Fellowships Prog. Information Sheet – NSF Graduate Research Fellowship

Updated: 9-15-19

		Brief description	More information
1.	Award	This award aims to support and recognize outstanding graduate students in social science and STEM fields who are pursuing research-based master's and doctoral degrees at accredited Universities and Institutions within the US. This grant takes the form of a three -year annual stipend (currently $34,000 per year) with additional tuition and fees assistance and numerous other opportunities for research and professional development, include a prestigious alumni network, "GRIP" and "GROW" opportunities for working in government labs and international settings.	https://www.nsfgrfp.org/ and https://www.nsf.gov/pubs/2019/nsf19590/nsf19590.pdf 1,600 awards are anticipated to be made for 2020. In 2019 2,052 awards were offered from ~14,000 applications. Honorable Mentions went to 1,541 individuals. Applicants who do not receive awards do receive feedback. Pay close attention to approved primary fields: https://www.nsfgrfp.org/applicants/application_components/choosing_primary_field
2.	Eligibility	Applicants must be a US citizen, national, or permanent resident holding a bachelor's in a relevant field and planning enrollment or continued study in a relevant graduate school program at a US university.	https://www.nsf.gov/pubs/2019/nsf19590/nsf19590.pdf "Applicant Eligibility"
3.	Timing	Due to the specific and yet multidisciplinary nature of this Fellowship specific deadlines differ depending on applicants' field of interest. The first 2019 deadline is October 21; others quickly follow. Candidates should reach out to their advisers and advising discussions should begin in junior year for applicants wishing to apply senior year, or senior year for those who plant to apply as alums.	https://www.nsfgrfp.org/applicants/important_dates and https://www.nsf.gov/pubs/2019/nsf19590/nsf19590.pdf "Important Information and Revision Notes" Seniors and bachelor's holders may apply (without limit on number of times) before enrolling in a degree granting graduate program' Graduate students enrolled in a degree granting graduate program may make one application either in their 1st year or at the start of their second. *Note: From Fall 2019, individuals pursuing joint bachelor's-master's degrees will be limited to one application for NSF GRF.*
4.	Selection Criteria	Applications are evaluated in respect to primary field of interest on analysis of intellectual contribution and the broader impacts that fellows can make in their respective disciplines. Very strong research experience and skills, an excellent research proposal, and a compelling personal statement are critical elements of your application. The potential to become an effective leader of your profession is very important to demonstrate; usually this involves meaningful collegiate leadership experience (on campus and/or in academic research) and well-grounded, future professional plans.	https://www.nsfgrfp.org/applicants/tips_for_applying https://www.nsfgrfp.org/applicants/application_components/merit_review_criteria Lots more detail in the FAQs: https://www.nsfgrfp.org/applicants/faqs There are benefits from applying as a senior if you have a strong research plan in mind for graduate study: you get practice preparing an application and you will get feedback on your application from the NSF GRFP review panel.
5.	Smith Role	You are strongly encouraged to work with both your faculty mentor and a Fellowships Adviser to prepare your application.	This application requires no official institutional endorsement.
6.	Fun fact(s)	This fellowship has an extensive and prestigious alumni network that is worth checking out! 81 Smithies have been offered NSF GRFs since 2000, including 6 graduating seniors.	https://www.nsfgrfp.org/fellows/grfp_alumni Tips from Smithies who have received recent NSF GRFP awards or honorable mentions can be found here
7.	How to get started	Those interested in applying should reach out to Dr. Margaret Lamb mlamb@smith.edu) and talk with their major advisers and research mentors.	

What Smithies say about NSF GRF.

"In terms of advice for future Smithie applicants, I'd say make sure you put your application drafts in front of as many people in your field as possible to get their feedback. Many faculty members are familiar with the application process or have even been reviewers themselves, and their advice about what is an interesting and feasible project idea is invaluable."

"The most challenging part of the application was coming up with a research idea I thought would be theoretically interesting, not yet studied, and of broader interest/policy relevance. I suggest that in applying students propose ambitious projects situated in the academic literature. In addition, the criteria that I think most people fall short on is broader interest/policy relevance, so I would make sure to really spend time thinking about and expressing why your project matters beyond academia. The best advice I received was honestly to read (and highlight) the fellowship solicitation and directions to get a better sense of what to focus on. For example, the directions state that students should explicitly demarcate sections for Broader Impact and Intellectual Merit, which are the two criteria that reviewers mark applicants on. I also benefited from reading the successful applications and reviews of people in my program."

NSF GRF Awardee, Sociology

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"The most challenging part of the application was coming up with a focused research plan that was innovative yet not overly ambitious. However, the personal statement also heavily factors into success in applying to the NSF. Remember: they are actually funding you, not the exact project you're proposing. Making sure that the broader impacts of your research plan and your personal statement are in alignment will greatly improve your chances of success. It was a fact that all three of my reviewers commented on for my proposal.

I would start by reading successful applications, and following this up by making sure that you have many individuals within and outside of your field read your application. The more eyes on your application drafts the better! The final piece of advice I would have is to be very cognizant of which study section you submit your proposal under. This can make or break a great application! Some study sections are more difficult to get a high score in due to sheer volume of proposals. This is particularly important in STEM proposals, where your project could technically fit under a few different study sections." [Note: Past examples of proposals and personal statements from many fields are available via this site set up by one GRF recipient: http://www.alexhunterlang.com/nsf-fellowship.]

NSF GRF Awardee, Biological Sciences

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"It's important to get back feedback on the disciplinary content, as well as the grammar and writing style."

"I recommend thoroughly reviewing the NSF GRFP website to really understand what they are looking for in applicants, requirements/deadlines, etc. And do the review well before applying. I recommend starting statements ~ 6 months before so students have time to sleep on drafts and have multiple people review their applications."

NSF GRF Awardee, Biomedical Engineering, Peer adviser to NSF GRF applicants at her institution

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"For me, the most challenging part of the application was the research proposal. I knew what I wanted to do and I was confident in my research design, but it was hard to fit the research question, background literature, project description, and explanation of broader impact into two pages. In the end, I lost points on the 'broader impact' criteria because I did not sufficiently justify the project's practical importance. So, my advice to Smithies would be to read winning proposals and see how they manage that balance."

"Also, before submitting, students should share their proposal draft with multiple faculty members and/or graduate students in their field to get detailed feedback. My sense is that different fields (even within the social sciences) have different standards of evaluating research questions/designs, so getting detailed feedback from someone who is familiar with the relevant discipline, methodology, and past work on the research topic is very helpful."

NSF GRF Honorable Mention, Sociology