

NIDA International Program Drug Abuse Research Fellowships

Application Instructions⁰¹²⁰²⁰

The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) International Program offers the following postdoctoral fellowship opportunities.

- The INVEST Drug Abuse Research Fellowship (INVEST)
- The INVEST/CTN Drug Abuse Research Fellowship (INVEST/CTN)
- The INVEST Prevention Drug Abuse Research Fellowship (INVEST Prevention)

A fourth postdoctoral opportunity, the NIDA–Inserm Postdoctoral Drug Abuse Research Fellowship, provides a unique opportunity for U.S. and French scientists to obtain postdoctoral training with French and United States (U.S.) mentors, respectively. Application instructions for the NIDA–Inserm fellowship are provided in a separate packet.

The INVEST, INVEST/CTN, and INVEST Prevention postdoctoral fellowships provide unique opportunities for non-U.S. researchers to obtain postdoctoral training with U.S. NIDA-funded researchers. The fellowship may be renewable once (after evaluation of the first fellowship period).

About the INVEST Fellowship

Applicants and U.S. NIDA-funded researchers (who serve as mentors) may propose to conduct their research in any aspect of the biomedical, social, or behavioral components of drug abuse and addiction.

Previous fellows and their mentors have conducted research in all aspects of NIDA research, including basic science, epidemiology, prevention, treatment, and preclinical and clinical sciences.

About the INVEST/CTN Fellowship

Applicants and U.S. NIDA-funded researchers may propose to conduct their research in any aspect of the Clinical Trials Network (CTN) research agenda on drug abuse and addiction, such as intervention research, clinical trials methodology, or drug abuse treatment as HIV/AIDS prevention.

U.S. NIDA-funded researchers must be affiliated with one of the existing CTN Regional Research and Training Centers identified at <https://www.drugabuse.gov/about-nida/organization/cctn/ctn>.

The fellowship is offered by NIDA's International Program and the Center for Clinical Trials Network.

About the INVEST Prevention Fellowship

Applicants and U.S. NIDA-funded researchers may propose to conduct their research in any area of drug abuse prevention research, such as prevention intervention research, prevention services research, prevention methodology, or drug abuse prevention as HIV/AIDS prevention.

The fellowship is offered by NIDA's International Program and the Division of Epidemiology, Services and Prevention Research (DESPR).

More Background on Fellowships

NIDA encourages outstanding early-career scientists to apply for these competitive postdoctoral fellowships. The INVEST, INVEST/CTN, and INVEST Prevention postdoctoral fellowships are awarded for 1 year.

During fellowships, fellows receive training in drug abuse research methods, develop and conduct research projects with NIDA-funded mentors, and participate in professional development activities. Fellows also learn about the National Institutes of Health (NIH) grant application process from U.S. mentors who have successfully sought NIDA support.

Each fellow receives a stipend to cover living expenses and an allowance to cover the cost of health insurance and professional development activities. The fellowship also provides air travel, for the fellow only, for both travel to the United States to begin the fellowship and travel back to his or her home country upon completion of the fellowship.

Fellows and their U.S. mentors join a network of international scientists who exchange information and collaborate on drug abuse research regionally, nationally, and globally.

Applicant Eligibility

Requirements for *applicants* include:

- An earned doctoral degree in medicine, public health, or biomedical, behavioral, or social science
- A *minimum* of 2 years of postdoctoral research experience, including a demonstrated ability to engage in independent research
- Written assurance from an institution in the home country that there is a position to which the applicant can return after completing the fellowship
- Proficiency in written and spoken English
- Citizenship or permanent residency of a country other than the United States
- Living and working outside the United States at the time the application is submitted
- Eligibility for a J-1 visa to enter the United States

Mentor Eligibility

Requirements for *mentors* include:

- Being a NIDA-funded researcher whose grant will be active throughout the proposed fellowship period
- Mentor's institution is a U.S. Department of State designated sponsor authorized to issue Form DS-2019, Certificate of Eligibility for Exchange Visitor (J-1) Status for the applicant and his or her accompanying dependents

Note: Remember, for the INVEST/CTN fellowship, the NIDA-funded researcher also must be affiliated with one of the CTN Regional Research and Training Centers identified at <https://www.drugabuse.gov/about-nida/organization/cctn/ctn>.

Tips for Finding a Potential Mentor

First, write a brief summary of your goals for the fellowship. Outline your proposed research question, the scientific methods you will use to answer that question, and the data needed to complete your investigation. List the skills, techniques, or methods you wish to learn or improve during your fellowship.

This exercise will help you identify the search terms you will use to identify potential mentors. You can search the RePORTER database of research projects supported by NIH at <https://projectreporter.nih.gov/reporter.cfm>, review peer-reviewed publications indexed by PubMed at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/>, and consult the listing of previous postdoctoral fellows and mentors at https://www.drugabuse.gov/international/fellowships-postdoctoral-training#postdoc_fellow_mentor.

For the INVEST/CTN Fellowship, contact one of the existing CTN Regional Research and Training Centers identified at <https://www.drugabuse.gov/about-nida/organization/cctn/ctn>.

Before contacting a potential mentor, you should:

- Confirm your eligibility for the fellowship by emailing the NIDA International Program at ip@nida.nih.gov. In your message, please indicate which fellowship opportunity interests you. (You also may email the program with any general questions about the process.)
- Review your resume or curriculum vitae (CV) to ensure your information is current.
- Learn more about the potential mentor—including the person’s scientific discipline and specific research interests—by reviewing the potential mentor’s publications, research background, and/or professional website.

When emailing a potential mentor:

- Provide information about your eligibility, educational and professional background (including your resume or CV and list of publications), and the goals of your fellowship and research project.
- Discuss what interests you about the mentor’s research and what you would hope to learn under his or her mentorship.
- Avoid contacting more than two or three potential mentors at the same time.

Information on Preparing the Application

The application is now submitted through the online application system. A complete application (OMB #0925-0733) requires contributions from the applicant, the applicant’s current employer, the applicant’s references, the mentor, and the mentor’s institution. The applicant and mentor should note the following information:

1. **Incomplete applications will *NOT* be reviewed.**
2. Applications and all accompanying materials must be written in English only.
3. The sample application form, available on the NIDA International Program’s website, shows the type of information needed to complete the online application.
4. When starting the online application, the applicant may complete and submit the application at that time or save the content and return later to complete and submit the application. The applicant may select only one type of program (INVEST, INVEST/CTN, or INVEST Prevention) for which to be considered.
5. The applicant should become familiar with the U.S. Federal regulations on the conduct of research supported by NIH.
 - a. For a complete discussion of NIH regulations, consult the NIH Grants Policy Statement at <https://grants.nih.gov/grants/policy/nihgps/nihgps.pdf> or Part III, Section 2 of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service Grant Application, PHS 398 Instructions at <http://grants2.nih.gov/grants/funding/phs398/phs398.html>.

- b. Any research conducted as a result of a NIDA International Program Drug Abuse Research Fellowship award must comply with all NIH policies as discussed in the NIH Grants Policy Statement, Part II, section 4, Public Policy Requirements, Objectives, and Other Appropriation Mandates.
6. The applicant will be required to upload a full Research Plan developed in cooperation with, and approved by, the selected mentor.
 - a. The INVEST Prevention Fellowship research plan is to focus on drug abuse prevention research.
 - b. The INVEST/CTN Fellowship research plan is to focus on any aspect of the CTN research agenda on drug abuse and addiction.
7. The mentor must complete the mentor online application, which includes uploading a mentor statement.
8. The “Certification and Acceptance” section of the applicant and mentor’s application must be completed before the online application can be successfully submitted.

Background on the Mentor Institution’s Sponsorship Requirements

The mentor will obtain, from his or her institution, a letter, on institution/organization letterhead, confirming the institution as a U.S. Department of State designated sponsor authorized to issue Form DS-2019, Certificate of Eligibility for Exchange Visitor (J-1) Status for the applicant and his or her accompanying dependents if a fellowship is awarded to the applicant. This letter from the mentor institution must be emailed directly to the NIDA International Program at ip@nida.nih.gov by the application deadline.

Information on the Applicant’s Professional References

Using the Reference Report Form downloaded from the website, the applicant should complete Part I of the form. The applicant should provide a copy of the Reference Report Form to his or her two professional references (preferably one from the home country supervisor and one from a research colleague).

Each person serving as a reference should complete Part II of the Reference Report Form, including the rating scale. Each reference must also attach a letter of reference, on institution/organization letterhead, explaining his or her association with the applicant. The letter also should comment on the applicant’s training and experience, including other areas as appropriate, and identify strengths and weaknesses that should be considered in evaluating the applicant’s potential for a research career. The form and letter of reference must be written in English only.

Each reference must email the completed Reference Report Form and letter of reference directly to the NIDA International Program at ip@nida.nih.gov by the application deadline.

Instructions for Submitting the Application and Supporting Documentation

Application Deadline: Annually on October 1

Notification of Award: Annually on December 1

Each applicant and mentor will need to complete all sections of the electronic application form and upload the required documentation (e.g., fellowship research plan, mentor statement) by **11:59 p.m. eastern time on October 1.**

The two professional references with letters of recommendation and the mentor institution's visa letter must be submitted directly to the NIDA International Program via email at ip@nida.nih.gov by **11:59 p.m. eastern time on October 1**.

For more information on these fellowships, visit <https://www.drugabuse.gov/international/fellowships-postdoctoral-training> or email ip@nida.nih.gov.

Preparing Your NIDA International Program Drug Abuse Research Fellowship Research Plan

The Research Plan is the most important part of the application. This plan should be well formulated and presented in sufficient detail so that reviewers can evaluate its scientific merit.

The applicant should actively seek the advice and cooperation of the selected mentor while preparing the Research Plan. The mentor's collaboration is important, but the **applicant** must write the Research Plan.

The plan should be specific and informative, and it should avoid redundancy. Brevity and clarity in the description of the Research Plan are considered indicative of an applicant's approach to the research objective and ability to conduct a superior project.

The Research Plan **should be four typed pages or less**, not including literature citations. The applicant should use the following format:

- (1) **Specific Aims.** State the specific purposes of the research and the hypotheses to be tested.
- (2) **Background and Significance.** Briefly describe the background of the Research Plan. This is an important consideration in the initial review of your application. Concisely state the importance of the Research Plan by relating specific aims to broad, long-term objectives.
- (3) **Research Design and Methods.** Discuss the following points in detail:
 - The research design and procedures to be used to accomplish the specific aims
 - Sampling design, if conducting primary data collection
 - The analytic plan detailing the statistical approach to addressing the hypotheses
 - Any precautions necessary for procedures, situations, or materials that may be hazardous to personnel
 - Potential limitations of the proposed project
 - The timeline for completion of the proposed investigation
 - The contributions that this project will make to the field of drug abuse research
- (4) **NIH Regulations on the Conduct of Research.** Research conducted as part of a fellowship is subject to the same U.S. Federal regulations, policies, guidelines, and review considerations applied to all NIH research project grant applications. Within the Research Plan, applicants must demonstrate that they understand and have planned to comply with those rules, particularly if the research involves human subjects or vertebrate animals (see Information on Preparing the Application, item 5).
- (5) **Literature Citations.** Provide literature citations at the end of the Research Plan. Each citation must include the authors' names, book or journal titles, volume number, page numbers, and year of publication.

Review Criteria

Applications are peer-reviewed through a competitive process and assessed according to scientific merit, the proposal's relevance to drug abuse and NIDA's research mission, adequacy of the applicant's education and experience to conduct the proposed research, likelihood that the proposed research can be completed within 1 year, and compatibility of the applicant's and mentor's objectives.

Several factors, outlined below, may enhance the rating of an application.

Applicant

- Demonstrates previous experience and education appropriate with the proposed study
- Demonstrates enough research experience to successfully complete the proposed study, though the applicant is not yet considered to be a senior scientist
- Provides letters of reference that support the applicant's scientific record
- Has authored a peer-reviewed scientific article in the area of the proposed research

Research Plan

- Describes how the proposed study is unique, how it will expand or advance the field of drug abuse research, and how it is consistent with the applicant's career goals
- Clearly and concisely states proposed aims, goals, and objectives appropriate to the stated hypotheses, conveying scientific sophistication and strong analytical skills
- Thoroughly reviews the relevant literature
- Acknowledges any potential regulatory issues or methodological limitations
- Clearly states the applicant's role in the proposed research and the collaborative plan between the applicant and the mentor
- Describes which skills and experiences will be gained in the process of working with the mentor, why that proposed training would be otherwise unavailable to the applicant, and how those skills will be used when the applicant completes the fellowship and returns home
- Includes a realistic timeline for completing the proposed study within the 1-year fellowship

Mentor

- Demonstrates significant expertise in the research area
- Holds a NIDA grant that will remain active throughout the fellowship period
- Has experience training fellows or other graduate-level students
- Has affiliation with an institution that can provide the resources necessary for the successful completion of the fellowship
- Carries out research that complements the applicant's proposed study
- Demonstrates how the mentor will ensure that the applicant is knowledgeable about, and able to comply with, NIH regulations regarding the conduct of research