



NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION  
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ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA 22314

**NSF 21-093**

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for Mathematical and Physical Sciences Ascending Postdoctoral Research Fellowships (MPS-Ascend) ([NSF 21-573](#))

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### ELIGIBILITY

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1. Must the applicant have their PhD *in-hand* by the solicitation deadline?
2. Must the applicant have already started a postdoc position?
3. Is an individual eligible to apply if currently supported by another mechanism, e.g., a non-NSF fellowship program or funds from a PI's grant, or similar mechanism?
4. Must the host institution be U.S.-based? Could it be a national lab?

### BUDGET

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5. Can the Ascend funds be used to pay for equipment and lab supplies?
6. Can the Ascend funds be used for travel?
7. Can the Ascend funds be used to pay for supplies for outreach activities? Who would own these materials after the end of the award?

### SUPPORTING INFORMATION

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8. Is the number of reference (not collaboration) letters capped at 3?
9. Should preference be given to letter writers who can speak to the applicant's research background or outreach activities?
10. Are preliminary data expected in the proposal?
11. Should letters of collaboration be provided from research collaborators or organizations participating in outreach (e.g., a local grade school)?

### OTHER

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12. How can I indicate which MPS Division funds the type of research that would be supported in this proposal?
  13. The solicitation synopsis states "The purpose of the Mathematical and Physical Sciences Ascending Postdoctoral Research Fellowship (MPS-Ascend) program is to support postdoctoral Fellows who will broaden the participation of groups that are underrepresented in MPS fields in the U.S. including Blacks or African Americans, Hispanics, Latinos, and Native Americans (to include Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians or other Native Pacific Islanders) as future leaders in MPS fields. May the applicant choose to address other underrepresented groups, such as first generation students, rural students, or others?"
  14. Is educational research supported?
  15. What if the proposed research is interdisciplinary and crosses multiple MPS/NSF divisions?
  16. How many awards will be made across the five divisions?
  17. How can I submit confidential letters of reference?
  18. May the Fellow change sponsoring institutions and/or sponsoring scientists during the Ascends supported postdoctoral appointment?
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## ELIGIBILITY

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1. **Must the applicant have their PhD *in-hand* by the solicitation deadline?**

Before a Fellow may enter upon tenure of a Postdoctoral Fellowship, the Foundation must have on record the date on which the Ph.D. was received. The Ph.D. must be conferred prior to the starting date of the postdoctoral position funded by MPS-Ascend.

2. **Must the applicant have already started a postdoc position?**

It is expected that the MPS-Ascend postdoc tenure will not begin until the award is granted. The MPS-Ascend award should not replace other existing funds for a postdoctoral position already in place.

3. **Is an individual eligible to apply if currently supported by another mechanism, e.g., a non-NSF fellowship program or funds from a PI's grant, or similar mechanism?**

If the applicant already has postdoctoral support from another agency/organization, then

no, the applicant is not eligible for the Ascend program, unless the support is scheduled to end before the starting date of the Ascend Fellowship. The Ascend Fellowship cannot be used to replace funds from another agency or NSF award.

**4. Must the host institution be U.S.-based? Could it be a national lab?**

Appropriate host institutions include U.S. institutions of higher education, private nonprofit institutes and museums, government installations and laboratories, and scientific facilities such as observatories.

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**BUDGET**

**5. Can the Ascend funds be used to pay for equipment and lab supplies?**

The funds can be used to purchase materials, but these funds are limited and access to large equipment should be supplied by the host institution.

**6. Can the Ascend funds be used for travel?**

Yes.

**7. Can the Ascend funds be used to pay for supplies for outreach activities? Who would own these materials after the end of the award?**

Yes, the funds can be used to pay for supplies for outreach activities. These materials are the property of the Fellow.

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**SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

**8. Is the number of reference (not collaboration) letters capped at 3?**

Yes.

**9. Should preference be given to letter writers who can speak to the applicant's research background or outreach activities?**

In addition to a required letter from the applicant's doctoral advisor, it is recommended that letter writers be selected based on who knows the applicant's abilities in either research or broadening participation best.

**10. Are preliminary data expected in the proposal?**

No, preliminary data are not required, but any evidence of feasibility of the project helps make a strong proposal. This applies to theoretical proposals as well as experimental proposals.

11. **Should letters of collaboration be provided from research collaborators or organizations participating in outreach (e.g., a local grade school)?**

These letters are not required for the application. If such letters are included, they must follow the requirements of the solicitation:

"Any needed letters of collaboration (such as those required for access to equipment at national labs or facilities, or access to a collaborator, etc.) must follow the NSF format:

If the proposal submitted by Dr. [insert the full name of the Principal Investigator] entitled [insert the proposal title] is selected for funding by NSF, it is my intent to collaborate and/or commit resources as detailed in the Project Description or the Facilities, Equipment and Other Resources section of the proposal."

**OTHER**

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12. **How can I indicate which MPS Division funds the type of research that would be supported in this proposal?**

When submitting the proposal, you will be asked for the program Solicitation Number. Select the MPS-Ascend 21-573 solicitation. Then for the NSF Unit of Consideration, select "Office of Multidisciplinary Activities" as the primary unit within MPS. Then select, as a secondary unit of consideration, the most appropriate Division and program that would fund this type of research. In some cases, there may be only one choice open as a secondary unit of consideration in a particular Division. In that case, please choose that one choice as the appropriate program. This will help us sort the proposal when they arrive at NSF.

13. **The solicitation synopsis states "The purpose of the Mathematical and Physical Sciences Ascending Postdoctoral Research Fellowship (MPS-Ascend) program is to support postdoctoral Fellows who will broaden the participation of groups that are underrepresented in MPS fields in the U.S. including Blacks or African Americans, Hispanics, Latinos, and Native Americans (to include Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians or other Native Pacific Islanders) as future leaders in MPS fields. May the applicant choose to address other underrepresented groups, such as first generation students, rural students, or others?"**

Yes, as long as the main focus is to broaden the participation of groups that are underrepresented in MPS fields in the U.S. that are specified in the solicitation: Blacks or African Americans, Hispanics, Latinos, and Native Americans (to include Alaska

Natives, Native Hawaiians or other Native Pacific Islanders). Groups beyond those listed above should not be the main focus of broadening participation efforts.

**14. Is educational research supported?**

No. The proposal must describe research within the scope of topic areas covered by the five MPS Divisions, which are: Astronomical Sciences (AST), Chemistry (CHE), Materials Research (DMR), Mathematical Sciences (DMS), and Physics (PHY).

**15. What if the proposed research is interdisciplinary and crosses multiple MPS/NSF divisions?**

Interdisciplinary proposals are welcomed if they overlap with at least one MPS division program. If there is substantial overlap between MPS Divisions both Divisions will be involved in the review of the proposal.

**16. How many awards will be made across the five divisions?**

We anticipate making 40-50 awards in 2021 spread across the Divisions.

**17. How can I submit confidential letters of reference?**

The solicitation does not allow for confidential letters, as you will need to upload them into Fastlane yourself. Please inform your recommendation letter providers that this is how their letters will be submitted to NSF.

**18. May the Fellow change sponsoring institutions and/or sponsoring scientists during the Ascends supported postdoctoral appointment?**

Yes, but NSF should be contacted in advance and prior NSF approval sought in advance with appropriate justification for the change.