

# Applying to Fellowships and Post-doc Positions

## Applying to Graduate Fellowships

There are many sources of funding for Ph.D. and master's programs. These may include assistantships (employment-based awards affiliated with teaching or researching in your department), financial aid and grants. **The Oregon State Graduate School has great information on many options, procedures and policies at [gradschool.oregonstate.edu](http://gradschool.oregonstate.edu).**

Here are some tips and information specifically about applying to graduate fellowships, a great source of funding that may take a bit more strategy to obtain.

## What is a Graduate Fellowship?

Fellowships are short-term opportunities to study or conduct research in a specific field and act like a scholarship. They may pay for living expenses or offer a stipend. Sometimes they include an internship or service component, but most often they focus on equipping you to make progress on your own research. Benefits of fellowships include funding that may be on top of what you receive from your department, the prestige of winning these awards for your CV and more autonomy to pursue your research interests independent from university priorities.

## Timeline

Fellowship deadlines often emerge in the fall, so it's a good idea to begin identifying them in the summer and gathering your materials. You may find yourself applying for fellowships frequently during your degree. If you are hoping to get a fellowship before being admitted, make sure to apply around the same time you are submitting grad school applications.

## Where to Find Fellowships

Some fellowships are awarded within Oregon State by the Graduate School or by academic college and department committees, but external agencies also make awards.

- Start by asking your faculty mentor or graduate program coordinator about common fellowships for your field.
- Search for fellowship opportunities affiliated with the main associations for your field.
- Do an internet search for fellowships + your subject area. There are also awards for identity groups like women in the sciences, students of color, etc.
- Check out well-known funders like the National Science Foundation, The Ford Foundation, National Institutes of Health, etc. Note that these are competitive awards.
- **Pathways to Science** has some good lists of fellowships, as do **GradSchools.com** and **ProFellow**.

## Tips for Being Competitive

- 1. Ask for copies of successful proposals** to review from funders or your department. Notice and imitate what previous winners have done.
- 2. Read up on existing literature** in your area of inquiry and cite sources well. Use your field's body of scholarship and faculty advice to better define your research question and proposal.
- 3. Consider focusing on a hot topic** in your field, an existing gap, something compelling to the scientific committee that will be evaluating your proposal.
- 4. Get advice on effective persuasion and writing** from the Oregon State Writing Center or your college-specific career advisor. Proofread your application thoroughly and ask for outside input.
- 5. Use strong visuals** and graphs to illustrate your points. Remember that reviewers have many proposals to read; make yours easy to navigate, succinct and powerful.
- 6. Read up on the awarding agency's funding goals** so that you can align your proposal with their mission and top priorities. Look for areas of crossover between your passions and theirs.
- 7. Prep strong recommenders** with top points about your work, your CV and how you've interacted with them in the past. Ensure they are positive advocates for you and give them plenty of time.
- 8. Demonstrate who you are** as a person in your application essays. Funders not only want to know that you are a competent scholar but that you are making a difference in your community, the industry or your field. They are funding a person as much as a project. Keep in mind key questions, why should society care about what I do? What makes me unique? What drives me? How am I taking my science to the world?

## What is a Post-doc?

Many Ph.D. students take on post-doctoral positions as a transition in their career. It is a temporary period of time (typically one to five years) where you focus on mentored research and scholarly training. For some fields, it's an important and expected preparatory time that transitions you from student to professional. The majority of post-doc positions are in academia, but industry (e.g., biotech, pharmacy) and government post-docs also exist.

This is a time to publish, focus on your investigations in greater depth and to have more independence in managing projects and research funds. Ensure you select a position that excites you and points in the direction of your future career goals.

## Key Competencies Developed in a Post-doc

1. Discipline-specific conceptual knowledge
2. Research skill development
3. Communication skills
4. Professionalism
5. Leadership and management skills
6. Responsible conduct of research

(Source: *National Postdoctoral Association*)

## Tips When Considering a Post-doc

- **Take ownership of your career.** Define your professional and research goals and use this time as a springboard for the next step, not as a stall tactic. Remember, a post-doc doesn't guarantee a faculty position. According to Science Magazine, only 20 percent of post-docs lead to tenured positions.
- **Negotiate the terms of the position.** Before accepting a post-doc, negotiate for things like first-authored publications and teaching independent courses that will advance your CV.
- **Establish expectations for yourself and your PI on the length of the post-doc.** Postdocs offer faculty an inexpensive source of skilled labor, but this position is meant to be temporary. Staying in it too long (more than a few years) can limit your earning potential and hirability.
- **Study up on your PI/post-doc mentor.** Make sure that there is a track record of doctorate students and post-docs from their program being placed in careers. Find out if they are likely to be advocates for your success and involved on a day-to-day basis. Ways to do this include asking good questions in the interview and reaching out to other post-docs in the program for insight.

## Places to Find Post-doc Positions

- Reach out to possible PIs/post-doc mentors directly via conferences, phone or email.
- Ask your current PI/Ph.D. mentor who in their network might be hiring.
- Use job boards like **Postdoc Jobs**, **HigherEdJobs** or **The Chronicle of Higher Education**.

Find more tips on applying and managing a post-doc through the **National Postdoctoral Association** and the academic job search section of this guide. Principles for applying to faculty positions are comparable to applying for post-docs.