National Institutes of Health NRSA F30 & F31

Quick Start Guide

The NIH's National Research Service Award (NRSA) fellowships aim to "help ensure that a diverse pool of highly trained scientists is available in appropriate scientific disciplines to address the Nation's biomedical, behavioral, and clinical research needs." They achieve this by supporting graduate training for predoctoral students in PhD programs (F31) and MD/PhD or other dual-degree training programs that integrate research and clinical training (F30).

Applicants will receive up to five years (but typically 2-3 years) of support for research training, including: stipend, tuition and fees, and institutional allowance to defray costs like research supplies and conference travel.

Who can apply for an NIH NRSA F30/31?

Citizenship and educational stage

- Applicants must be U.S. citizens or permanent residents enrolled full-time in a research doctoral degree program
- Applicants can be pursuing their PhD or MD/PhD at U.S. domestic institutions or foreign institutions (though you must justify why training in a foreign institution is more appropriate for your research than training in a domestic institution)
- Applicants must be PhD candidates (i.e., must have completed the qualifying exam) and have identified a dissertation research project

Research Area

- Applicants must propose a dissertation research project in scientific health-related fields relevant to the mission of the participating Institutions and Centers
- Applicants must have advisors ("sponsors") who are active investigators in the area of the proposed research training. Sponsor(s) must document sufficient funds, facilities, and mentoring experience to prove their ability to support your training. If your sponsor cannot document these, recruit a "co-sponsor" with these qualifications.

NOTE: Application format changed in 2025

Starting for applications submitted on or after January 25, 2025, the NIH adjusted the application components and review criteria. The broad changes are explained here, and the details are explained in the Instructions (Version I). It will likely take a few application cycles to understand exactly how these changes will affect applications and the review process. In the meantime, give yourself extra time to work on your application materials! We still recommend drawing inspiration from past applications as examples, but double-check the new application guidance to ensure that you are adhering to the current program requirements and tailoring your application to the program's current priorities.

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Application Overview & Review Criteria

F30/31 applications include both documents written by the applicant (the "PI" for this fellowship) and documents written others, like the applicant's supervisor (the "sponsor") and department administrators—so you need to coordinate closely with your supervisor and relevant department personnel as you are planning and submitting your application. Together, the application package must demonstrate that the applicant is poised for success from multiple dimensions:

Candidate's Preparedness and Potential: Is the applicant prepared for the proposed research training plan, and do they have potential for a future promising career in biomedical research?

Research Training Plan: Is the candidate's research project rigorous, feasible, and impactful? Does the candidate have the necessary developmental activities and resources to complete the project?

Commitment to Candidate, Mentoring, and Training Environment: Is the sponsor's mentoring plan suited to the goals and needs of the candidate? Will the support from the university help the candidate achieve their training plan and go on to a productive career in biomedical research?

Strategically Timing Your Application

There are many considerations that could affect your decision about when during your PhD training is the ideal time to apply.

- The time from application submission to funding awarded is 6 months
- If you need to re-submit, you will be forced to "skip" a cycle
- Typically 2-3 years of funding is awarded
- As you advance in your training, more evidence of productivity is expected
- Your PI plays a huge role in your application

Discuss with your PI if <u>now</u> is the right time to apply:

- Do you (and your PI) think you have suitable evidence of productivity?
    - Preprints/publications from prior training/jobs
    - Preliminary data for other projects in the lab
    - Review articles, textbook chapters
    - Public presentations
- Do you (and your PI) believe that you have enough preliminary data to derisk your research strategy?
- Do you (and your PI) believe that you and your PI can devote the time required to write this application?
    - From start to submission, your writing process could take 2 months essentially full-time writing
    - Your PI may need to interface with collaborators and contribute to or edit some of your documents
- Is your project separate enough from other NIH-funded projects from your PI?

Suggested timeline for the NIH NRSA F30/F31 application

~3 months before the deadline

- Talk with your advisor to determine the scope of your project, identify potential collaborators and co- sponsors, and begin drafting your Specific Aims.
- Hone in on a target NIH institute. Often, this will be the institute that your advisor submits

R01 grants to, but check that this institute is currently offering F30/31 awards (are they in the list at the top of the fellowship announcements?). You may also find that another institute is more suited to your project using NIH RePORTer.

- Contact a Program Officer at your target institute, share a draft of your specific aims with them, and ask whether your project fits into the institute's scientific priorities.
- Work with your department's business office to create an eRA Commons account and learn about internal procedures and deadlines.
- Find an example application from someone who has won an F30/31 in your field (your department should have a record of students with an F30/31; you can also find these students using NIH RePORTer).
- Using the F-award handbook and Program Announcement, check whether application guidelines have changed since the example applications you have were submitted.

2-3 months before the deadline

- Reach out to your references to request letters of recommendation. You'll need 3-5 letters of recommendation, and they cannot be from your sponsor or co-sponsor. Note that reference letters are submitted by the writers directly to eRA Commons.
- Ask your sponsor (and co-sponsor, if applicable) to begin preparing their biosketch(es) and statement(s).

2 months before-your business office's internal deadline

- Draft all components of the application, soliciting feedback from your advisor, colleagues, and/or writing consultants along the way.
- As you finish each part of the application, we recommend sending it to your business office contact immediately instead of sending all individual documents the day they're due, because the business office may ask you to reformat some things.
- Remind your reference letter writers about the deadline 2 weeks ahead of time.

After submitting the application

- Your application will be sent to a study section composed of professors with expertise in your area of study. Reviewers in the study section will consider whether your research project is interesting and well-designed, *as well as* whether it is well integrated with your overall training plan (this means well thought-out training activities, and a lab/institution which is likely to set you up for a productive research career).
- Approx. 3 months after submission, you will receive your overall score and scores on each review criterion.
- Approx. 4 months after submission, you will receive your summary statement.
- Approx. 5 months after submission, you will get an official offer of award.
- Approx. 6-9 months after submission, funding for successful applicants will begin.

A note on resubmission

Most applicants don't receive the fellowship award the first time they apply! If you weren't awarded the fellowship on your first try, assess the summary statement and contact the Program Officer to discuss how feasible it will be for you to address the reviewers' concerns in a resubmission.

You will likely not have time to resubmit for the next submission deadline, but you may be able to submit two cycles after your first submission. Use the summary statement to improve your

application, and indicate how you made those improvements in your "Introduction to Resubmission." (See our handout "Tips for Writing Research Strategy" for more information)

If addressing the critiques would mean significantly overhauling your aims, you may want to submit a new application instead of resubmitting your first one. Discuss this with the Program Officer. FAQs about resubmissions and submitting new applications can be found here.

Repurposing Your Fellowship Application

This NIH page lists funding opportunities for which you may use portions of your F31 for submission: https://www.fic.nih.gov/Funding/NonNIH

This website from Johns Hopkins University lists many predoctoral funding opportunities, some with similar guidelines as F30/31: https://research.jhu.edu/rdt/funding-opportunities/graduate/