mentoring training for faculty members mean that the NRT will fund professional development for faculty?

An NRT proposal may include funding for faculty training.

9. Can a project propose funding for the improvement of a training model that is not entirely new but is certainly not (yet) broadly adopted?

An NRT proposal may include funding to expand or improve a current training model, but the potential added value should be substantial and potentially transformative.

10. Does the fact that "Education" is not included in the "NRT" title mean that NRT will fund more proposed hands-on training and less classroom instruction?

No, training may include classroom instruction.

11. Referring to the "Key features of NRT Projects" (Section II.C of the solicitation), are we being asked to develop evidence-based strategies to broaden participation of students from diverse backgrounds, or are we being asked to apply evidence-based strategies that are already in practice?

Proposers are encouraged to build upon existing evidence-based strategies for broadening participation of students from diverse backgrounds, although they may also incorporate and test strategies that show promise of success based on available information.

12. Are there preferred types of formative assessments (Section II.C of the solicitation) that we would include as central to the traineeship, or are these formative assessments open as part of the new model we are proposing?

It is up to the proposers to identify the types of formative assessments. However, they should be formulated and designed to regularly inform and improve the NRT project.

13. Is there a limit on cost of education that can be charged to the grant?

The institution can budget for customary costs of education (e.g. tuition, health insurance, and required fees) for NRT trainees while they are receiving NRT stipend support. You may offer a discounted tuition rate if this is a customary practice for federally-funded trainees, research assistants, and/or fellows at your institution and not a practice solely for the NRT trainees.

14. Will NRT proposals with only external evaluators receive more preference than proposals that include internal evaluators?

All proposals must have an external evaluator. If an internal evaluator is also engaged, the project must provide justification and explain how lack of bias is ensured, including at minimum a provision for periodic external assessment of the ongoing evaluation by the external evaluator.

15. Can I propose an NRT project for a non-research-based Professional Master's program?

No, research is integral to the NRT program. For NRT proposals, non-research-based professional master's students are eligible to participate in NRT activities; however, they cannot be considered "trainees" (See FAQ #1 for a definition of "trainee") by the program and are ineligible to receive NRT stipend or cost of education support. NRT trainees must be in a research-based degree program that requires a thesis or dissertation.

16. Does the limit on the number of submissions per organization apply to subawardees and non-lead organizations on collaborative proposals?

Yes, eligible organizations may participate in only two proposals per competition. Participation includes serving as a lead organization on a non-collaborative proposal or as a lead organization, non-lead organization, or subawardee on a collaborative proposal. However, this limitation does not apply to organizations participating solely as evaluators on projects.

17. Can NRT projects include international partners?

Yes, NRT projects may include international partners if they provide significant added value to the projects. However, international partners cannot be subawardees and funds for their participation must be drawn from non-NSF sources.

18. Will we need Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval of the evaluation activities and instruments described in our proposal?

If your proposal is successful and awarded, you will need to provide official documentation from your institutions IRB confirming either that the planned activities involving human subjects have been approved or that your project falls into an exemption category.

19. Will a project that focuses on a master's only program receive lower preference than projects involving doctoral students only or both doctoral and master's students?

No, all proposals will be evaluated based on their merit. Projects involving master's students,

Ph.D. students, and both master's and Ph.D. students will be evaluated equally.

20. Will proposals that do not meet the eligibility requirements for submission be returned without review?

Yes, proposals that do not comply with the solicitation will be returned without review. The eligibility conditions (Section IV of the solicitation) include who may submit proposals and serve as a PI, limits on the number of proposals per organization, and limits to number of proposals per PI or Co-PI. In cases where proposals are submitted that exceed eligibility limits, submissions will be accepted (beginning with the earliest submission time stamp) until the limit is reached. All submissions beyond the eligibility limits (based on submission time stamp) will be returned without review.

21. Is there a list of national priority interdisciplinary research themes?

No, there is not a set list of research themes. Instead, submissions that are not in one of the identified priority areas should justify that the interdisciplinary research theme is an area of high national need.

22. Can a project focus on a research theme other than those identified in the high priority areas?

Yes, traineeships may focus on any area of interdisciplinary research that is of high national priority. The project team should justify in the proposal why the identified area is of national importance and how a traineeship program would fulfill an unmet need.