



**American
Foundation
for Suicide
Prevention**

***AFSP Policies for
Postdoctoral Research Fellowships***

Effective July 1, 2020

1. REVIEW PROCESS

Research grants and fellowships are awarded by the AFSP Board of Directors acting on the recommendations of the Chair of the Scientific Council. Each application is reviewed independently by two AFSP Scientific Advisors. The better-scoring applications are subsequently reviewed by a member of the Research Grants Committee, who presents them to the full committee for discussion and prioritization. These are then acted on by the Scientific Council and Board of Directors of AFSP.

Applications are evaluated on the basis of (a) the potential of the research to contribute to the understanding and ultimate prevention of suicide, or to the treatment of suicidal patients, (b) the qualifications, experience and productivity of the applicant, (c) innovation, (d) the facilities available to the applicant for the purpose of the study, and (e) the methodology and demonstrated availability of a sufficient number of patients or subjects to carry out the research.

In addition, the evaluation of Postdoctoral Research Fellowship applications will include consideration of the research training plan and the opportunities provided for the applicant to receive meaningful guidance in carrying out the proposed study and preparing for a career in suicide research.

2. SOURCE OF FUNDS

Funds used for all AFSP research grants and fellowships are obtained from private donations to the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention.

3. ELIGIBILITY AND CONDITIONS

a. Postdoctoral Research Fellowships are awarded to individuals who will be receiving training and conducting research at universities

and other training institutions in the U.S. and abroad.

b. Fellowship applicants must have completed all requirements for a Ph.D., M.D., or other doctoral degree prior to the start date of the Postdoctoral Research Fellowship. Individuals who have three or more academic years of postdoctoral fellowship research experience prior to the time the Postdoctoral Research Fellowship would begin are not eligible for this award.

c. An AFSP Postdoctoral Research Fellowship may not be held concurrently with any other postdoctoral fellowship. Additional funds may be secured by the Fellow to support costs associated with the research project.

d. Although it is the general policy of AFSP that individuals may be the Principal Investigator on only one AFSP grant at a time, individuals holding an AFSP Postdoctoral Research Fellowship are eligible to receive additional funds through an AFSP Pilot Research Grant to support costs associated with the research project (as distinct from salary support or the Institutional Allowance, as described below). Fellows may apply for a Pilot Research Grant at any point during the Fellowship period (See *AFSP Policies for Pilot Research Grants*).

e. Recipients of the AFSP Postdoctoral Research Fellowship may not reapply for this award.

f. Personnel compensated in whole or in part through an AFSP research grant are not considered employees of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, but of the grantee institution. AFSP does not assume any responsibility for the conduct of the research or other acts of the investigators. AFSP grantees are subject to the ethical and scientific policies of the grantee institution.

4. DESCRIPTION OF FELLOWSHIP

Purpose

Postdoctoral Research Fellowships are training grants designed to enable young investigators to qualify for independent careers in suicide research. The training can be in either basic or clinical research and must be full-time; that is, Fellows are expected to devote at least 40 hours per week to the training program and may not have any significant clinical or other responsibilities during the funding period.

Mentoring

The application for a Postdoctoral Research Fellowship must be endorsed by the applicant's proposed mentor and by the head of the department in which the training will be received. Both a research proposal and a plan of training must be formulated and agreed upon by the mentor and the applicant and described in detail in the application.

The mentor must have an academic rank of Associate or Full Professor and an established record of suicide research and publication relevant to the applicant's proposed study. Individuals may serve as mentors for no more than two AFSP grantees at a time, whether Young Investigators or Postdoctoral Research Fellows.

Term of Fellowship

If, during the course of the study, a grant recipient experiences delays that will cause the project's duration to last longer than the term of the award (based on the final payment date), a written request for an extension of the grant may be made by the Principal Investigator. These No Cost Extensions can be requested only after the final grant payment has been made. The NCE request will be evaluated in the (original) final quarter of the grant. If approved, the maximum term for such an extension is one year, thus postponing the closing date of the grant, and postponing the due date for the Final Reports. Please note that grant extensions will not normally be granted in cases where the problems

or delays being experienced make it unlikely that the project will be successfully completed.

Documents required for request of a No Cost Extension:

- Letter explaining the cause of the delay and rationale for the extension.
- Budget detailing expenses to date and use of remaining funds during the NCE period.
- New timeline outlining projected progress through the end of the new closing date.

Payments

At the time the award is made, grantees will be informed of the specific schedule of grant payments. Payments will be made to the investigator's institution in equal amounts, with the first payment made after all required information has been provided to AFSP, and the Principal Investigator has indicated that the grant project is ready to begin. Payments will proceed on schedule as long as the project is not experiencing significant delays, but may be delayed for projects that are not making adequate progress in completing scheduled activities, including reporting. Grantees should understand that the payments to the institution are suspended until proof of progress is made. The PI should inform the institution's financial officer of the delay, so that the officer also understands that funding will be delayed.

Requirements and Amount

The Postdoctoral Research Fellowship provides an annual stipend of up to \$50,000 per year for a two-year period plus an Institutional Allowance of \$10,000 per year. The annual stipend may be used *only* for compensation of the Fellow. Stipend payments for Postdoctoral Research Fellowships are made directly to the recipient institution. The institution may supplement the stipend to offset the cost of living, or may provide compensation in the form of salary or tuition reimbursement for such services as teaching or serving as a laboratory assistant. The conditions of stipend supplementation or compensation may not interfere with or detract from the Fellow's training program

The Institutional Allowance may be used to defray such expenses as research supplies or equipment, health insurance for the Fellow, and travel to scientific meetings.

Application Dates and Notifications

Applications are considered once each year and must be submitted by the deadline. Please visit our website for this year's date; generally our deadline is in mid-November. Final award letters are issued following review and approval by the Scientific Council, and in turn by the Board of Directors, at their May meeting. These grants, if approved, may begin after October 1st.

5. APPLICATION

Applications must be submitted via our online grant application/management system, accessible via our website: <https://afsp.org/our-work/research/apply-for-a-grant/>. Questions concerning application requirements should be addressed to grantsmanager@afsp.org.

Care should be taken to comply with the word or page restrictions noted for each section of the application on the application forms. Material submitted that exceeds the specified maximum number of pages/words (as applicable), or that is not specifically requested, may not be considered by the reviewers. Furthermore, applicants should not try to circumvent the restrictions by including crucial application information in an appendix. All substantive information must be in the application itself. The entire application should be typed using a font size no smaller than 11 point.

The application must include the following sections:

a. Basic Information. All requested information about the proposed project, applicant and institution must be provided, along with an upload of the signatures of the applicant and the head of the applicant's department. Please note: the log-in and primary contact email should be the applicant's institutional email address, not a

personal one (e.g., a .edu or .org address, not a gmail address).

b. Financial/Administrative Contact Information.

Provide complete financial payment and grant administrative contact information.

c. Abstract. The aims, methods and expected outcomes of the proposed research project should be clearly stated in lay language.

d. Budget. All requested information must be provided on the standard budget form, and the total amount requested for the first and second (if applicable) year of the project should be indicated. PI effort must be 100%.

Indicate for each person participating on the project: name, position, percentage of time to be dedicated to the project, and the amount of funds requested. Note that the use of "to be named" should be used *only* for support or clerical personnel. All personnel who will be playing a substantial role in the project should be specifically listed in the Key Personnel table of the application, and their biographical information provided on the appropriate forms. All consultants to the project who will receive grant funds must also be specifically identified, and a letter of agreement to collaborate from each consultant should be uploaded with the application.

Identify all other direct cost items for which funds are requested, and the amount requested in each budget year for each item.

e. Budget Justification. The duties and responsibilities of all key personnel and consultants should be described. All other expenses included in the budget should be explained and justified in accordance with the research aims, methods and activities. PI effort must be 100%.

f. Biographical Sketches. The information requested should be provided for all persons playing a substantial role in the project. Use only the format provided via the link in the

application; the size is up to five pages. All sketches should be combined and uploaded as one document. For consultants, sketches are not required; instead, upload letters of agreement (again as one document). *Do not provide full CVs.*

g. Project Description (excluding references).

Please limit this upload attachment to seven (7) single-spaced pages. This section of the application should provide sufficient detail to allow reviewers to evaluate the proposed methods and procedures. It must include a statement of the specific aims and hypotheses; a description of prior related work and the significance of the proposed study for the field; a description of sample, measures, the data collection and analysis methods to be employed; and a discussion of the study's strengths and weaknesses. There must be a suicide outcome measure included in the study. The number of subjects and the power of the study should be indicated. *Explicit details need to be given substantiating the availability of the proposed number of patients or research participants within the amount of time allocated for subject recruitment and enrollment. Additionally, if this proposal is an analysis of data previously collected, details regarding the fidelity, currency and ability to access the data need to be provided in the application.*

Including LGBTQ Data in Project Description

Survey data suggests that individuals who are LGBT are at greater risk for suicide attempts (Haas, Eliason et al. 2011). However, confirmation of this finding is needed across a wider range of samples and using a wider range of data collection methods. In an effort to learn more about this issue we suggest that all AFSP-funded researchers who are collecting original data systematically assess research participants for sexual orientation and gender identity.

For self-report assessments, please consider using the following questions, which have been recommended for inclusion in federal health surveys (<http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu>).

Gender identity: How do you describe yourself? (check one)

- Male
- Female
- Trans male
- Trans female
- Genderqueer/Gender non-conforming
- Do not identify as any of these options
- Prefer not to answer

Sexual orientation: How do you identify? (check one)

- Asexual
- Bisexual
- Gay or lesbian
- Heterosexual/straight
- Do not identify as any of these options
- Prefer not to answer

If the proposed research will utilize previously collected data, we suggest the following format to describe who is included in your sample:

Gender identify of participants (check one):

- Male
- Female
- Trans male
- Trans female
- Genderqueer/Gender non-conforming
- Did not identify as any of these options
- Preferred not to answer
- Gender not specified

Sexual orientation of participants (check one):

- Asexual
- Bisexual
- Gay or lesbian
- Heterosexual/straight
- Did not identify as any of these options
- Preferred not to answer
- Sexual orientation not specified

h. Certification for Protection of Human and Animal Subjects.

Human Subjects: The proposed research should be submitted to the sponsoring institution's Institutional Review Board (IRB)

no later than the date the application is submitted to AFSP. On the certification form, the applicant must indicate the current status of the IRB review. If the proposed research has already been approved by the IRB, the form should be signed by the appropriate official and submitted to AFSP. If the research has not been approved by the IRB at the time the application is submitted, this should be indicated by checking the appropriate statement on the form, and a copy of the signed form should be submitted following IRB approval. If a grant award is made by AFSP, no funds will be released until proof of IRB approval is received.

Animal Subjects: Institutions must implement the PHS Policy for all AFSP-supported activities involving animals and must ensure that any standards that might not be consistent with PHS Policy do not affect or pose risks to AFSP supported activities. A certification of approval from The Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) is required to be submitted prior to the funding of an application.

i. Project Timeline. Complete the table to identify key project activities and the anticipated dates for their completion.

j. Research Training Plan. The training plan should describe the applicant's training objectives and career goal and all aspects of the training to be obtained during the Postdoctoral Research Fellowship period, including research, course work, teaching, and clinical and other activities. *The evaluation of Postdoctoral Research Fellowship applications will include consideration of the adequacy of the research training plan in preparing the applicant for a career in suicide research.*

k. Recommendation of Mentor. Using the form online, the mentor should provide detailed information about his or her role in the proposed research project, and evaluate the applicant's qualifications to carry out the research and to pursue a research career. Specific information must be provided about the frequency and nature of anticipated contacts with the applicant during the grant period. *The*

evaluation of Postdoctoral Research Fellowship applications will include consideration of the mentoring plan and the opportunities provided for the investigator to receive meaningful guidance in carrying out the proposed research.

l. References. Provide complete citations for all literature cited in the Project Description. There is no page limit for references.

m. Appendices. Appendices should be limited to copies of unpublished instruments, manuals or other materials directly related to the proposed research. Do not include previous publications.

6. FINANCIAL RECORDS & REPORTS **(Download forms at www.afsp.org/grants)**

a. A separate account must be maintained for each grant. The account, with substantiating invoices and payrolls, should be available at all times for audit by representatives of AFSP. All financial reports must be signed by the Principal Investigator and the responsible Financial Officer of the institution. Reports that are not signed will not be accepted. Payment of grant funds is contingent upon timely receipt of financial and progress reports. Please be advised that the grant end date will change if payments are delayed for any reason.

b. AFSP is not responsible for the over-expenditure of grant funds, for commitments against a grant not paid within sixty days after its termination or renewal, or for expenditures made before the approved starting date of a grant.

c. Reports of expenditures must be submitted semi-annually. A final report of expenditures must be submitted within 60 days after termination of the grant, together with the refund of any unexpended balance. Unexpended funds from an existing grant cannot be carried forward to any other project or grant. Financial Reports are submitted online as an upload to the online Research Progress Report.

7. PROGRESS AND FINAL REPORTS

Every six months, grantees **MUST SUBMIT** a brief progress report on work completed. Continuing payment of grant funds is contingent upon timely receipt of progress and financial reports.

All grantees must also submit a final report within 60 days of the end date of the grant period. Reports of research findings that have not yet been published are considered confidential and this information will not be disseminated without the express consent of the Principal Investigator. All Research Progress Reports are submitted online via our grants management portal:

<http://www.afsp.org/research/forms/manage-your-grant> The log-in will be the same as that used for the applicant process.

8. PUBLICATIONS

Publications resulting from research supported by AFSP research grants should contain appropriate acknowledgement, such as, "Supported by a grant from the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention." The Principal Investigator should send AFSP a PDF copy of all publications issuing from the grant to grantsmanager@afsp.org.

9. CHANGES OR CANCELLATION OF GRANT

If any significant departures are made from the original, approved grant application, AFSP

must be notified in writing of the changes and be provided with adequate justification before the change is made. Based on this information, AFSP reserves the right to terminate the grant if the changes are deemed inappropriate. All budget changes must be requested in writing and signed by the PI and the Financial Officer.

If the grantee changes institutions during the grant period, permission to transfer the grant to the new institution must be obtained from AFSP prior to the move. The written request by the grantee to transfer the grant should discuss the impact of the move on sample recruitment and other aspects of study design, the grantee's relationship with co-investigators, as well as the new institution's IRB approval and budget, and the timeline for the study. Based on the information provided, AFSP will decide whether to approve the transfer or terminate the grant.

In the event that the grantee does not transfer the grant, the grant will be terminated. The grantee must take responsibility for informing AFSP of his/her departure from the institution where the grant is housed. The letter must be signed by the Principal Investigator and the Financial Officer at the sponsoring institution. A final report of expenditures and research accomplishments must be provided within 30 days of the effective date of cancellation. This letter must be accompanied by the return of all unexpended funds.

References

Haas, A. P., M. Eliason, et al. (2011). "Suicide and suicide risk in lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender populations: review and recommendations." Journal of Homosexuality **58**(1): 10-51.

Despite strong indications of elevated risk of suicidal behavior in lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people, limited attention has been given to research, interventions or suicide prevention programs targeting these populations. This article is a culmination of a three-year effort by an expert panel to address the need for better understanding of suicidal behavior and suicide risk in sexual minority populations, and stimulate the development of needed prevention strategies, interventions and policy changes. This article summarizes existing research findings, and makes recommendations for addressing knowledge gaps and applying current knowledge to relevant areas of suicide prevention practice.