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Poorvu Center for Teaching and Learning
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National Institutes of Health NRSA F30/31: Quick Start Guide

Find the 2021 call for submissions (including instructions) at these links:
F31 (for applicants pursuing a PhD)
F30 (for applicants pursuing an MD/PhD)

Vocabulary note: you (the applicant) are the "PI" and your advisor is your "sponsor"

Background on the NIH NRSA F30/31

- Full title = Ruth L. Kirschstein Predoctoral Individual National Research Service Award
- The purpose of the program is to "enable promising predoctoral students with potential to develop into a productive, independent research scientist [in the biomedical, behavioral, or clinical sciences] to obtain mentored research training while conducting dissertation research."
- The F31 is also used to enhance diversity in the scientific workforce through the associated Individual Predoctoral Fellowships to Promote Diversity
- The F30 is intended for predoctoral students in MD/PhD or other dual-degree training programs who integrate research and clinical training.
- The F31 is intended for predoctoral students in PhD programs working on biomedical research without a direct clinical component. MD/PhD students may also apply for an F31, especially in the case where the relevant NIH institute does not support F30s; contact the Program Officer from your target institute for advice if you're an MD/PhD deciding whether you should apply for an F31.
- 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?

- 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 propose a dissertation research project in scientific health-related fields relevant to the mission of the participating Institutions and Centers.
- Applicants must be PhD candidates (must have completed the qualifying exam) and have identified a dissertation research project
- Applicants must have advisors ("sponsors") who are active investigators in the area of the proposed research training. Sponsor(s) must be able to document sufficient funds, facilities, and mentoring experience to prove their ability to support you during your training. If your primary sponsor cannot document these (e.g. they started their lab recently), recruit a "co-sponsor" with these qualifications to join your proposal.

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Timeline for the NIH NRSA F31/31 Application

~3 months before the deadline

- Talk with your advisor to determine the scope of your project, identify collaborators (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 announcement?).
- 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 this example application was 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) (see our "Essential Documents" handout for more information).

2 months before, through 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.
- Send final documents as individual PDFs.
- 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).
- ~3 months after submission, you receive your overall score and scores on each review criterion.
- ~4 months after submission, you receive your summary statement.
- ~5 months after submission, you get an official offer of award.
- ~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 to 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. FAQs about resubmissions and submitting new applications can be found here.