

Office of the Vice Provost for Research

Postdoctoral Fellowship Proposals

This is to clarify when it is necessary to route proposals for Postdoctoral Fellowships through the Vice Provost for Research for sign-off on the Division Approval Form (DAF).

The general policy.¹ Whenever a research proposal includes a PI or Co-PI who is not a tenure-track professorial faculty member, the division is required to submit the proposal for review and approval by the Vice Provost for Research. This should take place only after the proposal has been reviewed and approved by the Division Chair and includes a written statement from a professorial faculty member agreeing to provide oversight of the project.

An exception for Postdoctoral Fellowships. At Caltech, Postdoctoral Scholars occasionally apply for a type of grant that is called a "Postdoctoral Fellowship." Such awards typically provide support for the postdoc in the form of a stipend and may also include very limited funds for supplies and materials and other expenses. Some sponsors require that the Postdoc be listed as the Principal Investigator on the application and that the faculty sponsor or advisor be listed as the Co-PI. Other sponsors require that the postdoc's faculty sponsor be listed as the PI and the Postdoc be listed as the Co-PI. In either instance, it is not necessary to obtain the Vice Provost's signature on the DAF, as long as

- The proposal is being submitted in response to a solicitation for Postdoctoral Fellowships, not a research grant²
- The DAF clearly identifies the Postdoc's faculty sponsor/advisor
- The Division Chair has indicated approval of the proposal by signing the DAF
- The Postdoc has a current Conflict of Interest disclosure on file

If the postdoc is submitting a proposal for a sponsored research project, i.e., one that covers more than a stipend/salary and nominal supplies and materials, the Vice Provost's signature will be required.

When the postdoc is not yet at Caltech and has not yet been accepted by Caltech. There may be situations when a postdoc may wish to submit an application for a Postdoctoral Fellowship before he or she has been accepted to Caltech. In such cases, the postdoc should follow the same procedures as all other postdocs who are applying for a postdoctoral fellowship:

- Complete a Division Approval Form (DAF) that clearly identifies the Postdoc's faculty sponsor/advisor

¹ The Caltech Faculty Handbook states that only "faculty members of professorial rank and senior research faculty...may serve as principal investigators on sponsored research projects. Others, [including] postdoctoral scholars, with the approval of their Division Chair and the Vice Provost, may serve as principal investigator under special circumstances and with the understanding that a supervising professorial faculty member assumes responsibility for the validity and importance of the research and management of the budget."

² NIH Research Career Development Awards, grants in the "K" series, e.g., K99, "Pathway to Independence," are research grants, not Postdoctoral Fellowships.

- Clearly indicate on the DAF whether or not the postdoc has “any financial interests that he/she believes may be, or could be perceived to be, financial conflicts of interest with the proposed research activity.”
[Note: If there is a positive response to this question, the postdoc must be entered into the Caltech HR system and complete the Conflict of Interest Disclosure.]
- Obtain the approval of the Division Chair on the DAF. Note that prior to obtaining the Chair’s signature on the DAF, the Faculty sponsor must still have completed his/her COI disclosure in order for the proposal to be submitted.

If the postdoc does not have a positive response to the conflict of interest question on the DAF and has not yet been accepted at Caltech, the proposal may be submitted without obtaining the approval of the Vice Provost for Research if the proposal has been approved by the Division Chair.

As soon as the postdoc is informed by the sponsoring agency that he/she will be receiving the fellowship award, the postdoc must be entered into the Caltech HR system and then complete the Conflict of Interest Disclosure. The award will not be accepted by Caltech until the Office of Sponsored Research has been informed that the Conflict of Interest Disclosure has been reviewed and any potential or actual conflict has been managed.

Questions should be directed to the Office of Research Compliance or the Office of Sponsored Research.