

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for candidates

Questions about the Program

Q1. What is the Australian Science Policy Fellowship Pilot Program?

The Australian Science Policy Fellowship Pilot Program places early- to mid-career scientists and engineers in participating government departments for 12 months. As a policy officer, you will use your knowledge and analytical skills and at the same time gain first-hand experience of policy making in the federal government.

Q2. What benefits will I get from participating in the program?

As a pathway program, the Science Policy Fellowships program is designed to introduce you to the public service and policy making. Through the program, you will receive on-the-job training in, and experience in, policy development. In addition you will have opportunities to participate in mentoring and formal training to enhance your policy skills.

By the end of the program, you will have gained valuable skills, experience and insight into public policy. Should you choose to pursue a career in public policy, you will be well-placed to competitively apply for other policy roles.

Q3. How long is the fellowship program?

The program is a 12 month long learning experience running from July to June.

Q4. If I am successful how do I prepare for the experience of working in a Commonwealth Government department?

All participants will receive introductory training on the workings of the Commonwealth Government, and exposure to some of the issues, institutions, and individuals involved in federal policymaking.

Q5. Are fellowships available every year?

The fellowship program is currently in a pilot stage and has been approved to run for three years beginning in July 2018. There is no commitment from the Government to continue beyond the pilot at this stage.

Q6. May I opt for a shorter fellowship? Is it possible to start the fellowship at a different time of year?

No. The fellowships are available only as a 12-month commitment starting in July.

Q7. Can I participate in the program part-time while I continue my research?

No. The program is designed to fully immerse you in policy development and requires a full-time commitment.

Q8. Is my participation in the program considered a career disruption by the ARC?

The ARC considers participation in the program as an allowable career interruption, as research activities cannot be undertaken while participating in the program. Applicants to ARC schemes could claim a career interruption regarding non-research employment not concurrent with research employment for the period that they hold the Science Policy Fellowship.

Further information on the ARC's policy on eligibility and career interruptions can be found on the [ARC website](#).

Q9. Is my participation in the program considered a career disruption by the NHMRC?

The opportunities available to participants in the Science Policy Fellowship program will be taken into consideration by the peer review panel, in accordance with NHMRC's policy to assess applications "relative to opportunity". Assessment criteria descriptors make specific reference to policy activities, which suggests that the Science Policy Fellowship placements could add value to an applicant's research track record.

The Science Policy Fellowship Program does not meet the NHMRC definition of a career disruption for the purposes of eligibility for funding schemes, particularly those that have "years post-PhD" limits.

Further information on career disruptions and the NHMRC's assessment criteria and can be found within each funding schemes Grant Guidelines available on [GrantConnect](#).

Q10. Where are the fellowships located?

Canberra, ACT, Australia. Host departments will assist you with reasonable costs to relocate to Canberra if necessary.

Q11. Who funds the fellowships?

Fellowships are funded by the departments where participants are placed.

Q12. Do I need to have a security clearance?

All participants will be required to obtain a minimum baseline security clearance, this involves pre-employment and background checks. Some participating departments may require a higher level clearance. You do not need to have a security clearance at the time of application.

Q13. What if the program isn't right for me? Can I leave part way through?

Host departments and the Office of the Chief Scientist will provide support to policy officers, and may be able to move policy officers into a new role within the host department. You can also exit the program if you wish to return to your previous role.

Eligibility Questions

Q14. Do I have to have a PhD?

Scientists in medical and health sciences; biological, physical, or earth sciences, behavioural sciences, or computational sciences and mathematics are required to have a terminal scientific degree (PhD, ScD, MD, DVM, etc.) in order to apply for a fellowship.

You do not need to have a PhD if you have a Masters degree in any field of engineering plus a minimum of three years of professional engineering experience (not including further academic studies).

Q15. Who is the ideal candidate for a Science Policy Fellowship?

Our ideal candidate will have significant scientific expertise and an interest in transitioning to a career in policy. Fellows come from many different disciplines in science and engineering, and can come from academia, industry, and the not-for-profit sector. The program is targeted at early-to-mid career researchers who are no more than 15 years post-PhD.

Q16. Is previous experience in public policy necessary?

No, but it is important that you convey an understanding of, and interest in, government and public policy. You should also be prepared to speak about how your specialty and skill set might relate to policy issues, and how they can be applied in government decision-making.

Q17. I am completing my doctorate after the application deadline but before the fellowship year starts. Can I still apply?

No. The degree requirements must be met before applications close. If that is your situation, you may wish to apply for a Commonwealth department graduate program or you might consider applying next year.

Q18. What if I have completed all of my requirements for my doctorate, but my degree will not be conferred until after applications close?

You may be accepted into the program prior to your degree being conferred, provided all degree requirements have been met before applications close, including dissertation defence and any revisions (as applicable). In this situation, you would need to provide a letter from your committee chair (or equivalent appropriate official) verifying that you have satisfied all requirements for the PhD or equivalent degree.

Q19. Do I have to be an Australian Citizen?

Yes. Australian Citizenship is required for all participants.

Q20. May I apply if I am not yet an Australian Citizen but I expect to have my citizenship before the fellowship year begins?

No. Applicants to the fellowship program must have Australian Citizenship at the time of application.

Q21. Is there a fellowship program for undergraduate or graduate students?

There is currently no fellowship specifically for undergraduate or graduate students, however most Australian Government departments and agencies run a Graduate Program. Undergraduate and graduate students are encouraged to apply for one of these positions.

New PhD graduates may also consider applying for a departmental graduate program.

Q22. I am an Australian Public Service (APS) employee, am I eligible?

APS employees that are employed in a research role in a Commonwealth research institution are eligible to apply. However, if you are an APS employee in a policy or program role, you are not eligible as you are already embedded in the policymaking process. If you are an APS employee and you are unsure if you are eligible, please contact us at

OCS-projects@chiefscientist.gov.au.

[Application Process](#)

Q23. How do I prepare a competitive application?

In the 2018-19 program, competitive applications showed applicants' genuine interest in public policy, and demonstrated how their skills and experience are relevant to policy development.

In preparing your application, please read the program and applicant information to ensure you have a good understanding of the fellowships program, including the eligibility requirements, selection criteria and the application instructions. Then allow time to develop a comprehensive, well-presented, and polished candidate statement and other required documents (ensuring you adhere to the page and word limits indicated in the application form). Contact your referees early so they have time to prepare thoughtful letters of recommendation. If invited for an interview, come prepared to articulate your interests and background, and discuss how your science relates to policy.

Q24. What happens if one or more of my letters of recommendation arrive late or not at all?

All required information must be received by the application deadline. Applications with fewer than two letters are ineligible and will not be considered. In the interest of fairness to other applicants we cannot grant extensions if your letters do not arrive in time.

Q25. When will I be notified about the status of my application?

We will contact you in early March to notify you of the outcome of the short-listing process and if you have been selected for interview. Once interviews have been conducted, we will notify you of the outcome in April.

Q26. What if I can't attend the interview in person?

Wherever practicable, applicants will be asked to participate in a face-to-face interview. The panel may conduct interviews remotely (via video-conferencing) for applicants who cannot attend in person.

Q27. If I am successful, do I have a say in where I am placed for the program?

While candidates may express a preference for a position or host department, the host department will have final say and will offer positions to suitable candidates.

Q28. If I am not successful, can I reapply for the Science Policy Fellowship Pilot Program in future years?

Yes. There is no limit on the number of times you may apply in subsequent years.

Q29. May I receive feedback on my application or interview?

Feedback will only be provided for candidates shortlisted for interview.

Q30. Who will my employer be? How much will I be paid?

Successful candidates will be employed by the host agency participating in the pilot program.

Remuneration, employment conditions, entitlements and conditions of engagement will be in accordance with the employing agency's policies. You can find more information on pay scales in each department's enterprise agreement.

Q31. Can I contact host departments to talk about the roles offered?

Please direct all enquiries to OCS-projects@chiefscientist.gov.au. The Office of the Chief Scientist will handle all inquiries and direct them to host departments as appropriate.