

MSU Research Foundation Postdoctoral Scholars Program

Call for Faculty Proposals

Positions available	Up to 15; two-year postdoctoral appointments
Award duration	24 months
Application deadline	July 15, 2026
Targeted agencies	HHS agencies and offices including NIH and ARPA-H.
Eligibility	Tenure-track and tenured faculty with demonstrated federal funding history. Non-tenure-track faculty can participate as co-PI. HFH faculty members can participate as a Co-PI.

Program overview

The MSU Research Foundation Postdoctoral Scholars Program is designed to provide an outstanding environment for recent PhD graduates to receive state-of-the-art training in research areas covered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) agency. The program seeks to provide strong mentoring and scientific opportunity in support of a trajectory to independence for the scholar. In this way, the Program simultaneously accelerates the research trajectories of faculty scholars who have already demonstrated strong potential to successfully mentor post-doctoral scholars while successfully competing for federal funding in high-priority areas. The program aligns with the mission and priorities of agencies within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), including the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the Advanced Research Projects Agency for Health (ARPA-H), whose investments closely reflect the university's core strengths in health sciences, biomedical innovation, and population health.

By providing a rigorous postdoctoral training, within established and high-performing research environments, this ORI initiative is grounded in a clear and compelling premise: train the next generation of high-quality independent investigators. In this way, we enrich the intellectual and technical skillset within laboratories of investigators already competitive in the federal funding landscape so as to significantly expand their impact by pursuing larger, more complex, and more transformative research programs.

MSU Research Foundation postdoctoral scholars are not startup awards; they are strategic investments in researchers who are deeply committed to mentoring the next generation of scientific leaders who share our passion for advancing solutions that improve health outcomes for all.

Strategic rationale

Sustained support from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the Advanced Research Projects Agency for Health (ARPA-H) demands more than compelling ideas. It requires research enterprises defined by rigor, momentum, and resilience. Successful teams must possess the capacity to generate robust preliminary data, execute sophisticated experimental and clinical protocols, and navigate highly competitive and rapidly evolving funding landscapes. In this context, the postdoctoral scholar represents one of the most strategic and high-impact investments a university can make to strengthen a researcher's external funding competitiveness. It also provides an outstanding training environment for the postdoc to develop into an independent scientist. In general, laboratories where postdoctoral scholars participate in the conduct of research programs consistently demonstrate enhanced grant productivity, increased scholarly output, and stronger mentorship and training outcomes.

The MSU Research Foundation Postdoctoral Scholars Program is designed to provide the intellectual and operational capacity necessary for investigators to advance and implement solutions to complex, high-impact health challenges. Specifically, the program will:

- Enable faculty to generate the depth and breadth of preliminary data required to secure large-scale NIH and ARPA-H awards
- Create dedicated capacity to support both competitive renewals and new investigator-initiated proposals
- Empower faculty to respond effectively to ARPA-H's rapid-cycle, high-risk/high-reward funding opportunities
- Build sustained research pipelines that position investigators for center-level grants and multi-PI collaborations
- Strengthen the university's leadership in translating discovery into meaningful improvements in health outcomes
- Elevate the quality, rigor, and impact of scholarly publications while accelerating the development and translation of intellectual property

Faculty eligibility

The MSU Research Foundation Postdoctoral Scholars Program is a highly competitive program designed for research-active faculty who have established a strong record of federal funding and can articulate a clear, forward-looking vision for how a postdoctoral trainee will catalyze the next phase of their externally funded research portfolio and simultaneously provide an outstanding training environment for the scholar to transition into an independent scientist.

Applicants must meet all of the following criteria:

- Demonstrated success in securing significant federal funding from agencies such as the National Institutes of Health (NIH), Advanced Research Projects Agency for Health (ARPA-

H), or other HHS-related offices (e.g., CDC, FDA, AHRQ, etc.), reflecting a sustained and competitive research program

- A strong and consistent record of peer-reviewed publications appropriate to career stage and discipline, evidencing ongoing scholarly productivity and influence
- Demonstrated success in graduate and postdoctoral mentoring appropriate to career stage
- A clearly defined and feasible plan to recruit a highly qualified postdoctoral scholar within three to six months of award notification
- A demonstrated commitment to the postdoctoral scholar's independent career development, including opportunities for co-authorship, conference participation, and mentored grant writing. Faculty collaboration with Office of Postdoctoral Affairs (OPA) will be essential to ensure systematic implementation of postdoc mentoring plan.
- Commitment towards the postdoctoral trainee's path to independence evidenced by engagement with grant submissions on which the scholar is PI (F and/or K awards)
- A compelling and strategically articulated narrative that demonstrates how the postdoctoral appointment will catalyze multiple federal grant submissions: either by directly advancing the investigator's broader scientific vision or by expanding research capacity in ways that empower the faculty member to devote greater focus and intellectual energy to high-impact large-team proposal development

Department chairs and deans are strongly encouraged to write letters of support for faculty who are at a pivotal inflection point in their research trajectory, investigators who have demonstrated the ability to secure federal funding and are exceptionally well-positioned to compete for substantially greater levels of support. These supporting letters should be included along with the application.

Postdoctoral scholar recruitment

Recruitment philosophy

MSU Research Foundation postdoctoral scholars are distinguished appointments that carry significant institutional prestige and are designed to attract exceptional postdoctoral scholars capable of securing positions at the most competitive research-intensive institutions nationwide. The program has equal-weight toward external recruitment, fostering the infusion of new scientific talent, innovative thinking, and diverse perspectives into the university's research enterprise.

Faculty are expected to recruit from leading doctoral programs at peer research-intensive universities, academic medical centers, and schools of public health with demonstrated excellence in biomedical and health sciences training. Selected candidates should bring complementary

expertise, original scientific insight, and the intellectual independence necessary to make immediate and meaningful contributions to high-performing research programs.

MSU Research Foundation postdoctoral scholars are not intended as mechanisms for internal retention within the same research group. Accordingly, faculty may not appoint individuals who completed their doctoral training under their direct supervision to these roles. This policy is essential to ensuring that the program fulfills its mission of broadening the institution's scientific network while strengthening its capacity through the recruitment of outstanding talent.

Application components

A complete MSU Research Foundation postdoctoral scholars application consists of the following elements (total narrative not to exceed 4 pages, excluding budget, CV and support letters - maximum of three, one-page length):

- Research vision statement (2 pages) — A description of the applicant's current federally funded research program, the specific scientific directions the postdoctoral scholar will pursue, and the federal funding opportunities that will be enabled by addition of an exceptional postdoctoral trainee
- Federal funding track record (1 page) — A summary of current and recent federal grants (last four years), including role, funding period, total costs, and publications resulting from each award
- Postdoctoral scholar recruitment and mentorship plan (1 page) — A concrete plan for identifying and recruiting an exceptional postdoctoral candidate, including target institutions and timelines; a description of the mentorship structure and how the scholar will develop an independent research identity and apply for F and/or K awards. Include the list of past and current doctoral and postdoctoral mentees and their current positions (for past mentees)
- Budget and supplemental support plan (up to 1 page) — A description of the PI's existing funding sources to cover costs beyond NIH NRSA salary and fringe benefits, including equipment, research supplies, and travel. Awardees are expected to have a documented funding source for these costs prior to the postdoctoral scholar's start date.
- NIH-style biosketch — Current and complete
- Department chair or dean letter of support — Confirming the faculty member's eligibility, their capacity to mentor a postdoctoral scholar, and the department's support for their participation in the program
- Up to two other support letters may be included from collaborators, industry partners, or national labs

Review criteria and selection

Applications will be reviewed by a faculty committee convened by the Office of Research and Innovation and evaluated on the following weighted criteria:

Criterion	Weight
Federal funding track record	25%
Scientific merit and federal funding potential	30%
Scholar recruitment plan	20%
Mentorship and career development	15%
Institutional impact	10%

Institutional impact here implies growing or strengthening a scientific domain that will broaden the opportunity for researchers at MSU. Applications are aligned with potentially promising research areas at MSU. Applicants may be invited for a brief presentation to the review committee. Funding decisions will be communicated within 8 weeks of the submission deadline. Up to 15 positions will be funded in the inaugural cohort.

Award terms and conditions

- Each award funds one postdoctoral position for two years at a salary commensurate with NIH NRSA stipend levels, plus fringe benefits and a modest research/travel allowance
- Each award covers NIH NRSA-level salary and fringe benefits only. Principal investigators are responsible for securing independent funding to cover all associated costs, including equipment, research supplies, and travel. Evidence of this funding source must be provided prior to the postdoctoral scholar's start date
- Continuation of funding in Year 2 is contingent on satisfactory progress review at the 12-month mark
- Faculty awardees are expected to demonstrate increased federal grant activity during the two-year appointment — securing increased number and size of sponsored awards and/or participation in large team sponsored program efforts
- Awardees will participate in annual ORI Postdoc symposium and submit annual progress reports to the Office of Research and Innovation
- Adherence to the provisions outlined in [MSU's Postdoctoral Scholar Handbook](#), including participation in goal setting for the postdoctoral scholar. The university retains the right to recover funds in cases of postdoc departure before 12 months, subject to documented extenuating circumstances

Questions and submission

For questions about program eligibility, application requirements, or postdoc recruitment resources, contact the Office of Research and Innovation at proposal@msu.edu. Application materials should be submitted electronically via the [submission portal](#) by July 15, 2026.