§ 3402.7 Fellowship appointments.

(a)(1) Fellows must be identified and Fellowships must be awarded within 18 months of the effective date of a grant. Institutions failing to meet this deadline will be required to refund monies associated with any unawarded Fellowships. Graduate Fellowship appointments may be held only by persons who enroll and pursue full-time study in a graduate degree program in the national need area and at the degree level supported by the grant. Postdoctoral Fellowship appointments may be held only by persons who pursue full-time traineeship in research, teaching or extension in the national need area and are supervised by the mentor indicated in the grant application.

(b) It will be the responsibility of the grantee institution to award fellowships to students of superior academic ability.

(3) Graduate Fellows:

(i) Must be appointed before completing two semesters or equivalent hours of full-time study, as defined by the institution, or immediately after passing of candidacy/qualifying examinations, whichever is later;

(ii) Must be citizens or nationals of the United States as determined in accordance with Federal law; and

(iii) Must have strong interest, as judged by the institution, in preparing for a career in agricultural research, teaching or extension.

(4) Postdoctoral Fellows:

(i) Must have been USDA Graduate Fellows who successfully completed their doctoral degrees in areas of the food and agricultural sciences designated by NIFA as national need areas;

(ii) Must not have obtained their doctoral degrees more than five years prior to beginning their postdoctoral Fellowships;

(iii) Must have strong interest, as judged by the institution, in preparing for a career in agricultural research, teaching or extension.

(5)(i) A doctoral level Graduate Fellow who maintains satisfactory progress in his or her course of study is eligible for support for a maximum of 36 months within a 42-month period. A master’s level Fellow who maintains satisfactory progress in his or her course of study is eligible for support for a maximum of 24 months during a 30-month period. A postdoctoral Fellow who achieves his or her training objectives is eligible for support for a maximum of 36 months during a 60-month period. It is the intent of this program that Graduate Fellows pursue full-time uninterrupted study or thesis/dissertation research, including time spent pursuing USDA-funded special international study or thesis/dissertation research activities.
(ii) Postdoctoral Fellowship appointments may be held only by persons who pursue full-time traineeship in research, teaching, or extension in the national need area and are supervised by the mentor indicated in the grant application. However, during the period of support, USDA Graduate and Postdoctoral Fellows are permitted, at the discretion of their institutions, to accept additional supplemental employment that would positively contribute to their training or research and provide eligibility for tuition waivers (e.g., full or partial tuition waivers with research or teaching assignments).

(iii) For graduate Fellows requiring additional time to complete a degree, it is expected that the institution will endeavor to continue supporting individuals originally appointed to Fellowships through such other institutional means as teaching assistantships and research assistantships. For postdoctoral Fellows who terminate the Fellowships prematurely, the institution must return all unexpended monies to USDA. For USDA Graduate Fellows who complete the program of study early (less than 24 months for master's degree or 36 months for doctoral degree) or terminate their Fellowships prematurely, the institution may use any unexpended monies, within the time remaining on the project grant, to support pursuit of a doctoral degree in a discipline in the food and agricultural sciences by a master's degree Fellow at the grantee institution; or a replacement Graduate Fellow. Where less than one semester/quarter remains before the expiration date of the Graduate Fellowship grant, the institution must refund any unexpended monies to the granting agency. Such funds cannot be used to increase the annual stipend amounts for current USDA Graduate or Postdoctoral Fellows.

(b) Within the framework of the regulations in this part, all decisions with respect to the appointment of Fellows will be made by the institution. However, institutions are urged to take maximum advantage of opportunities for awarding Fellowships to members of underrepresented groups at the graduate and postdoctoral level in the food and agricultural sciences, particularly minorities and women. Throughout a USDA Graduate Fellow’s tenure, the institution should satisfy itself that the Fellow is making satisfactory academic progress, and carrying out, or planning to carry out, national needs related research. If an institution finds it necessary to terminate support of a USDA Graduate Fellow or a postdoctoral Fellow for insufficient progress or by decision on the part of the Fellow, the Fellow may no longer receive funds from the active grant. However, termination does not automatically disqualify a Fellow from receiving future grant support under this program. If a graduate or postdoctoral Fellow finds it necessary to interrupt his or her program of study because of health, personal reasons, or outside employment, the institution must reserve the funds for the purpose of allowing the Fellow to resume funded training any time within a six (6) month period. However, a USDA Graduate or Postdoctoral Fellow who finds it necessary to interrupt his/her program of training more than one time cannot exceed a total of six (6) months’ cumulative leave status without forfeiting eligibility. For a USDA Graduate Fellowship terminated because of insufficient progress, by decision on the part of the Fellow, or reserved due to an interrupted program but not resumed within the required time period, the institution may use any unexpended monies to support, within the time remaining on the project grant, and subject to the limitations above, a replacement Fellow at the same master's or doctoral levels. For postdoctoral Fellowships terminated because of insufficient progress, by decision on the part of the Fellow, or reserved due to an interrupted program but not resumed within the required time period, the institution must return all the unexpended monies to NIFA.

(c) Only Fellows enrolled in master’s programs of study may be supported under master’s Fellowship grants. Master’s degree level Fellows who complete their degree early may be supported under master’s Fellowship grants, if they are enrolled in Ph.D.
programs in areas of the food and agricultural sciences designated as national need areas. Only Fellows enrolled in doctoral programs of study may be supported under doctoral degree Fellowship grants. Only USDA Graduate Fellows who have completed their doctoral degrees may be supported under postdoctoral Fellowship grants.

§ 3402.8 Fellowship activities.

A USDA Graduate Fellow shall be enrolled as a full-time graduate student, as defined by the institution, at all times during the tenure of the Fellowship in the national need area and at the degree level supported by the grant. This includes the time used for special international study or thesis/dissertation research, if the international travel is funded through a special international study or thesis/dissertation research travel allowance under this grant program. However, the normal requirement for formal registration during part of this tenure may be waived if permitted by the policy of the Fellowship institution, provided that the Graduate Fellow is making satisfactory progress toward degree completion and remains engaged in appropriate full-time Fellowship activities such as thesis/dissertation research. Postdoctoral Fellowship appointments may be held only by persons who pursue full-time traineeship in research, teaching, or extension in the national need area and are supervised by the mentor indicated in the grant application. Graduate and postdoctoral Fellows in academic institutions are not entitled to vacations as such. They are entitled to the short normal student holidays observed by the institution. The time between academic semesters or quarters is to be utilized as an active part of the grant period. During the period of support, USDA Graduate and Postdoctoral Fellows are permitted, at the discretion of their institutions, to accept additional supplemental employment that would positively contribute to their training or research and provide eligibility for tuition waivers (e.g., full or partial tuition waivers provided with research or teaching assignments). A Fellow may accept from any other entity a grant supporting the Fellow’s research costs.

§ 3402.9 Financial provisions.

An institution may elect to apply the cost-of-education/training institutional allowance to a Fellow’s tuition, fees and laboratory expenses and to defray other program expenses (e.g., recruitment, travel, publications, or salaries of project personnel), unless stated otherwise in the solicitation. Tuition and fees are the responsibility of the Fellow unless an institution elects to use its cost-of-education institutional allowance for this purpose or elects to pay such costs out of non-USDA monies. No dependency allowances are provided to any USDA Graduate or Postdoctoral Fellows. Stipend payments and special international study or thesis/dissertation research travel allowances may be made to Fellows by the institution, in accordance with standard institutional procedures for graduate and postdoctoral fellowships and assistantships.

Subpart C—Preparation of an Application

§ 3402.10 Application package.

Applications will be available at http://www.grants.gov and through the NIFA Web site. An application package will be made available to any potential grant applicant upon request. This package will include all necessary forms and instructions to apply for a grant under this program.

§ 3402.11 Proposal cover page.

The Proposal Cover Page, Form NIFA–2002, must be completed in its entirety, including all authorizing signatures. One copy of each grant application must contain the original pen-and-ink signatures, or approved electronic equivalent, of:

(a) The Project Director(s); and
(b) The Authorized Organizational Representative for the institution.

§ 3402.12 Project summary.

Using the Project Summary, Form NIFA–2003, applicants must summarize the proposed graduate program of study and/or the academic and research