



NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION
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NSF 19-071

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for Program Solicitation NSF 19-574, Atmospheric and Geospace Sciences Postdoctoral Research Fellowships (AGS-PRF)

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PRIOR TO SUBMISSION

1. **The Solicitation states that proposals are accepted anytime. However, are there better times of year to submit?**

Certain programs within AGS have preferred submission windows. We encourage you to check with the program director(s) prior to submitting your proposal so a decision is made in a timely manner. Review of proposals can take up to 6 months from the date that they are submitted, so please factor that into your timeline. It should also be noted that due to the Federal budget calendar, it can sometimes be difficult to start awards in the late Fall.

2. My proposal idea crosses disciplinary boundaries in AGS. How will that be handled?

AGS program directors work closely with each other and will share proposals when warranted. Please reach out to multiple programs if you feel that your work crosses boundaries.

3. My proposal idea crosses disciplinary boundaries outside of AGS. Is this allowed?

AGS-PRF proposals can cross disciplinary boundaries outside of AGS, but the core of the work should be directed at the science supported by one of the listed AGS programs.

4. The solicitation states that awards are made to individuals, rather than institutions, and are administered by the Fellows. What does that mean?

A typical science grant made by NSF is to an institution who controls the funds and provides the researchers and students with salary, benefits, and infrastructure. The researchers whose salaries are supported by traditional grants are employees of the institution. For NSF Fellowships, the funds are paid directly to the Fellows. The Fellows are not employees of NSF nor does the Fellowship provide a mechanism for employment at the host institution. AGS-PRF Fellows are expected to draw down their salaries, purchase and administer their own benefits (such as health care) and spend their research stipend in a legal, responsible manner.

5. Can you clarify the eligibility criteria regarding PhD timing?

There are three categories of potential proposers to the AGS-PRF:

- PhD students who are nearing completion of their degree. For students to be eligible, they would need to complete their degree and begin the Fellowship within 6 months of the notification of an award, so proposing too early before a degree is conferred is not recommended.
- PhDs within 2 years of their degree at the time of submission of the proposal.
- PhDs who have had no more than 18 months of full time employment between their degree and proposal submission. This criterion is in recognition of

extenuating circumstances like dependent care.

6. Can you clarify the intent behind the rules for staying at a current institution?

AGS staff believe that there is significant benefit to performing a post-doctoral Fellowship at a new institution. However, there is also recognition that there are a variety of factors that may prevent such a move. The conditions noted in the solicitation ensure that the Fellow is expanding the breadth of their research and professional connections. The 12-month minimum is to discourage Faculty from bringing in a Post-Doc and then having them immediately seek out an AGS PRF award.

7. What is the difference between the two tracks?

The main difference between the Geospace and Atmospheric Tracks is the eligibility criteria for the host institution. All PRF Fellows must affiliate with a host institution at all times during the tenure of the Fellowship. The Geospace Track allows research to be conducted at other Federal laboratories, while the Atmospheric Track does not.

8. Why is NCAR ineligible to be a host institution?

GEO/AGS already funds the ASP Postdoctoral Fellowship program at NCAR.

9. Can I affiliate with a foreign host institution?

No.

10. This is my first NSF proposal, what exactly is meant by Broader Impacts?

NSF has two merit review criteria: Intellectual Merit and Broader Impacts. Intellectual Merit is effectively the core scientific reasoning and research plan. Broader Impacts is, at a high level, the potential for the project to benefit society. Broader Impacts can be achieved through a variety of means, and we highly encourage the applicant to browse the resources widely available online to get an initial feel for what a Broader Impacts plan may look like. You may also discuss Broader Impacts with program directors in your initial contact prior to the proposal.

11. I am applying to multiple post-doc opportunities. How should I report this?

NSF understands that prospective Fellows may be applying to multiple funding opportunities. An NSF proposal is often distinct from other opportunities with the focus on process understanding and broader impacts. However, if a similar proposal is being submitted to other agencies, it should be noted on the [Cover Page](#) and the [Current and Pending Support](#) section.

12. How are AGS-PRF proposals reviewed?

PRF proposals may be reviewed by panel, a mix of panel and mail reviews or mail reviews only. A minimum of three external reviews is required for all NSF proposals.

13. My proposal was declined. When can I submit again?

There is no exclusionary period for proposal submissions. However, there are two major considerations when submitting for the second time: 1) The AGS-PRF has a two submission limit and 2) NSF requires proposals to be "substantially revised" (see the [PAPPG](#)) before resubmission or it may be returned without review and count against the two submission limit.

POST-AWARD

14. How do I receive my stipend and Fellowship allowance?

NSF uses the Award Cash Management System (ACM\$) to provide access to funds for awardees. The Fellow will work with staff at NSF to set up access to ACM\$. The Fellow will be able to draw down the Fellowship allowance immediately and the stipend (salary) in monthly increments.

15. Am I an NSF employee while on my Fellowship?

No. The Fellow is neither an NSF employee or an employee of the affiliated institution. The Fellow is self-employed, though the exact status for tax purposes should be discussed with a tax professional.

16. How do I pay taxes?

Fellows should investigate relevant IRS regulations or work with a tax professional to develop a plan for paying taxes. NSF does not deduct income or FICA taxes or provide W-2 or 1099 forms and NSF staff cannot answer any tax-related questions.

17. I need employment verification. Who can I contact?

In many cases, entities that require employment verification will accept the original award letter that goes with the Fellowship. If additional verification is required, please contact the AGS PRF program director who will help you with the extra materials.

18. Is there a guideline for how the Fellowship allowance should be split between fringe benefits and research activities?

The \$29,000 allocated per year for the Fellowship allowance is intended for the support of research and for fringe benefits. Use of these funds is up to the Fellow, with the recognition that the eventual output of the award will likely be judged by the external

community by research productivity - as measured by products, publications and presentations.

19. How do I get Health Insurance?

NSF is not the Fellow's employer and does not provide traditional fringe benefits. Some institutions allow Fellows to "buy-in" to their benefits system and there are other ways that individuals can purchase health insurance and other benefits. The Fellowship allowance can be used for individual or family insurance (health, dental, disability), dependent care, moving expenses and retirement. NSF does not check to see how the funds are being spent during the activities of an award, but all Federal funds are subject to audit.

20. If I buy an instrument or computer during my Fellowship, do I get to keep it after the Fellowship is completed?

Yes, with a caveat. Instruments or other equipment should not be purchased at the end of a Fellowship to "use up" the Fellowship allowance. These funds are intended for research conducted during the Fellowship.

21. Do I need to keep receipts for everything that I purchase during the Fellowship?

As stated above, all Federal funds are subject to audit. The best guidance is to use good judgement and keep a defensible record of spending.

22. My pay is below other post-docs and my institution is willing to make up the difference. Is that allowed?

No. While NSF recognizes that pay rates differ, especially geographically, the intent of the AGS-PRF is that a Fellow works full-time at the solicitation-defined pay rate.

23. Can I interrupt my Fellowship and then resume it later?

Yes. Interruptions may be approved with written justification for a period or periods of up to 12 months in total. It is expected that the Fellowship will be completed within a duration of 36 months.

24. My affiliated institution has offered a paid teaching position. Can I use that opportunity to gain experience and some extra funds?

The Fellow may opt to accept a teaching position paid by the affiliated institution. However, the Fellow may not be paid concurrently for time on the Fellowship and time teaching, so the Fellowship stipend must be deferred during the teaching interval. The deferment should be in whole month increments and should have the sponsor's concurrence. A written justification should be submitted to, and approved by, your

program director prior to interrupting the Fellowship for a teaching position. It is also your responsibility to apply for a no-cost extension to extend the Fellowship period for the number of months deferred.

25. My mentor has extra funding on a project that is associated with mine. Can I supplement my project with funding from other sources?

As noted above, the intent of the AGS-PRF is that a Fellow is a full-time position. You may not be paid concurrently for time on the Fellowship and other research activities.

However, sponsoring scientists and affiliated institutions may supplement a Fellow's stipend with non-salary support for research activities. Fellows may solicit and accept non-salary support within the Host Institution for research expenses, such as laboratory supplies, instrumentation usage fees, field station usage fees, travel expenses, conference/registration fees and expenses, or subscription fees.

26. I am active-duty military or a veteran. Are there exemptions to the additional payments policy?

Yes, there are different guidelines for veterans and active-duty military. Please contact your program officer to discuss these issues.

27. My host institution is not providing me an email address or office space. What should I do?

The Letter of Commitment from the host institution must detail the facilities and support that will be provided to the Fellow. A reminder of this Letter, signed by the Department Chair (or equivalent), is usually enough to get the relevant access.

28. I would like to change mentors and/or institutions. What should I do?

The Fellow should request, in writing, permission from NSF and explain the appropriateness of the new mentor and/or institution. A change in mentor and/or institution will require a new Letter of Commitment.

29. What are my reporting requirements?

All NSF awardees are required to submit Annual Reports, Final Reports, and a Project Outcome Report, detailing what was accomplished and produced under NSF funding. In addition, Fellows are required to submit an Interim Report 90 days into the Fellow's tenure to verify that the project is on track.

30. What if I choose to end the Fellowship early?

Some Fellows receive employment opportunities or have other reasons for ending their

Fellowship tenure early. If this is the case, the Fellow will return the pro-rated Fellowship allowance and stop stipend payments. For example, if the Fellow took the full \$29,000 of the Fellowship allowance and then terminated the Fellowship at the 6-month mark, the Fellow would repay NSF \$14,500.

31. What are the Fellowship Family Leave policies?

Two months of paid leave over the duration of the award may be used for dependent care or family leave. In addition, up to two months of unpaid leave may be taken with permission of the NSF program director and submission of a No-Cost Extension.

32. I am near the end of my tenure and I am not done with my project. Can I have an extension?

Yes, with a caveat. Fellows can submit what is known as a No-Cost Extension, which extends the period of award without providing extra funds. There must still be funds available in the original award to submit a No-Cost Extension. The caveat is that Fellows may not receive additional compensation while on active Fellowship tenure.