



NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION  
2415 EISENHOWER AVENUE  
ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA 22314

**NSF 24-011**

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for the Office of Polar Programs Postdoctoral Research Fellowship (OPP-PRF) Program

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The Office of Polar Programs (OPP) postdoctoral research fellowship (PRF) program provides opportunities for early career researchers to initiate or enhance their polar research experience; access polar scientific data, sites and facilities; and develop their professional networks. The OPP-PRF program encourages proposal submission by new investigators who have not previously worked in polar regions and/or projects employing innovative techniques that have not previously been applied to polar science. The program aims to provide early career investigators with opportunities for research and networking that will establish them in positions of leadership in the scientific community. Because OPP-PRF candidates are likely to be first-time proposers to NSF, PRF program officers have prepared the following FAQs regarding the fellowship.

1. [What is the earliest/latest date I can start my fellowship?](#)
2. [May I submit a postdoctoral research fellowship proposal to more than one NSF PRF program?](#)
3. [May I submit a postdoctoral research fellowship proposal to NSF and to another organization or federal agency \(such as NASA or NOAA\) at the same time?](#)
4. [How will my data management plan \(DMP\) be evaluated?](#)
5. [Does the OPP-PRF permit fieldwork?](#)
6. [May I include a letter of collaboration in my OPP-PRF proposal?](#)
7. [I received my PhD more than 24 months ago. Am I eligible to submit a proposal?](#)
8. [I have not yet received my PhD. Am I eligible to apply?](#)
9. [I've never worked in the polar regions before. Am I eligible to submit a proposal?](#)
10. [My PhD was on a polar topic. Am I eligible to submit a proposal?](#)
11. [I'm not sure my project counts as "Arctic" or "Antarctic". Am I eligible to submit a proposal?](#)

12. Do I need to submit a separate postdoctoral mentoring plan?
  13. May I stay at my PhD-granting institution?
  14. May I have more than one scientific mentor?
  15. I'd like to work with a mentor outside the U.S. Is this allowed?
  16. Should my secondary mentor submit a letter of support?
  17. Do I need to submit a budget justification?
  18. May I use my research allowance to support a student?
  19. May I use my research allowance to pay for open-access publication of a journal article?
  20. May I use my research allowance to pay for fieldwork?
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**1. What is the earliest/latest date I can start my fellowship?**

Proposers may request a start date as early as August 1 and as late as March 15 of the following year.

**2. May I submit a postdoctoral research fellowship proposal to more than one NSF PRF program?**

Yes. However, the submissions must be substantially different. Proposals should be tailored to the programmatic or geographic focus of the program to which the proposal is submitted. All PRF submissions, including the OPP-PRF, must be disclosed on the Current and Pending (Other) Support document. If the proposer is awarded another PRF at any point after the submission of an OPP-PRF proposal, the proposer should notify the OPP-PRF program immediately at [opp-prf@nsf.gov](mailto:opp-prf@nsf.gov).

**3. May I submit a postdoctoral research fellowship proposal to NSF and to another organization or federal agency (such as NASA or NOAA) at the same time?**

NSF permits simultaneous submissions. Remember to disclose all pending proposals, whether submitted to NSF or to another organization or federal agency, on the Current and Pending (Other) Support document. Notify the OPP-PRF program immediately at [opp-prf@nsf.gov](mailto:opp-prf@nsf.gov) if you are selected for a fellowship by another organization or federal agency.

**4. How will my data management plan (DMP) be evaluated?**

Data management and sharing plans (DMPs) are evaluated as part of the merit review

process for completeness and compliance with [OPP guidelines \(NSF 22-106\)](#). DMPs should discuss details of all anticipated types of data, code, and samples (e.g., format, structure, size, etc.), and include plans for deposit in a long-lived, publicly accessible archive by the end of the award, regardless of publication status. DMPs should also address specific requirements, outlined in the [OPP guidelines](#), for metadata deposit at either the Arctic Data Center (ADC) or the U.S. Antarctic Program Data Center (USAP-DC). Note that code versioning services, such as GitHub, are not considered long-lived archives, nor are self-published personal, lab, or university websites, servers, or archives. Snapshots of code and software from such services should be uploaded to the ADC, USAP-DC, or another long-lived and publicly accessible discipline-specific archive (see [OPP Repository & Resource page](#)).

## 5. Does the OPP-PRF permit fieldwork?

OPP-PRF awards are limited to two years, so any fieldwork proposed should be limited. The Program encourages study and analysis of previously collected data and samples (see [NSF 21-041](#)). Fellowship candidates proposing Arctic fieldwork may request [Arctic logistics support](#), or may budget for fieldwork using their research allowance of \$15,000 per year.

Given current limitations on Antarctic field support (see [NSF 23-117](#)), fellowship candidates proposing **any** Antarctic fieldwork are advised to contact the OPP-PRF Antarctic lead at [opp-prf@nsf.gov](mailto:opp-prf@nsf.gov) to discuss project feasibility in advance of the target date. Fellowship candidates proposing Antarctic fieldwork must leverage existing fieldwork already funded via the U.S. Antarctic Program. Proposals from such candidates must include the **Logistics Requirement and Field Plan** from the existing funded project and a one-page statement detailing how their OPP-PRF proposal integrates or leverages existing fieldwork.

## 6. May I include a letter of collaboration in my OPP-PRF proposal?

Yes, proposers are strongly encouraged to include *Letters of Collaboration*, which document relationships to organizations, communities, and individuals that may be relevant to achieving the objectives outlined in the proposal. *Letters of Collaboration* provide evidence that a proposer has laid the foundation for a broader impact or, minimally, made contact with a potential collaborator. For more guidance on such letters, see Chapter II.D.2.i(iv) of the [NSF Proposal & Award Policies & Procedures Guide](#) (PAPPG).

Competitive proposals will have specific, well-developed broader impacts linked to the topic of the proposal, the proposer's skills or interests, and/or the resources and capacities of the host institution.

## ELIGIBILITY

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### 7. I received my PhD more than 24 months ago. Am I eligible to submit a proposal?

Eligibility is not determined by the date the PhD was awarded. Eligibility is determined by whether you have had more than 24 months of employment *requiring a PhD* since receipt of the PhD. Family medical leave, maternity leave, and leave for personal reasons does not count toward that 24 months. Employment at the master's level does not count toward that 24 months.

### 8. I have not yet received my PhD. Am I eligible to apply?

Yes. However, your PhD must be awarded before the proposed start date of the postdoctoral fellowship.

## POLAR RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

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### 9. I've never worked in the polar regions before. Am I eligible to submit a proposal?

Yes, this opportunity is open to those interested in gaining experience in polar science.

### 10. My PhD was on a polar topic. Am I eligible to submit a proposal?

Yes, the Program welcomes proposers with projects that will enhance or diversify their polar research experience.

### 11. I'm not sure my project counts as "Arctic" or "Antarctic". Am I eligible to submit a proposal?

The OPP-PRF considers projects that are outside of the Arctic and Antarctic, strictly defined, as long as the relevance of the work to understanding Arctic or Antarctic systems, processes, phenomena and/or peoples is clear.

## SCIENTIFIC MENTOR AND MENTORING

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### 12. Do I need to submit a separate postdoctoral mentoring plan?

No, a Postdoctoral Mentoring Plan is not required for PRF proposals. Instead, the *Letter of Support* from the proposed scientific mentor should address research and professional development of the fellow, including mentoring.

### 13. May I stay at my PhD-granting institution?

Yes. However, you are encouraged to seek new opportunities for collaboration with a scientific mentor with expertise that differs from that of your PhD advisor. The proposal

narrative should provide a strong justification for staying at the same institution.

**14. May I have more than one scientific mentor?**

Yes. However, you must identify a primary mentor, and this mentor must be at a U.S. organization. A secondary mentor may be at a non-U.S. organization. The project narrative and/or letter from the secondary mentor should clearly explain what the secondary mentor brings to the project.

**15. I'd like to work with a mentor outside the U.S. Is this allowed?**

Yes, but that person may not be your primary mentor. Your primary mentor must be at a U.S. organization eligible to receive funding directly from NSF.

**16. Should my secondary mentor submit a letter of support?**

A letter from the secondary mentor may be submitted, but is not required. Alternatively, the primary and secondary mentors may collaborate on the letter of support. Minimally, the project narrative should clearly explain what the secondary mentor brings to the project.

## **BUDGET AND BUDGET JUSTIFICATION**

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**17. Do I need to submit a budget justification?**

Yes. The budget justification should itemize proposed expenditure of the research allowance of \$15,000/year.

**18. May I use my research allowance to support a student?**

Yes.

**19. May I use my research allowance to pay for open-access publication of a journal article?**

Yes.

**20. May I use my research allowance to pay for fieldwork?**

Yes, but remember the fellowship is limited to two years, so fieldwork should be of limited duration, and study or analysis of fieldwork samples or data should be completed within the two-year time frame of the award. Proposers planning Antarctic fieldwork should contact the OPP-PRF Antarctic lead at [opp-prf@nsf.gov](mailto:opp-prf@nsf.gov) to discuss project feasibility in advance of the target date.