

GRFP FAQs for Applicants

1. [Who can help me with questions regarding the GRFP application process?](#)
2. [I lost my password for the GRFP application. How can I get it?](#)
3. [I do not know my email address to provide on the Forgot Password screen, or I have not received the temporary password. What should I do?](#)
4. [I lost my username for the GRFP application. How can I retrieve it?](#)
5. [Where do I direct technical questions regarding FastLane and the GRFP?](#)
6. [How can I determine if I am eligible to apply for the GRFP?](#)
7. [Applying for GRFP takes a lot of effort, and I don't want to apply if I'm not eligible. Can I find out if I'm eligible before I apply?](#)
8. [For GRFP eligibility purposes, do courses I'm currently taking count as complete?](#)
9. [I am in the process of becoming a permanent resident alien, but I won't have my green card until after the GRFP application deadline. Am I still eligible?](#)
10. [I don't see my field on the list provided in the program solicitation for the GRFP. Am I eligible?](#)
11. [What application materials do I need to submit for the GRFP?](#)
12. [I applied for the GRFP fellowship last year. Can I just send in copies of last year's information? Can I re-activate materials from an old application?](#)
13. [Where can I find information about the relevant deadlines for the GRFP?](#)
14. [Do I need to attend school full-time if awarded a GRFP fellowship?](#)
15. [What materials should I review before beginning my GRFP application?](#)
16. [I am preparing my application for the GRFP. How can I learn about the types of research projects NSF funds?](#)
17. [Can I submit my GRFP application material after the deadlines?](#)
18. [Is there any advantage to submitting my GRFP application material before the deadline?](#)
19. [What is a semester or quarter hour mentioned in the GRFP application?](#)
20. [What academic transcripts are required for the GRFP and where should transcripts be sent?](#)
21. [How can I confirm that my electronic application for the GRFP was submitted?](#)
22. [I have applied to several graduate schools but I haven't been accepted to any yet. What should I put down for my proposed graduate institution for the GRFP?](#)
23. [After I submitted my application for the GRFP, I was published in a scientific journal. I would like to add that in my application. What do I need to do?](#)
24. [Should references or citations be included in the essays for the GRFP, and if so, do they count as part of the page limit?](#)
25. [What are the formatting and page number restrictions for the essays for the GRFP?](#)
26. [What do I do if I have not had any direct research experience for the GRFP application?](#)
27. [My university mailed my transcripts directly to your office instead of to me for the GRFP. Is that okay?](#)
28. [Should I send a transcript of my grades after I complete my courses this fall for the GRFP?](#)
29. [Most institutions have a long transcript request turnaround time, and there is a due date for transcripts. Will my application for the GRFP be incomplete if my transcripts aren't returned by that date?](#)
30. [I attended a university overseas for one semester. It is very difficult to obtain a transcript. It probably won't get here in time for the deadline for the GRFP. Do I still have to get a transcript from the international university?](#)
31. [Can you tell me if you have received my transcripts for the GRFP?](#)
32. [I am preparing my application for the GRFP, and I heard about FASED. What is FASED and how do I apply for it?](#)
33. [I am preparing my application for the GRFP, and have chosen an institution for my graduate work. However, can I move to another institution and still keep my award?](#)
34. [Can you explain the Merit Review Criteria for the GRFP?](#)
35. [Who are the panelists that review the applications for the GRFP?](#)
36. [I heard that applications for the GRFP are pre-screened and if your GPA is below a certain average, your application isn't considered. Is this true?](#)
37. [Since applicants can't revise an application after it's been submitted, how do I make changes to](#)

- [my references in the application for the GRFP?](#)
38. [How do I re-rank my references if 5 have been added and ranked?](#)
 39. [I submitted my application for the GRFP via FastLane. Do my references have to submit by FastLane also?](#)
 40. [I just started graduate school and my professors don't really know me well enough to fill out the References for the GRFP. What should I do?](#)
 41. [How do my references for the GRFP know they have successfully submitted their References?](#)
 42. [Can my references for the GRFP upload their comments, or do they have to type comments on a form in FastLane?](#)
 43. [My institution has letters of reference on file in the Placement Office, or my reference has provided me with a general letter of reference. Can I go ahead and use that letter for the GRFP?](#)
 44. [Can you tell me if you have received my Reference Letters for the GRFP?](#)
 45. [What type of information should referees include in their GRFP reference letter?](#)
 46. [What is the deadline for submitting GRFP reference letters?](#)

1. Who can help me with questions regarding the GRFP application process?

For questions related to the application process or requirements, contact the Graduate Research Fellowship Operations Center. The Operations Center helpdesk is staffed between the hours of 8:30 am and 5:30 pm EST Monday through Friday. Contact it in any of these ways:

- Email: info@nsfgrfp.org
- Toll Free Phone: 866-NSF-GRFP (866-673-4737)
- International Phone 202-331-3542.

2. I lost my password for the GRFP application. What should I do?

On the main GRFP login screen, click Forgot My Password to request that a temporary password be sent to you at the primary email address you provided during account setup. You may also reset your password directly on the Forgot My Password screen by using the password secret questions feature.

3. I do not know my email address to provide on the Forgot Password screen, or I have not received the temporary password. What should I do?

For resetting a password directly, please use the Forgot Password link on the FastLane/GRFP login box. If you have forgotten your email address, contact the GRF Operations Center at 1-866-673-GRFP (4737) (office hours: Monday-Friday, 8:30 am - 5:30 pm EST) or email info@nsfgrfp.org.

4. I lost my username for the GRFP application. How can I retrieve it?

You can click the Forgot Username link and retrieve your username after you have completed the screen form. Or contact the FastLane Help Central at 1-800-673-6188 (office hours: Monday-Friday, 7 am - 9 pm EST) or email fastlane@nsf.gov.

5. Where do I direct technical questions regarding FastLane and the GRFP?

Contact the FastLane Help Central at 1-800-673-6188 (office hours: Monday-Friday, 7 am - 9 pm EST) or email fastlane@nsf.gov.

6. How can I determine if I am eligible to apply for the GRFP?

Eligibility requirements are described in the Program Solicitation.

7. Applying for GRFP takes a lot of effort, and I don't want to apply if I'm not eligible. Can I find out if I'm eligible before I apply?

The text in the Program Solicitation is the only official eligibility guidance you can receive. Read the

Program Solicitation closely to be sure you are interpreting the eligibility requirements properly. Seek additional advice from your mentors, professors, or academic advisors. When deciding to apply, consider your relative qualifications, eligibility concerns, and estimated time investment balanced against the benefits the GRFP provides.

8. For GRFP eligibility purposes, do courses I'm currently taking count as complete?

No. Only courses from academic periods that have ended are considered complete for eligibility purposes.

9. I am in the process of becoming a permanent resident alien, but I won't have my green card until after the GRFP application deadline. Am I still eligible?

Permanent resident status must be established by the application deadline.

10. I don't see my field on the list provided in the program solicitation for the GRFP. Am I eligible?

NSF-supported fields are listed in the FY 2011 Program Solicitation.

11. What application materials do I need to submit for the GRFP?

Complete applications include (1) information that must be submitted electronically using NSF's FastLane Graduate Research Fellowship Program application module, (2) Official Academic Transcripts submitted in hard copy to the GRF Operations Center, and (3) three letters of reference submitted electronically using NSF's FastLane Reference Letter submission.

12. I applied for the GRFP fellowship last year. Can I just send in copies of last year's information? Can I re-activate materials from an old application?

No. NSF cannot reactivate or reuse materials submitted in prior years. However, you can use the same user name and password from your old application to log into FastLane to begin a new application. All application information must be re-entered, except for your personal profile information, which can and should be updated.

13. Where can I find information about the relevant deadlines for the GRFP?

Complete information regarding GRFP deadlines, requirements, and submission methods can be found at the Graduate Research Fellowship Program module.

14. Do I need to attend school full-time if awarded a GRFP fellowship?

Yes, the fellowship is intended only for students enrolled in full-time programs leading to graduate degrees in disciplines supported by NSF.

15. What materials should I review before beginning my GRFP application?

Read and understand the Program Solicitation to get an understanding of the program benefits, eligibility, requirements, and how your application will be evaluated. Review the Applicant User Guide to identify the information you need to provide and specific instructions for filling out the online application. Review the GRFP FAQs, which clarify the Program Solicitation and the Applicant User Guide. These links can be found at FastLane's GRFP module.

16. I am preparing my application for the GRFP. How can I learn about the types of research projects NSF funds?

You can visit NSF's website (www.nsf.gov) for information and guidance about current and emerging themes within the NSF directorates (departments). You can review the NSF Guide to Programs at

www.nsf.gov/funding/ as well as the NSF's database of funded projects (awards) at www.nsf.gov/awardsearch/ for specific funding information. You should also discuss your proposed research with your mentors, professors, or researchers, who have applied for NSF grants in your field.

17. Can I submit my GRFP application material after the deadlines?

NSF does not accept application material that is late. Applicants must adhere to the deadlines for submitting both the FastLane Application Information electronically and the hard copy Supporting Application Materials. These deadlines are posted at <https://www.fastlane.nsf.gov/grfp/> during the period open for applications.

18. Is there any advantage to submitting my GRFP application material before the deadline?

You are encouraged to submit your application in advance of the deadlines to avoid delays in electronic submission that may be caused by traffic volume. We suggest that you complete the Personal Statement, Previous Research Experience, and Proposed Research essays as early as possible to allow ample time for editing. This will eliminate delays at the time of submission. Also, do not wait until submission to check for error and warning messages. Periodically click the **Check Application Completeness** button and resolve errors as you go to avoid delays at the time of submission.

19. What is a semester or quarter hour mentioned in the GRFP application?

Most U.S. institutions of higher education are on either a semester system or a quarter hour system and count their course credits accordingly. For the purposes of the GRFP application, use whatever system is applicable to you. Official transcripts normally include, next to the course grade, the credits per course with cumulative totals at the end. The transcript key should include a statement of the credit system the school uses; the registrar's office for that institution can also provide this information.

20. What official academic transcripts are required for the GRFP and where should the transcripts be sent?

Academic transcripts are required for all institutions listed in the Education and Work Experience section of your application. Required transcripts to complete your application include academic transcripts from your baccalaureate institution and transcripts for all completed graduate work. If your undergraduate transcripts include all transfer credits, such as community college or summer courses, you do not need to list each undergraduate institution attended. Please read the Application Preparation Instructions in the Program Solicitation for more information on the transcripts requirements. We recommend applicants send in transcripts ahead of the deadline.

Applicants are also able to upload optional electronic copies of unofficial or official transcripts. On the Education and Work Experience section of the application an "upload" link will be available under the Optional Electronic Transcript column, next to each institution listed.

Hard copies of official transcripts must be sent to:
GRF Operations Center
1818 N Street NW
Suite 600
Washington, DC 20036

21. How can I confirm that my electronic application for the GRFP was submitted?

FastLane will display the status of application information that is submitted. Applicants can view the status by accessing Fastlane. The status of the application is displayed on the screen after you log into the system; after you submit your application, a screen displays stating that your application is now submitted. If the submission of the FastLane application package was successful and if you provided a valid email address as part of the application, you will also receive a confirmation email message that same day. If the submission was not successful, you will not receive a confirmation email message. Throughout the process you can view and print your application using the View/Print Application option.

22. I have applied to several graduate schools, but I haven't been accepted to any yet. What should I put down for my proposed graduate institution for the GRFP?

You do not have to be accepted to an institution before listing it on your application. Carefully select the institution you wish to attend if you were granted a fellowship, as reviewers will consider the appropriateness of the choice relevant to your proposed field of research.

23. After I submitted my application for the GRFP, I was published in a scientific journal. I would like to add that in my application. What do I need to do?

NSF does not permit revisions or additions to the application after the submission deadline.

24. Should references or citations be included in the essays for the GRFP, and if so, do they count as part of the page limit?

Yes on both counts. Necessary references and/or citations should be included in your essays and will count towards the page limit.

25. What are the formatting and page number restrictions for the essays for the GRFP?

- All essays should be written **using standard 8.5" x 11" page size, 12-point, Times New Roman font, 1" margins on all sides, and must be single spaced or greater. Only publications and presentation citations may be a smaller font, no less than 10 pt. Times New Roman.** Small type size makes it difficult for reviewers to read the application; consequently, the use of small type not in compliance with the application guidelines may be grounds for NSF to return the application without review.
- There is a 2-page limit for the Personal Statement, Previous Research Experience, and Proposed Plan of Research essays. There is a 1-page limit for the Eligibility Essay (for those having completed greater than 12 months of graduate study). References and citations are included toward the page limits.
- Character spacing should use normal (100%) single-line space option. Do not condense line spacing or reduce the character spacing scale. Adherence to type size, character spacing, and page length is necessary to ensure that no applicant will have an unfair advantage, by using smaller type or line spacing to provide more text in the application.
- Images may be included in your essays, however they will be produced only in black and white. All images, footnotes, endnotes, and other citations are included in the 2-page limit.

26. What do I do if I have not had any direct research experience for the GRFP application?

If you have had no direct research experience, describe any activities that you believe have prepared you to undertake a research-based graduate degree, including working on open-ended problems and developing plans to solve them.

27. My university mailed my transcripts directly to your office instead of to me for the GRFP. Is that all right?

Either the applicant or the university may send the transcripts directly to the GRF Operations Center. Transcripts cannot be sent to NSF headquarters.

28. Should I send a transcript of my grades after I complete my courses this fall for the GRFP?

No. As part of the applications process, you should submit Official Transcripts of your academic records,

graduate and undergraduate, completed as of the date of application.

29. Most institutions have a long transcript request turnaround time, and there is a due date for transcripts. Will my application for the GRFP be incomplete if my transcripts aren't returned by that date?

Yes. Transcripts must be received by the posted deadline. It is the applicant's responsibility to ensure that Official Transcripts are submitted to the GRF Operations Center.

30. I attended a university overseas for one semester. It is very difficult to obtain a transcript. It probably won't get here in time for the deadline for the GRFP. Do I still have to get a transcript from the international university?

Applicants are required to submit Official Academic Transcripts as described in the program solicitation. However, applicants may not be disqualified if they are unable to submit Official Academic Transcripts from international institutions, if they can provide other evidence of academic achievement at those institutions. Transcripts must be in English.

31. Can you tell me if you have received my transcripts for the GRFP?

Applicants will be able to check the status of their application materials online on FastLane at the Application Package Status feature.

32. I am preparing my application for the GRFP, and I heard about FASED. What is FASED and how do I apply for it?

FASED stands for Facilitation Awards for Scientists with Disabilities. Details of this program can be found at http://www.nsf.gov/funding/pgm_summ.jsp?pims_id=5516.

33. I am preparing my application for the GRFP, and have chosen an institution for my graduate work. However, can I move to another institution and still keep my award?

Yes, the Fellowship is portable. Fellows need to request the change by electronically submitting a tenure change request within the Graduate Research Fellowship FastLane module.

34. Can you explain the Merit Review Criteria for the GRFP?

This refers to the considerations that are applied to fellowship applications to assess their merit for award consideration. Complete information regarding the NSF Merit Review Criteria, how the criteria relates to the GRFP application, and the GRFP review process can be found in the FY 2009 Program Solicitation in the GRFP module of FastLane. Refer to the [NSF Grant Proposal Guide](#), Chapter III for further information.

35. Who are the panelists that review the applications for the GRFP?

Panelists are a diverse group of individuals who are recognized experts in the relevant academic disciplines and have experience in graduate education. If the panel considers the application to be multidisciplinary, a member of another disciplinary panel may be asked to review the application.

36. I heard that applications for the GRFP are pre-screened and that if your GPA is below a certain average, your application isn't considered. Is this true?

No. Applications are not pre-screened for merit.

37. Since applicants can't revise an application after it's been submitted, how do I make changes to my references in the application for the GRFP?

After an application has been submitted, changes can only be made to References through the Manage References link listed under the Application Optional Task List before the application deadline.

38. How do I re-rank my references if 5 have been added and ranked?

The application will not allow two references to hold the same rank. In order to change the rank of a reference after all five have been added, you will need to delete one of the references. After you have deleted a reference, you will be able to change the rankings, as long as no two references have the same rank. Once the references are in the preferred order, you can re-add the deleted reference at the desired rank.

39. I submitted my application for the GRFP via FastLane. Do my references have to submit by FastLane also?

Yes. NSF accepts only reference letters that are submitted via FastLane for the NSF Graduate Research Fellowship program. Reference letters must be submitted by the published reference letter deadline.

40. I just started graduate school, and my professors don't really know me well enough to fill out the references for the GRFP. What should I do?

It is to the applicant's advantage to submit references from faculty members who have current knowledge of the applicant's academic work and scholarly development. If that is not possible, as in the case of applicants who have been out of school for some time, letters from other faculty or employers would be appropriate. NSF suggests that at least two of the three references be persons with whom you have worked in your present (or most recent) department, including your thesis adviser.

41. How do my references for the GRFP know they have successfully submitted their references?

If the submission of the FastLane references was successful, the referee will receive a confirmation email message within the same day. The referee can also log back into FastLane and view the submitted reference PDF.

42. Can my references for the GRFP upload their comments, or do they have to type comments on a form in FastLane?

Referees can only upload their comments into FastLane using the provided utility. FastLane does not provide a text box for typing comments.

43. My institution has letters of reference on file in the Placement Office, or my reference has provided me with a general letter of reference. Can I go ahead and use that letter for the GRFP?

The letters need to be uploaded by your reference into FastLane. General letters of reference are not recommended: they need to be tailored to your GRF application. Panelists look for reference letters that demonstrate knowledge of your proposed research as well as specifically address your intellectual merit and the broader impact of your activities.

44. Can you tell me if you have received my reference letters for the GRFP?

Applicants can check the status of each reference letter by logging into FastLane and clicking the **Manage References** link.

45. What type of information should referees include in their GRFP reference letter?

We ask that in a reference letter, the referee do the following:

- Indicate his or her department and institution, and how long they have known you, and in

what capacity.

- On the basis of knowledge of your past and current research experience and activities, comment on your potential to do the following:
 - Succeed in graduate school,
 - Conduct original research,
 - Communicate effectively,
 - Work cooperatively with peers and supervisors, and
 - Make unique contributions to your chosen discipline and to society in general.
- If he or she has known or supervised other NSF Graduate Research Fellows, compare you with them. Otherwise, compare you to other successful graduate students or senior undergraduates that he or she has known in their institution or through interactions with other institutions.
- Comment on the broader impacts of supporting you, including your leadership potential in the chosen field of graduate work and in general, as a member of the scientific and technical community.

Note that the more specific (as opposed to generic) a letter the referee can provide, the better it is for you as an applicant. If the referee is your research supervisor, the referee should comment on the originality of your proposal, and communicate what role he or she played in assisting you with the proposal.

The following are the two issues that are the basis of NSF's merit review criteria:

- **Intellectual Merit:** The intellectual merit criterion includes demonstrated intellectual ability and other accepted requisites for scholarly scientific study, such as the ability to: (1) plan and conduct research; (2) work as a member of a team as well as independently; and (3) interpret and communicate research findings. Panelists are instructed to consider: the strength of the academic record, the proposed plan of research, the description of previous research experience, the appropriateness of the choice of references and the extent to which they indicate merit, Graduate Record Examinations (GRE) General and Subject Tests scores, and the appropriateness of the choice of institution for fellowship tenure relative to the proposed plan of research.
- **Broader Impacts:** The broader impacts criterion includes contributions that (1) effectively integrate research and education at all levels, infuse learning with the excitement of discovery, and assure that the findings and methods of research are communicated in a broad context and to a large audience; (2) encourage diversity, broaden opportunities, and enable the participation of all citizens-women and men, underrepresented minorities, and persons with disabilities-in science and research; (3) enhance scientific and technical understanding; and (4) benefit society. Applicants may provide characteristics of their background, including personal, professional, and educational experiences, to indicate their potential to fulfill the broader impacts criterion.

46. What is the deadline for submitting GRFP reference letters?

Reference letters must be submitted by the relevant application deadline for the applicant's field of study.