

Revisions to the NIH Fellowship Application and Review Process: Overview for Candidates

Goals

NIH is implementing revisions to the NIH fellowship application and review process for application due dates on or after January 25, 2025. The changes are meant to improve the chances that the most promising fellowship candidates will be consistently identified by scientific review panels. The proposed changes are intended to:

1. **Better focus reviewer attention on three key assessments:** the fellowship candidate's preparedness and potential, research training plan, and commitment to the candidate.
2. **Ensure a broad range of candidates and research training contexts can be recognized as meritorious by clarifying and simplifying the language in the application and review criteria.**
3. **Reduce bias in review by emphasizing the commitment to the candidate without undue consideration of sponsor and institutional reputation.**

What's changing?

The NIH is restructuring the considerations that are used by scientific review panels to evaluate fellowship applications and to identify the most promising candidates from five review criteria into three redefined criteria: (1) Candidate's Preparedness and Potential, (2) Research Training Plan, (3) Commitment to Candidate.

NIH will also revise the NIH Fellowship Supplemental Form (part of the application package) to:

1. Align the application with the restructured three review criteria – so reviewers have the information they need to apply the criteria.
2. Reduce redundancy.
3. Clarify the instructions, so that it is clear which party – candidate or sponsor – is responsible for which sections.

What does this mean for candidates submitting an NIH fellowship application?

- The changes are meant to level the playing field. The revised review criteria allow NIH to 'cast a wider net' in identifying promising scientists by decreasing the reliance on narrow markers of academic success and reducing the impact of sponsor or institutional reputation. **We encourage you to consider applying, even if you don't think of yourself as a "competitive NIH fellowship candidate"**.
 - Note: All [eligibility requirements](#) remain the same. For example, candidates must be U.S. citizens, noncitizen nationals, or permanent residents.
- Fellowship (F) funding opportunities provide details on required application materials as well as an overview of the review criteria. Funding opportunities can be found on the [NIH Guide to Grants and Contracts](#) and on [Grants.gov](#).
- NIH is revising the instructions for reference letter writers. Revised instructions will be available on the [NIH Grants page on Reference Letters](#) later in 2024. The changes are meant to ensure

that letters better assist reviewers in understanding the candidate's strengths, opportunities for growth, and potential to pursue a productive career within the biomedical research ecosystem.

- Forms and instructions for applications submitted on or after January 25, 2025 will become available in late November 2024 and will be included in the funding opportunity; application instructions will also be available on the [Grants Application Guide](#).
- Candidates applying to due dates **before** January 25, 2025 should use the current forms and instructions referenced in active funding opportunities and on the [Grants Application Guide](#). Standard due dates are available [here](#).

What does this mean if you are resubmitting a fellowship application that was first reviewed under the prior application and review model (with 5 review criteria) for a due date on or after January 25, 2025 (new application instructions and 3 review criteria)?

- Resubmission applications will be reviewed using the guidelines in place for that application due date. An "A1" application submitted after January 25, 2025 must conform to the new guidelines. This is true even if the original ("A0") application was submitted and reviewed under previous guidance.
- Candidates should carefully review the upcoming changes to application instructions, [described here](#). **Applications submitted on or after January 25, 2025 will differ significantly from those submitted previously.** Changes will affect the materials submitted by the candidate, sponsor(s), and referees.

How can I learn more?

- [The public website on the revised NRSA fellowship application and review process](#)
- [FAQs](#)
- Join us for a webinar on September 19, 2024 that will provide more details on the changes and an opportunity to have your questions answered by NIH experts. [Register now](#).