



*Information for Astronomy and Astrophysics*

*Postdoctoral Fellows*

**February 2023**

National Science Foundation  
Division of Astronomical Sciences

## IMPORTANT

This booklet outlines the terms and conditions of your National Science Foundation (NSF) Astronomy and Astrophysics Postdoctoral Fellowship (AAPF) and provides general information for use during your tenure. Read it carefully and refer to it whenever you have a question about your Fellowship.

You may contact the Program via e-mail at [aapf@nsf.gov](mailto:aapf@nsf.gov) or directly via the cognizant NSF Program Officer.

You can also send correspondence to:

Astronomy and Astrophysics Postdoctoral Fellowships  
Division of Astronomical Sciences  
National Science Foundation  
2415 Eisenhower Avenue  
Alexandria, VA 22314

The telephone number for the Division of Astronomical Sciences is (703) 292-8820.

**As a recipient of NSF funds, you are responsible for fulfilling the academic and fiscal obligations of your award.**

**Failure on the part of a Fellow to observe all the terms and conditions of a Fellowship award constitutes sufficient grounds for its revocation by the Foundation.**

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Your National Science Foundation Astronomy and Astrophysics Postdoctoral Fellowship has been awarded by the National Science Foundation in recognition of your proposed research and education activities, and with the hope that the experience you obtain during your Fellowship tenure will enhance your development as a scientist and educator and contribute to the scientific and educational effort of the United States. Upon acceptance of an award under this program, the Foundation will issue an award notice based on the information submitted in your Fellowship proposal.

### 2. HOST INSTITUTION

During the entire Fellowship tenure, a Fellow must, by law, affiliate with an eligible **United States** institution, as described in the NSF Astronomy and Astrophysics Postdoctoral Fellowships program solicitation and is responsible for making all arrangements for such affiliation with the host institution. A clear relationship should be established with the chosen institution before beginning tenure, thus assuring both the Fellow and the Foundation that it will be possible to carry out the program for which the Fellowship was awarded.

If it becomes necessary or desirable to seek affiliation with an institution other than the one proposed at the time of proposal submission, the Fellow must request **in writing** permission from the Foundation, stating the reasons for the proposed change and explaining the appropriateness of the new institution for the proposed plan for research and education. **(See Section 5 of this document for more details.)** This must be done **before** final arrangements with the new institution are completed. A Fellow may not enter on tenure until the Foundation approves all changes, including the new scientific mentor.

Before a Fellow enters on tenure at an institution at which a full-time position or appointment is presently held, the Foundation must receive a letter from an appropriate official stating that the Fellow will be relieved of all prior institutional duties during the tenure of the Fellowship.

### 3. SCIENTIFIC MENTOR

Each Postdoctoral Fellow will arrange for a staff member at the host institution to serve as his or her scientific mentor. Usually, this individual will be a professor or staff scientist with whom you will be working closely in your Fellowship program. It is hoped that this individual will assist in the planning and initiation of your program of study and research and will advise you from time to time. The scientific mentor will be the institutional representative responsible for your activities during tenure.

Starting Certificates used in connection with the Fellowship should be signed by the scientific mentor, or if absent, by an appropriate official of the host institution.

Any questions relating to your status at the host institution which the scientific mentor cannot answer should be referred for resolution to other appropriate officials within the host institution, such as a department chair, dean, or a designated institutional representative.

### 4. ENTRANCE UPON TENURE

A Postdoctoral Fellow must begin Fellowship activities by October 1 of the year in which the award is made. A Fellow who is unable to begin tenure by October 1 of the award year is expected to decline the Fellowship. This declination will not prejudice any future proposal. Typically, Fellowship tenures begin on or after June 1 of the award year.

Before a Fellow may enter upon tenure of a Postdoctoral Fellowship, the Foundation must have on record the date on which the Ph.D. was received. If the Ph.D. is not received prior to the starting date of tenure, a Fellow, before beginning Fellowship tenure, must submit evidence that all the requirements for the degree have been completed. A certification form for this purpose will be made available by the cognizant NSF Program Officer.

A set of starting materials, including a Fellowship Starting Certificate, [NSF Form 349](#) (06/2009), will be made available to you after issuance of your award notice. Fellowship tenure starts on the date a Fellow begins Fellowship activities and terminates on the date Fellowship activities are completed at the host institution. The Starting Certificate must be signed by the scientific mentor or by an appropriate official of the host institution. The Starting Certificate is required to comply with governmental accounting regulations. If a Fellow interrupts tenure or affiliates with more than one institution, Starting Certificates are required for each portion of tenure. Stipend payments (with the exception described in section 6c below) will not be authorized until a Starting Certificate has been received by the Foundation (see Section 6.b.1).

### 5. PROGRAM CHANGES

Any major change in the program of research or education from that proposed at the time of proposal submission, and any change in tenure or in the host institution(s) with which a Fellow is associated, must receive the **prior** approval of the Foundation. Although it is expected that each Fellow will carry out the program as approved at the time of proposal submission, **minor** changes may be made at the discretion of the Fellow and with concurrence by the scientific mentor. However, any **major** changes must be outlined and justified in full in writing so that a determination may be made by the Foundation as to whether the new program falls within the intent of the award.

The likely impact of both the scientific mentor and the host institution on the professional development of the Fellow is an important factor in the proposal evaluation process; thus, the selection of these, especially for the first year of fellowship tenure, will normally be viewed as a commitment on the part of the proposer to fulfill the plan for research and education as outlined in the original proposal. However, changes in the host institution may be approved by the Foundation following review of the potential impacts on the Fellow's research and education activities. Approval of the change will be contingent on the qualifications and suitability of the proposed host institution to provide the resources, facilities, and mentoring needed to support the Fellow's research and education activities and professional development.

Requests to change the host institution should be submitted in writing to the cognizant Program Officer at least three months prior to the requested start date at the new host institution, and should provide a detailed justification that: (1) addresses how the change impacts the Fellow's research and educational activities; including facilities and resources required for the work; (2) identifies the proposed scientific mentor and other collaborating scientist(s) and educational mentor(s); (3) relates the Fellow's work to current research and educational efforts at the host institution; and (4) describes the suitability of the host institution. The change request must also include a signed Letter of Commitment from the proposed host institution, as described in the Proposal Preparation Instructions of the NSF AAPF Program Solicitation

## **6. STIPENDS**

### **a. Amount**

The stipend will be paid at a monthly rate that totals \$75,000 for each 12-month period of Fellowship tenure.

### **b. Payments**

- 1) Stipend payments will be authorized after submission of a properly completed Fellowship Starting Certificate, NSF Form 349 and the Fellow's banking information in [Research.gov](https://www.research.gov). Stipend payments are processed in the Award Cash Management Service (ACM\$) of [Research.gov](https://www.research.gov). You will make payment requests of your Fellowship funds once per month. As administrator in ACM\$, you must review and manage user roles. If you are not able to successfully make a request of your Fellowship funds by COB on the first day of the month, please contact your Program Specialist.
- 2) Fellowship Starting Certificate, NSF Form 349. The Fellow must complete and submit to the cognizant NSF Program Officer the Fellowship Starting Certificate, [NSF Form 349](https://www.nsf.gov/forms/nsf349). This form will serve as the authority to begin your stipend payments and will provide the Fellow's statement of tenure information. The form is countersigned by your scientific mentor or other appropriate official at your Institution.
- 3) Stipend payments are made directly to you via electronic funds transfer to a U.S. bank account. The Fellowship is an award to you as an individual and payment cannot be deposited directly into the host institution's account. To receive payments from the Fellowship, you must submit your banking data via the Individual Banking portal of [Research.gov](https://www.research.gov). Please see the [Individual Banking How-to Guide](#) for specific guidance related to individual banking. You will be notified via automated email of the steps that must be completed in [Research.gov](https://www.research.gov) to initiate NSF payments. The automated email will be sent from the "NSF Individual Banking" email address ([btdfm005@nsf.gov](mailto:btdfm005@nsf.gov)) with "ACTION REQUIRED: Steps to Initiate NSF Payments" in the subject line. Your home address must be provided; your financial institution must be located in the United States; and you must complete the Certification in

Research.gov to certify the accuracy of the information contained on the form and that you have read the Privacy Act Statement.

- 4) No funds will be released to the Fellow without submission of this information.
- 5) After the completed [NSF Form 349](#) is received and banking information is submitted in Research.gov and acknowledged by NSF, you may begin making monthly requests of your stipend payments. Fellows are encouraged to make arrangements for accounts prior to the start of their Fellowship tenure, so that initial processing may proceed without delay. In addition, Fellows are requested to use the same account for the entire period of their Fellowship tenure, as any changes may involve significant delays in the processing of stipends. However, bank account updates may be made in Research.gov. See the [Individual Banking How-to Guide](#) for instructions.
- 6) Any changes or interruptions in stipend payment or any other miscellaneous actions should be requested and described on the Fellowship Action Form, [NSF Form 383](#), also made available with the starting materials.

### **c. Initial Stipend Advance**

Because Starting Certificates are not to be submitted until after tenure begins, Fellows may request payment of the first month's stipend in advance, to receive assistance during the processing period. In addition, Fellows may request an advance of up to \$6,000 on their allowance to defer the cost of moving expenses. A form to request this advance, Request for Stipend Advance, [NSF Form 929](#), (06/2009), will be made available with the starting materials. **If you receive an advance and do not subsequently begin tenure as planned, the amount of the advance must be returned to NSF immediately.**

### **d. Delayed or Lost Stipend Payment**

If an anticipated stipend or other Fellowship payment is not received on time, the Fellow should notify the cognizant NSF Program Officer immediately. If the payment in question has posted for payment but was not received, inquiry should be made at the Fellow's bank to see if the payment can be traced. If it is still missing after a week, the Fellow should write the Foundation via electronic mail or at the address given on page one of this booklet requesting that the payment be stopped and that a replacement be processed. The Foundation will forward the appropriate fiscal information to the Treasury Department. In addition, an official of the bank should also write the Foundation stating that the bank did not receive the stipend payment. Such replacement payments usually require at least two months for processing. If the stipend is paid in the meantime, the Foundation should be notified immediately.

## **7. ANNUAL FELLOWSHIP ALLOWANCE**

As soon as possible after the Foundation receives the Starting Certificate, each Fellow will be able to request a first annual payment representing a Fellowship Allowance of \$35,000; this allowance will also be paid electronically to the Fellow through ACM\$ and is intended to cover costs of the fellowship, including:

- 1) Expenses directly related to the conduct of the proposed research and education activities, including but not limited to materials and supplies, equipment, computing resources, access to databases, travel, publication charges, and subscription fees. The fellowship allowance is not intended to cover the cost of major equipment: the host institution is expected to provide appropriate infrastructure for the fellow's research.

- 2) Expenses in support of the Fellow, such as office space, general purpose supplies and use of equipment, facilities and other institutional resources.
- 3) Expenses in support of fringe benefits, including but not limited to individual or family health insurance provided through a group or individual plan, dental and/or vision insurance, disability insurance, retirement savings, dependent care, and moving expenses. Fellows may request an advance of up to \$6,000 on their allowance to defer the cost of moving expenses.

The Foundation is not responsible for any charges incurred by, or on behalf of the Fellow by the host institution.

## **8. ANNUAL & FINAL PROJECT REPORTS**

### **a. Annual Project Reports**

- 1) Submission Requirement. Fellows are required to submit an annual project report.
- 2) Content of Annual Project Reports. Fellows are required to submit annual reports electronically via the project reporting system at [Research.gov](https://www.research.gov). The content requirements for annual project reports are specified in the Research.gov system and may be supplemented in the award document.
- 3) Timing of Annual Project Reports. Unless otherwise specified in the award, annual project reports shall be submitted no later than 90 days prior to the end of each 12-month award period. It should be noted that the final annual report serves as the project's final report and must be submitted in accordance with paragraph b below. Continued funding for the second and third years of the Fellowship will be contingent on the approval of annual project reports, and it is the Fellow's responsibility to ensure that annual reports are submitted in a timely fashion so that stipend payments are not interrupted.

### **b. Final Project Report and Project Outcomes Report**

- 1) Submission Requirement. Unless otherwise specified in the award, the Fellow shall submit a Final Project Report and a Project Outcomes Report within 120 days following the end date of the award.
- 2) Content of Final Project Report and Project Outcomes Report. Unless otherwise specified in the award, the Fellow shall submit both reports electronically via the project reporting system at [Research.gov](https://www.research.gov).

The Foundation would be pleased to receive an account of the Fellow's progress at any time, especially if there are particularly significant developments during a given Fellowship year. Fellows may use the Interim Project Report capability in Research.gov to submit such updates.

## **9. CHANGE OF ADDRESS**

A change in postal and/or electronic mail address should be reported promptly to the Foundation via electronic mail or in writing at the address on the first page of this booklet. Fellows are also expected to maintain updated contact information in Research.gov, both as the Principal Investigator and Authorized Organizational Representative (AOR) on the fellowship award. Award amendments will be mailed electronically to the AOR email address on file in Research.gov.

## 10. FOREIGN TRAVEL

All travel to be reimbursed from Federal funds must be made via use of U.S. flag carriers if such service is available. For details, please see Chapter XI.F.1 of the [NSF Proposal & Award Policies and Procedures Guide \(PAPPG\)](#). **No exceptions can be made to these regulations.** Due to the complexity of the travel requirements, Fellows are encouraged to consult with their Fellowship host institution's Sponsored Projects Office (or equivalent) regarding any travel issues.

## 11. ADDITIONAL FELLOWSHIP PROVISIONS

### a. Length of Tenure and Leaves of Absence

These Postdoctoral Fellowships are awarded for periods of up to three years, subject to satisfactory progress on the research and educational programs proposed. The tenure of a Fellowship may be interrupted with prior approval of the Foundation. Interruptions may be approved with written justification for a period or periods of up to 12 months in total. **The total elapsed time of the Fellowship must not exceed 48 months.** In general, approval will not be given for support for portions of calendar-year intervals of durations less than three full-time months.

Within the fellowship period, up to two months of the Fellow's stipend may be used for paid leave, including parental or family leave, if the following conditions are met: (1) a written notification for paid leave must be submitted by the Fellow and acknowledged by the cognizant Program Officer; and (2) the two months of paid leave cannot be used to increase the level of the Fellow's salary support beyond 36 months. NSF enables career life balance (CLB) through a variety of mechanisms. For more information, please see <https://www.nsf.gov/career-life-balance/>. Please note that per the guidance in PAPPG Chapter, II.F.8, NSF postdoctoral fellows who receive funding directly from NSF are ineligible to receive CLB supplements.

The Fellowship is subject to termination if the Fellow discontinues his/her research and educational activities for any reason without Foundation approval prior to the end of Fellowship tenure. If a Fellow does not conform to the administrative requirements of the host institution, the Foundation reserves the right to withhold all stipend payments, pending a full explanation.

### b. Extension of Tenure and Requests for No Cost Extensions

Requests for extensions of tenure beyond a total elapsed time of 48 months will not be granted. If, however, additional time beyond the established end date of the award is required by the Fellow to assure adequate completion of the original scope of work within the funds already made available, a formal request must be submitted to NSF via [Research.gov](#). The request must be submitted to NSF at least 45 days prior to the end date of the Fellowship. The request must explain the need for the extension and include an estimate of the unobligated funds remaining and a plan for their use. The plan must adhere to the previously approved objectives of the project, and as noted above, the total duration of the award may not exceed 48 months. Before requesting a No-Cost Extension, note that Fellows may not receive additional compensation while on active Fellowship tenure (see Section 11.j below).

### c. Rights to Inventions or Writings

NSF claims no rights to any inventions or writings that may result from its fellowship awards. However, Fellows should be aware that NSF, other Federal agencies, or private parties may acquire such rights through other grant support. Fellows visiting foreign institutions or collaborating with foreign scientists

should be aware that specific provisions regarding allocations of intellectual property rights apply to particular countries, and Fellows should be cognizant of any such provisions before commencing work.

#### **d. Publications**

Fellows are responsible for assuring that an acknowledgment of NSF support:

- 1) is made in any publication (including World Wide Web pages) of any material based on or developed from the fellowship-supported research, in the following terms:

"This material is based upon work supported by the National Science Foundation under Award No. (NSF award number)."

- 2) is orally acknowledged during all news media interviews, including popular media such as radio, television and news magazines. Fellows are responsible for assuring that every publication of material (including World Wide Web pages) based on or developed under this award, except scientific articles or papers appearing in scientific, technical or professional journals, contains the following disclaimer:

"Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation."

Fellows are responsible for assuring that the cognizant NSF Program Officer is provided access to, either electronically or in paper form, a copy of every publication of material based on or developed under this award, clearly labeled with the award number and other appropriate identifying information, promptly after publication.

#### **e. Liability**

NSF cannot assume any liability for accidents, bodily injury, illness, breach of contract, any other damages or loss, or any claims arising out of any activities undertaken pursuant to the Fellowship award, whether with respect to persons or property of the Fellow or third parties or for unauthorized use of patented or copyrighted materials. The Fellow is advised to take such steps as may be deemed necessary to insure or protect themselves and their property.

#### **f. Sharing of Findings, Data and Other Research Products**

Fellows are expected to agree to complete and open sharing of data and material in an expeditious manner. Fellows are responsible for compliance with the following NSF guidelines on sharing of findings, data, and other research products:

NSF expects significant findings from research and education activities it supports to be promptly submitted for publication, with authorship that accurately reflects the contributions of those involved. It expects Fellows to share with other researchers, at no more than incremental cost and within a reasonable time, the data, samples, physical collections and other supporting materials created or gathered in the course of the work. It also encourages Fellows to share software and inventions or otherwise make them or their products widely available and useful.

Adjustments and, where essential, exceptions may be allowed to safeguard the rights of individuals

and subjects, the validity of results, or the integrity of collections or to accommodate legitimate interests of NSF-supported Fellows.

**g. Government Permits and Activities Abroad**

- 1) For awards that include activities requiring permits from appropriate Federal, State, or local government authorities, the Fellow should obtain any required permits prior to undertaking the proposed activities.

The Fellow must comply with the laws and regulations of any foreign country in which research is to be conducted. Areas of potential concern include: (1) requirements for advance approval to conduct research or surveys; (2) special arrangements for the participation of foreign scientists and engineers; and (3) special visas for persons engaged in research or studies. NSF does not assume responsibility for the Fellow's compliance with the laws and regulations of the country in which the work is to be conducted.

- 2) The Fellow also should assure that activities carried on outside the U.S. are coordinated as necessary with appropriate U.S. and foreign government authorities and that necessary licenses, permits or approvals are obtained prior to undertaking the proposed activities.

**h. Referrals to the NSF Office of the Inspector General**

The Fellow shall promptly refer to the NSF Inspector General any credible evidence that a principal, employee, agent, contractor, sub-grantee, subcontractor, or other person has submitted a false claim under the False Claims Act or has committed a criminal or civil violation of laws pertaining to fraud, conflict of interest, bribery, gratuity, or similar misconduct involving those funds.

**i. Income Taxes**

No income tax will be withheld from any stipend. Provision therefore must be made by the Fellow for payment of any tax, domestic or foreign, when due. Final authority as to the taxability of awards rests with the Internal Revenue Service and the courts. Specific questions should be referred to the Internal Revenue Service.

Fellows are not in any sense employees of the National Science Foundation. Therefore, no funds will be deducted from the stipends; no Social Security taxes will be paid by the Foundation; no W-2 forms will be issued; and provision must be made by the Fellow for the filing of any necessary estimate of taxes due and for payment of all income taxes which may become due. A statement of funds received (including the fellowship allowance) will be issued by the Division of Financial Management of the Foundation upon written request of the Fellow.

The Foundation is unable to supply information concerning the income tax or other tax provisions of any foreign country. Inquiries should be directed to the authorities in the appropriate countries.

**j. Supplementary Activities**

During the tenure of the Fellowship the Fellows are expected to devote full time to the program of scientific research and educational activities outlined in their proposal, for which the award was granted. A Fellow may not engage in activities for compensation (except for brief military obligations) or receive another Fellowship or similar award while pursuing Fellowship activities without **prior** approval of the

Foundation. Such approval may be granted only under exceptional circumstances.

**k. Federal and/or Armed Forces Employees**

If, during any part of a Fellowship tenure a Fellow will be a member of the Armed Forces or on leave from a position in the Federal Service, a statement must be filed from a cognizant official of the Government organization involved specifying (1) the funds, if any, that will be made available to the Fellow during tenure and the purpose for which they will be provided, and (2) the funds, if any, that will be made available to the host institution on the Fellow's behalf. The Foundation and the Fellow's organization must reach a mutually satisfactory agreement regarding the Fellow's support during tenure before any funds can be provided under the Fellowship.

**l. Vacations**

Fellows are expected to maintain a full-time commitment to their fellowship activities throughout tenure and to respect vacation periods that would be customary for employees of similar status at the host institution.

**m. Medical Insurance**

No medical or hospitalization program for use in the event of illness or accident involving a Fellow (or dependents) during tenure is provided by the National Science Foundation. Medical or hospital fees may be paid from the annual fellowship allowance.

In the absence of medical and hospital insurance by the institution, it is recommended the Fellows continue during tenure any medical insurance programs with which they are affiliated, or if they are not members of any such program, make arrangements to join a medical program which gives a reasonable amount of protection.

**n. Future Employment**

The award and acceptance of a Postdoctoral Fellowship does not obligate a Fellow, the National Science Foundation, or the United States Government with regard to future employment or future service of any kind.

**o. Military Status**

Brief interruption of a Fellowship for duly authorized military service or training will be permitted with prior Foundation approval. Requests for such interruptions of tenure should be directed to the Foundation in writing as soon as plans are final. Interruptions of less than four days do not require approval.

In the case of a longer interruption resulting from active military service or from certain activities in lieu of service with the regular U.S. Armed Forces, provision can be made for reservations of a Fellowship (or the balance of it), and reinstatement of the unused portion at a later date. In such cases Fellows should notify the Foundation immediately in writing of their plans and request further instructions.

**p. Veteran's Benefits**

As a result of the enactment of P.L. 91-219, effective March 26, 1970, educational benefits payments from the Veterans Administration may be received concurrently with and supplementary to Fellowship

payments from the National Science Foundation.

#### **q. Special Considerations**

A number of situations frequently encountered in the conduct of research require special information and supporting documentation before starting tenure. Among these are the following, some mandated by Federal law.

- 1) research which has an actual and/or potential impact on the environment;
- 2) research at a registered historic or cultural property;
- 3) research involving the use of in vitro generated recombinant DNA molecules;
- 4) research involving the use of human subjects, hazardous materials, vertebrate animals, or endangered species.

Fellows must provide information on the status of any special permissions, clearances or provision related to the above items before beginning tenure. Assessment of environmental impact will be required when appropriate. Specific guidance on the need for such additional documentation may be obtained from the host institution's Research Administration Office or the NSF PAPPG.

### **12. EARLY TERMINATION OF FELLOWSHIP**

A Fellow who wishes to end their fellowship prior to the nominal end date of the award should inform the cognizant NSF Program Officer in writing in of their plans and fill out [NSF Form 383](#) with action “early termination”. The stipend will be prorated to reflect the actual number of days the Fellowship was active in the final year of tenure.

If a Fellowship award is terminated early, the Fellow must return unused Fellowship allowance funds to NSF. Generally, the Fellow would return a prorated portion of the allowance. Exceptions may be considered for such things as equipment purchases and should be discussed with the cognizant NSF Program Officer.

### **13. ASSOCIATED FORMS AND DOCUMENTS**

The following documents will be made available with the award notice and are referred to in this document. These forms should electronically mailed to NSF at the address given at the beginning of this document, at the appropriate time in the tenure of the Fellowship, as described above.

- [NSF Astronomy and Astrophysics Postdoctoral Fellowships](#)
- [NSF Form 349, Fellowship Starting Certificate](#) (06/2009)
- [NSF Form 929, Request for Stipend Advance](#) (06/2009)
- [NSF Form 1367, Fellowship Payment Schedule](#) (06/2009)
- [NSF Form 383, Fellowship Action Form](#) (06/2009)

Other information relevant to the NSF AAPF Program may also be found at:

[https://www.nsf.gov/mps/ast/aapf\\_postdoc\\_information.jsp](https://www.nsf.gov/mps/ast/aapf_postdoc_information.jsp) and in the NSF PAPPG available at:  
[https://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub\\_summ.jsp?ods\\_key=pappg](https://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub_summ.jsp?ods_key=pappg).