



National Science Foundation
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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 program also has an explicit goal "to **enable those entering the postgraduate workforce** to contribute to our understanding of global sustainability." 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 broaden the impact and/or scope of the proposed research activities;
- The Fellow devotes some time to a professional development activity; and
- The proposal includes letters from "postdoctoral mentors," including the "Host Mentor" and "Partner Mentor." The letters must include a description of 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.

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 research host and research partner, 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?**

An explicit goal of the program is "to **enable those entering the postgraduate workforce** to contribute to our understanding of global sustainability." Applicants must have received their doctorate within four years of the application deadline, unless an exception for extenuating personal circumstances is approved by a cognizant NSF program officer. The proposal must include a discussion of professional development activities. The proposal must also include letters from the "Host Mentor" and "Partner Mentor" that describe the mentoring activities that will be provided for the applicant. One of the program's review criteria is, "How well do the proposed professional-development activities enhance the applicant's professional growth while complementing their proposed SEES-based interdisciplinary research and research partnership?"

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

In general, SEES Fellows are expected to work full time on their fellowship 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 two courses throughout the period of the award. Also, a SEES Fellows award will cover two to three years of fellowship costs, over a maximum four-year period.

4. **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 received their PhD by the start date of the SEES Fellows award. In general, it is expected that Fellows will begin their tenure in the summer or fall following the competition.

5. **I am currently a post-doc, and received my PhD less than four years ago. Am I**

eligible?

Current postdoctoral scholars may apply, as long as they meet all eligibility requirements. You must have received your PhD less than four years prior to the application deadline (December 5, 2011), unless an exception for extenuating personal circumstances is approved by a cognizant NSF program officer.

6. **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.

7. **I am currently employed as an Assistant Professor. 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?**

To apply, you need not be affiliated with any institution. Applicants should write their proposal with the intention of affiliating with a particular institution, and if selected, **MUST** affiliate with the proposed institution in order for the 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 their institution.

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 are encouraged to 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. **The program solicitation states that exceptions to the requirement that potential SEES Fellows must have received their doctorate within four years of the application deadline can be made for extenuating personal circumstances, such as a career interruption due to family responsibilities, but must be approved by a cognizant program officer prior to submission of the proposal. How do I request such an exception?**

First, note that the request for an exception must be made and approved prior to submission of the proposal. Please send an email to seesfellows@nsf.gov with the following: 1) the month and year when you completed your Ph.D., 2) a brief explanation of the nature of your extenuating personal circumstance and/or career interruption, 3) when you re-entered the workforce, and 4) how many months/years you were not working, or how many months FTE you worked when you were not full time? Your request will be reviewed by NSF, and additional information may be requested. If an exception is approved and you submit a proposal, all correspondence regarding the exception will become part of your official file. External reviewers who evaluate the proposal will be told that an exception was granted, but will not be informed of the details and will not see the email correspondence. If you want to share any relevant information with reviewers, you might consider including a brief statement in your biographical sketch.

11. **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 and/or scope of their research activities. A company could serve as the partnering organization.

12. 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 and/or scope of their research activities. A foreign institution could serve as the partnering organization. For those fellowships with an international research partnership, an additional \$10,000 per year 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 allowance of \$20,000 per year for research expenses such as materials and supplies, publication costs, computer, and travel may be used by the Fellow to work overseas.

13. I have a Ph.D. in History, but my current research is in an area that is closely aligned with Anthropology. Am I eligible?

The only subject matter requirement for the SEES Fellows program is that the proposed research must be in an area "beyond the applicant's current area of core expertise" and in "the broadly defined area of sustainability sciences" (see the [SEES website](#)).

14. 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 [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.

15. 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 "stipend/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.

16. 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* on 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.

17. 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 Research Office and the managing NSF Program Officer. Specific requirements and procedures will be provided when Fellows are selected.

18. 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 principal, 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 with your Program Director your plans, and if she/he agrees with your plan, you will then need to work with the two institutions (the current and prospective institutions) to do a PI transfer. This is an agreement between the two institutions, with the NSF grant moving from one institution to another.

19. I am a current Fellow. I have accepted a tenure track appointment at Big State 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 enable those entering the postgraduate workforce to contribute to our understanding of global 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 and/or scope of the research activities, and professional development activities.