

Guidance for Those Applying to the NSF Graduate Research Fellowship Program

1. You can find information about the program at <http://www.nsfgrfp.org>.
2. Georgia Institute of Technology is not listed as the university name in the dropdown menu. You need to select "Georgia Tech Research Corporation." Georgia Tech's contract with NSF is under this name, the Institute's contracting entity.
3. Three letters of reference are required. Referees may benefit from the following resource about what NSF wants in a reference letter, which is outlined at:
<https://www.eeducation.psu.edu/writingrecommendationlettersonline/node/156>.
4. The NSF website has helpful information for applicants, which is available here:
https://www.nsfgrfp.org/applicants/tips_for_applying
5. Eligibility criteria is found here, under Eligibility Information:
<https://www.nsf.gov/pubs/2019/nsf19590/nsf19590.pdf>
6. Two essays are required: There is a Personal, Relevant Background and Future Goals Statement, and a Graduate Research Plan Statement. Both must address intellectual merit (what you are contributing to knowledge) and broader impact (how your work has or will benefit society).
7. You can apply even when you are not sure about your research topic — NSF allows you to make changes if you receive an award, and about 90 percent of applicants change their topic. The important thing for NSF is to see if you can write a strong research proposal by stating the objective and the methodology. Be clear about intellectual merit (how it will contribute to knowledge) and about broader impacts (how your research will benefit society).
8. Read the NSF GRFP FAQs at: <https://www.nsf.gov/pubs/2019/nsf19081/nsf19081.jsp>.
9. Get feedback on your essays from the writing specialist in your department (if there is one), from the Fellowships Office (in Pre-Graduate and Pre-Professional Advising, C2D2 <https://advising.gatech.edu/tags/majors/pre-graduate-pre-professional-pgpp>), from your advisor, and from the Communications Lab (<http://www.communicationcenter.gatech.edu/>). Start essays long before they are due.
10. NSF provides feedback. You will have this information if you try a second time.
11. A broader impact valued by NSF is work done in STEM areas with schools. Try, if possible, to include experience with schools as part of your background in the personal part of the essay.
12. Make the personal essay section interesting. Avoid beginning 'when I was a child.' Tell a story that is yours, and let reviewers know who you are.
13. When discussing previous research, include what the objective of the research was, what your role was, how the research will contribute to knowledge, and how it will have impact on society. Mention whether you worked alone or as part of a team.
14. NSF GRFP applications do NOT include GRE scores.

15. The journey of applying for an NSF GRFP fellowship may not be quite as good as winning the award, but it is a special experience that is valuable. The essays serve as an excellent foundation for other applications and for professional development.