National Science Foundation
4201 Wilson Boulevard
Arlington, Virginia 22230

NSF 14-004

Frequently Asked Questions for NSF SEES Fellows Solicitation

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1. **How is a SEES Fellows grant different from a "regular" NSF research grant?**

The emphasis of the SEES Fellows program is to facilitate investigations that cross traditional disciplinary boundaries and address issues of sustainability through a systems approach, building bridges between academic inquiry, economic growth, and societal needs. The SEES Fellows program requires that:

- The Fellow's proposed investigation should be interdisciplinary and allow him/her to obtain research experience beyond his/her current core disciplinary expertise;
- The Fellow develops a research partnership that would advance and broaden the impact/scope of the proposed research;
- The Fellow devotes time to professional development activities; and

- The Fellow works with a "Host Mentor" and "Partner Mentor." The two mentors must be from different institutions and provide different disciplinary expertise.

SEES Fellows proposals will be evaluated through use of the two National Science Board-approved merit review criteria of intellectual merit and broader impacts. In addition, in line with the requirements above, additional review criteria will be used that relate to SEES, the hosts and partnerships, and the Fellow's professional development (see the solicitation section on NSF Merit Review Criteria).

2. **What career level will the SEES Fellows program support?**

Applicants must not have worked more than 36 full-time equivalent months in positions that require the doctoral degree. The proposal must include a discussion of professional development activities, and include letters from the Host Mentor and Partner Mentor that describe the mentoring activities that will be provided for the applicant, such as career counseling, training in preparing grant applications, guidance on ways to improve teaching skills, and training in research ethics. One of the program's review criteria is, "Will the proposed professional development activities enhance the Fellow's career growth while complementing the proposed interdisciplinary research and partnerships?"

The actual position that an individual holds during their tenure as a SEES Fellow will be decided by agreement between the fellow and the host (grantee) institution.

Postdoctoral scholar would be one appropriate position. (The NSF Grant Proposal Guide defines a postdoctoral scholar as "An individual who has received a doctoral degree (or equivalent) and is engaged in a temporary and defined period of mentored advanced training to enhance the professional skills and research independence needed to pursue his or her chosen career path.")

3. **I am currently employed as an Assistant Professor. Am I eligible?**

The solicitation does not allow applications by people currently in tenure-track (or equivalent) positions.

4. **Are Fellows expected to work full time on their SEES Fellows activities?**

In general, Fellows are expected to work full time on their SEES Fellows activities. Some flexibility is provided, as indicated in the solicitation. Fellows may include a plan for leading and teaching a course at the undergraduate or graduate level, provided it is supported financially by the institution where the teaching will take place, and the teaching is limited to no more than one course per semester and no more than three courses throughout the period of the award. Likewise, a Fellow may propose, subject to agreement with the host (grantee) institution, to work less than full-time on the SEES Fellows project in order to participate in other research and education activities, for career-life balance reasons, or for other reasons. A SEES Fellows award will support up to 36 full-time equivalent months of salary plus fringe benefits. In order to ensure adequate time to engage in the SEES-focused research, partnerships, and professional development, the proposed project duration is limited to a maximum of 48 months.

5. **I am a graduate student. Can I apply for the SEES Fellows program?**

Current doctoral students may apply, as long as they meet all eligibility requirements. However, individuals must have completed all requirements for their doctoral degree before they start tenure as a SEES Fellow. In general, it is expected that Fellows will begin their tenure in the summer or fall following the competition.

6. **I am currently a post-doc, and received my doctoral degree four years ago. Am I**

eligible?

Current postdoctoral scholars may apply, as long as they meet all eligibility requirements. One requirement is that, as of the proposal deadline date, you have not worked for more than 36 full-time equivalent months in one or more positions that require the doctoral degree. If more than 36 months have elapsed between the date that the doctoral degree was conferred and the application deadline for the SEES Fellows solicitation, your Biographical Sketch must include the following statement: "I affirm that I have not worked more than 36 full-time equivalent months in positions for which the doctoral degree was a requirement."

7. **I am currently employed as a research associate. Am I eligible?**

Yes, as long as you meet all eligibility requirements. Note the answers to questions above about the unique aspects of a SEES Fellows grant, career level of Fellows, and time commitments.

8. **I am currently unaffiliated with any institution. Can I apply?**

You do not need to be affiliated with an institution to apply. Your application must be written with the intention of affiliating with a specific host institution; if selected, you MUST affiliate with the proposed institution in order for an award to be made. The institution must be a university or college accredited in, and having a campus located in the U.S. or a non-profit, non-academic organization, such as an independent museum, observatory, research laboratory, professional society, etc. in the U.S. that is associated with educational or research activities. The proposal must include a letter from the Host Mentor, confirming support of the applicant's plan for research at the host institution. See also question 18.

9. **I am a foreign national, but have applied for a green card. Am I eligible?**

Applicants must be U. S. citizens or nationals, or permanent residents of the United States by the application deadline. See the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services website for information about permanent residence (green card holder). As long as you have obtained status as a permanent resident (conditional or with conditions removed) you are eligible to apply. Applicants must indicate their U.S. citizenship or permanent residence status in their biographical sketch when they submit the proposal. (Do not include personal information such as birth date or place of birth.)

10. **Can I apply to the SEES Fellows program to work at a company?**

Fellows must be primarily affiliated with a U. S. based university, college or non-profit, non academic organization. Fellows are required to develop a research partnership to broaden the impact/scope of their research activities. A company could serve as the partnering organization.

11. **Can I apply for a SEES Fellows grant to work overseas?**

Fellows must be primarily affiliated with a U. S. based university, college or non-profit, non academic organization. Fellows are required to develop a research partnership to broaden the impact/scope of their research activities. A foreign institution could serve as the partnering organization. For those projects with an international research partnership, up to an additional $30,000 is allowed for international travel to visit the research partner's institution and to conduct necessary research. Also, with approval of the host (grantee) institution, the SEES Fellows allowance of up to $60,000 may be used by the Fellow to work overseas.

12. **I have a doctoral degree in the humanities, but my current research is in an area that is closely aligned with Anthropology. Am I eligible?**

Yes, you are eligible. The subject matter requirements for the SEES Fellows program are that the proposed research must be 1) in an area that NSF supports, 2) in the broadly defined area of sustainability sciences (see the SEES website), and 3) in an area beyond the applicant's current area of core expertise.

13. **How do I apply?**

Prospective Fellows apply through the submission of a proposal -- similar to what professors do when applying to NSF for support of their research. The proposal must conform to formatting requirements, as discussed in the NSF Grant Proposal Guide. Additional guidelines for the content of the SEES Fellows proposal are contained in the solicitation. Proposals will typically be submitted by the host (grantee) institution, on behalf of the prospective Fellow as the Principal Investigator, or may be submitted to NSF directly by the individual, with the understanding that, if selected, the Fellow must affiliate with an eligible host institution which will administer the award.

14. **Do I need to provide budget information, since the amounts for a SEES Fellows award are specified in the solicitation?**

Yes, as directed in section II.C.2.g of the Grant Proposal Guide, "Each proposal must contain a budget for each year of support requested. The amounts requested for each budget line item should be documented and justified in the budget justification. The budget justification should be no more than three pages."

The solicitation allows for salary plus fringe benefits for the Fellow of up to a maximum of $264,000, based on 36 months full-time equivalent effort. Amounts for the Fellow's salary plus fringe benefits may be less than the stated maximum, based on institutional policies and pay scales. As stated in FAQ #4, Fellows are generally expected to work full time on their SEES Fellows activities, but some flexibility is provided. The up to 36 person-months of salary plus benefits support for the Fellow may be budgeted over a maximum award period of four years.

In addition to salary plus benefits, Fellows are allowed up to a maximum of $60,000 for expenses directly related to the proposed research, partnerships and professional development, including but not limited to salary and fringe benefits for student research assistants, equipment, domestic and foreign travel, materials and supplies, computing resources, access to data, and publication charges. Included in this amount, you must budget for trips to NSF for PI meetings in the second and third year of the award.

Fellows proposing international partnerships may request an additional $30,000 for international travel, subsistence, and other expenses required for the research, partnership and professional development activities. These costs should be clearly explained in the budget justification, including number of trips and duration of stays. Please refer to section II.C.2.g.iv.c of the NSF Grant Proposal Guide for guidelines on international travel. Also see FAQ #11.

Indirect costs are in addition to the allowances specified for the SEES Fellow, and should be requested following established guidelines and negotiated rates for the host institution.

Again, there must be a separate budget page for each year during which any support is requested, and the amounts requested for each budget line item should be documented and justified in the budget justification.

If submitting as an unaffiliated individual (see FAQs 8, 17 and 18), enter the totals for salary plus benefits in the "Senior Personnel" line of the budget and leave the "Fringe Benefits" and "Indirect Costs" lines blank. If selected for an award, the actual amounts for each category will be determined in consultation with the host institution before the award is made.

15. **What items are required in the SEES Fellows proposal, and what items should not be included?**

Applicants should follow guidelines in section II.C.2 of the Grant Proposal Guide, together with program-specific requirements in the SEES Fellows solicitation.
Required items:

   a. Cover Sheet. For Program Announcement, select NSF 13-595 NSF SEES Fellows from the drop-down list. When you click the select button, the system will automatically enter "SMA - SEES Fellows" for NSF Unit Consideration. You do not need to select other organizational units, as all SEES Fellows proposals will go to one unit for cross-Foundation consideration. [Grants.gov users: The program solicitation number will pre-populated by Grants.gov on the NSF Grant Application Cover Page. Refer to Section VI.1.2. of the NSF Grants.gov Application Guide for specific instructions on how to designate the NSF Unit Consideration.]
   b. Project Summary (maximum of 1 page)
   c. Table of Contents (automatically generated)
   d. Project Description (maximum of 15 pages)
   e. References Cited
   f. Biographical Sketch of the Principal Investigator (applicant) (maximum of 2 pages). You must include identification of U.S. citizenship or permanent resident status, and the month and year when the doctoral degree was (or is expected to be) received. If more than 36 months have elapsed between the date that the doctoral degree was conferred and the application deadline for the SEES Fellows solicitation, you must include the following statement: "I affirm that I have not worked more than 36 full-time equivalent months in positions for which the doctoral degree was a requirement."
   g. Budget for each year of support requested, and budget justification (maximum of 3 pages)
   h. Current and Pending Support (include the SEES Fellows proposal as a pending proposal)
   i. Facilities, Equipment and Other Resources
   j. Special Information and Supplementary Documentation
      1. Data Management Plan (maximum of 2 pages)
      2. Letter of Collaboration (maximum of 2 pages) and Biographical Sketch (maximum of 2 pages) from the Host Mentor
      3. Letter of Collaboration (maximum of 2 pages) and Biographical Sketch (maximum of 2 pages) from Partner Mentor
      4. Additional Letters of Collaboration (maximum of 1 page each) are allowed to document agreement with other collaborators that are discussed in the proposal. These should not be letters of recommendation, but rather highlight contributions to and benefits of the collaboration.
      5. Information/documentation, if relevant to the proposed project, for such things as compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act, work in Antarctica, research involving the use of human subjects, etc. (see details in the NSF Grant Proposal Guide).

Items that should not be included:

   a. Postdoctoral Mentoring Plan (1-page supplementary document). This is a general requirement for NSF proposals that includes financial support for postdoctoral researchers in the "Other Personnel" section of the budget. For SEES Fellows proposals, the applicant is the Principal Investigator. Instead of the standard 1-page postdoctoral mentoring plan, SEES Fellows proposals must include, as described in the solicitation, Letters of Collaboration from the Host Mentor and Partner Mentor (see above). The only exception, when you must include a Postdoctoral Mentoring Plan, would be if you include support in the budget for a postdoctoral researcher from the up to a maximum of $60,000 SEES Fellows allowance for

expenses directly related to the proposed research, partnerships and professional development.

b. Biographical sketches for anyone other than the Principal Investigator (applicant), Host Mentor, and Partner Mentor. As noted above, the PI's biographical sketch should be entered in the biographical sketch section of the proposal. The biographical sketches of the mentors should be uploaded into the Supplementary Documents section.

16. **May I submit a SEES Fellows proposal through my current institution, but propose a different host institution?**

If the host institution would become the grantee institution for the SEES Fellows award, you should, if possible, work from the outset to have the host institution submit the proposal. One reason for this is that there needs to be agreement between you (the PI) and the grantee institution on the allocation of the "salary plus benefits" portion of the support. There may be cases where, for administrative or other reasons, it would be better to have the PI's current institution serve as the grantee institution even though the PI would be hosted for the fellowship by a different institution. For such situations, please consult with a cognizant NSF Program Officer before submitting a proposal.

17. **How do I submit a proposal directly to NSF as an individual?**

The easiest way to submit a proposal as an individual is through the NSF FastLane system. Click on *Postdoctoral Fellowships and Other Programs o*n the horizontal menu bar across the top of the FastLane homepage. Click *Go* next to *Individual Registration.* After registering, go back to the *Postdoctoral Fellowships and Other Programs* page and click *Go* next to *PI/Co-PI Login Page*. If you have questions, FastLane User Support (1-800-673-6188) can provide assistance with creating accounts, uploading documents, and submitting proposals.

18. **If I apply directly to NSF as an individual and am selected, how do I affiliate with the host institution for the award?**

First, in developing your proposal, the Host Mentor's letter must confirm support of your plan for research at their institution. If you are selected to be a SEES Fellow, the NSF grant will be made to the proposed host institution and you will be the Principal Investigator (PI). The institution will pay your salary and benefits, purchase materials and supplies, pay for travel expenses, etc. in accordance with federal accounting guidelines. You will need to work with the institution's Sponsored Projects Office and the managing NSF Program Officer. Specific requirements and procedures will be provided when Fellows are selected.

19. **I am a current SEES Fellow. I would like to change my Host Mentor to a different one at a different university. Is this possible?**

In principle, yes. NSF recognizes the Fellow as the Principal Investigator (PI) of the award, and will treat this situation in the same way that it treats other situations where a PI changes institutions. You will need to discuss your plans with your Program Director, and if she/he agrees with your plan, you will then need to work with the two institutions (the current and prospective institutions) as well as NSF to transfer the grant to the new institution. This can be done using the "PI Transfer" module in FastLane.

20. **I am a current Fellow. I have accepted a tenure track appointment at a university. Can I take the remaining award money with me to augment my start-up package?**

Congratulations on your appointment! SEES Fellows awards are intended to "develop a workforce

trained in the interdisciplinary scholarship needed to understand and address the complex issues of sustainability." Please discuss your situation with the NSF managing Program Officer for your grant. A decision on your request will depend on whether the new position will allow you to advance the objectives/requirements of the SEES Fellows program including, for example, interdisciplinary research experience beyond current core disciplinary expertise, a research partnership that broadens the impact/scope of the research, and professional development.

21. **My doctoral degree is in civil engineering, but my SEES project is mainly on the sustainability topic of community disaster resilience and my host mentor is from the geosciences field of meteorology. Will my proposal be considered for this competition?**

    Yes. In general, for this program the fellow can be an engineer but the project and mentor both need to be from non-engineering fields.