

HBI Postdoctoral Pioneers Program - 2027 RFA

Postdoctoral fellows are the lifeblood of biomedical research labs. They often develop or adapt new technologies and experimental paradigms, which allow their labs to address research questions that were previously intractable. They also can be the driving force behind a lab's entry into a new research area.

Recognizing that innovation frequently occurs at the interface of different disciplines and requires labs to venture out of established areas of expertise, the Harvard Brain Science Initiative (HBI) aims to support postdocs who serve as pioneers in their labs by taking on new or risky projects.

The HBI Postdoctoral Pioneers Program offers \$50,000 fellowships to mid- to late-stage postdocs who are conducting basic neuroscience research in areas outside of their lab's established focus.

Award Information:

- These fellowships are meant to be flexible and enhance productivity at a critical time in the postdoc's career. Expenses that are covered include (as examples) postdoc salary, the salary of a technician directly supporting the postdoc's project, professional development opportunities, and/or specialized research supplies needed for the postdoc's project.
- They have an award period of one year. A no-cost extension of up to one year may be approved upon request.
- No F&A expenses are allowed.
- We anticipate awarding ~six fellowships in this cycle.

Selection Criteria:

Awardees will be chosen based on scientific excellence, commitment to the work proposed, extent to which the work is truly pioneering for the lab, and consideration of funding impact on applicant's research progress and career. Personal circumstances may also be taken into account.

[You can read about past awardees here.](#)

Eligibility:

- This program is open to full-time Harvard postdoctoral fellows who are conducting neuroscience research in labs at Harvard University, in [the FAS](#) or [HMS Quad \(Blavatnik Institute\) basic science and social science departments](#).
 - Examples of relevant [FAS departments](#) include, but are not necessarily restricted to, Molecular and Cellular Biology, Psychology, Organismic and Evolutionary Biology, Chemistry and Chemical Biology, Physics, Human Evolutionary Biology. (Note, SEAS is affiliated with FAS and SEAS postdocs are eligible.)
 - [HMS Quad basic and social science departments](#) are Neurobiology, Cell Biology, Genetics, Immunology, Microbiology, Systems Biology, Biological Chemistry and Molecular Pharmacology, Biomedical Informatics, Global Health and Social Medicine, Health Care Policy, as well as the University-wide Stem Cell and Regenerative Biology Department (SCRB).
 - Postdocs in hospital labs are eligible only if the PI has a faculty appointment in one of the HMS Quad Basic and Social Science Departments listed above. Please note, Neurology is a clinical department (not eligible), distinct from Neurobiology (eligible).
 - To be eligible, the postdoc must have completed at least two years of full-time postdoctoral work in their lab by January 2027.
 - Individuals with the title “Postdoctoral Fellow” or “Research Associate” are eligible. Individuals with “Instructor” or other titles which come with PI rights are not eligible. (If any ambiguity or question, please contact us well ahead of the deadline to discuss.)
 - **Each lab may nominate only one postdoc per application cycle.**
 - If a postdoc is co-mentored, that should be specified on the application.
 - The primary mentor will count as the sponsor. (If there is any ambiguity or question in this area—or any change envisioned in terms of which lab is paying the postdoc—please contact us well ahead of the deadline to discuss.)
 - While applications from all eligible labs will be considered, when all other things are equal, priority may be given to labs which did not receive funding in the last cycle.
 - Individuals who have received an HBI pioneer grant in past rounds are not eligible to apply again.
-

Application Deadlines

- **Applications are due Monday Nov 9th, 2026 by 5pm EST**
- Decisions will likely be announced late January
- Grants will likely begin in March

How to Apply:

Please use this link to apply via the Harvard University Funding Portal:

<https://btly.communityforce.com/4rbqqjs>

We recommend using Google Chrome or Firefox as your web browser.

Ensure that you have spoken to your advisor about the one application per lab policy and your application will be the sole one.

Following this, please ask your advisor to submit a recommendation letter for you in the portal. You can press the “Request” button in the portal and enter in their email address. The system will then send them a code that allows them to log in and submit the letter.

Advisors:

Please describe the scientific merits of the applicant’s work and their talents, providing context on how the proposed work fits into the lab’s overall goals, and explaining why it is pioneering. Please also share the impact you expect this funding to have on the postdoc’s career, as well as your lab.

Your letter should be 11-point Arial font with one-inch margins all around, not to exceed two pages. Please upload in PDF format.

Applicants:

Please prepare the components listed below. All text can be entered directly into the form fields, except for the research description and NIH biosketch, which must be uploaded separately. Please upload in PDF format.

Note that you will be asked for the name and email address of your lab’s grant manager. If you do not know who that is, please check with your PI.

Proposal Title

Short Abstract, 250 words or fewer, describing your proposed research, how it relates to the lab’s interests as a whole and what you feel makes it pioneering.

Research Description, two pages or less, inclusive of any figures, briefly introducing your research project, its major aims, progress made so far, and big picture significance. Explain clearly how the proposed research is pioneering for your lab.

- Use one-inch margins all around, 11-point Arial font. (Figure legends should also be 11-point Arial font.)
- A short list of references may also be included. References can be on a separate page.
- Please avoid jargon and write for a broad audience; not all reviewers will be experts in your sub-field of neuroscience.

Budget Request, one to two paragraphs describing how you would use the funds if you were awarded this fellowship. If you are a recipient of any other award(s), internal or external, please note those here, including the award period and expenses covered, and explain any potential overlap. (Also, please note that no F&A expenses can be covered by this mechanism.)

Personal Statement, 250 words or fewer, describing your career goals, what stage you are at in your postdoctoral training, and how receiving this funding would make an impact on your work

NIH Biosketch – Use new sciENCv format (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/sciencv/>). Please “Print to PDF” before uploading because the original, digitally certified PDF file does not upload in our portal.

You will receive an auto-confirmation of your submission from the funding portal right away. If you don't receive that, please check in with us before the application deadline has passed.

Within one week of the application deadline, you will also receive a manual email from HBI_Grants@harvard.edu confirming your application is complete. Please check back if you do not hear from us in this time frame.

Questions?

Please reach out to Parizad Bilimoria at HBI_Grants@harvard.edu.