

NRC Research Associateship Programs

Research Adviser Guide

As a Research Adviser to an NRC Research Associate, you play a key role in assuring that their tenure is not only productive but also a meaningful step forward in their career development, providing a foundation for future success. Additionally, your guidance ensures that the Associate's work in the laboratory enhances and complements the existing research efforts, contributing positively to the overall mission of the agency.

The following sections, describing certain aspects of the program, should provide you some guidance in your role as a Research Adviser. For more information about specific policies guiding the administration of the program, please refer to the [Policies, Procedures, and Practices](#).

Role of a Research Adviser

As a Research Adviser to an NRC Postdoctoral Research Associate, your role is similar to that of a principal investigator to a postdoctoral fellow at a research university, encompassing guidance, mentorship, and oversight of their research endeavors. Like guiding a postdoc in an academic setting, your support will involve fostering their intellectual growth, facilitating their integration into the research community, and helping them navigate the challenges and opportunities inherent in their critical phase of career development.

For an NRC Senior Research Associate, your relationship to them is akin to that of a professional colleague, engaging with them as a peer and valuing their expertise and insights. This collaborative approach fosters open dialogue and mutual respect, reflecting a partnership that recognizes the Senior Research Associate's advanced skills and contributions to the field.

Understanding that a Research Associate's subsequent career will be deeply influenced by their publication record, you should provide guidance and support to help them publish effectively and advance in their field. Beyond academic guidance, your encouragement and support is vital to guide an Associate in their growth as a researcher. Finally, you should assist the Research Associate in acclimating to the laboratory environment, procuring equipment, securing technical support, and obtaining access to any additional resources.

Communication

The majority of program-related communication is primarily handled between the Laboratory Program Representative (LPR) at the sponsoring agency and both the Program Administrator (PA) and Program Coordinator at the Fellowships Office of the National Academies. The LPR coordinates the Research Opportunities, approves new Research Advisers, and handles all day-to-day administrative details concerning the program at the laboratory. Any request to the Fellowships Office for expenditure of program funds administered by the National Academies must have the approval of the LPR.

The LPR serves as the foremost representative for the program at each sponsoring laboratory and stands as the initial point of contact for any inquiries or concerns related to the program. As a Research

Adviser, you are welcome to contact the Fellowships Office as needed for any guidance or support; however, the Program Administrator or Program Coordinator will typically call upon the LPR to assist in the resolution of any problems related to an Associate's award.

Research Opportunities

You must submit new or revised Research Opportunities through InfoRAP for approval by the Fellowships Office and your laboratory's LPR before they are made available online to potential applicants. Research Opportunities may be revised, deleted, or added at any time throughout the year.

Creating a New Research Opportunity

1. [Sign in to InfoRAP.](#)
2. Select **RAP Lab Opportunity Management**.
3. Select **create a new opportunity or add yourself to existing opportunity...** located under your list of research opportunities.
4. Select your division from the drop down under **Participating Agency/Program**.
5. Enter the title of your research opportunity.
6. Enter keywords separated by semicolons.
7. Enter the text of your research opportunity.
8. Select **submit** to forward your submission to the Fellowships Office for processing.

Requesting to be Added as an Adviser for an Existing Research Opportunity

1. [Sign in to InfoRAP.](#)
2. Select **RAP Lab Opportunity Management**.
3. Select **create a new opportunity or add yourself to existing opportunity...** located under your list of research opportunities.
4. Select your division from the dropdown list under **Participating Agency/Program**.
5. Select the Research Opportunity you wish to be added to from the dropdown list under **Research Opportunity**. (Note: You will not be able to make any edits to the existing Research Opportunity until you have been approved to be added to the existing Research Opportunity.)
6. Select **submit** to forward your request to the Fellowships Office for processing.

Revising the Content of an Existing Research Opportunity

1. [Sign in to InfoRAP.](#)
2. Select **RAP Lab Opportunity Management**.
3. Select the vertical ellipsis (:) to the right of the **active** or not active column for the research opportunity you wish to revise.
4. In the ACTIONS box, select **edit opportunity** to open the form.
5. Edit the title, keywords, and the text of the research opportunity (as applicable).
6. Select **submit** to forward your request to the Fellowships Office for processing.

Requesting a Change in Status for an Existing Research Opportunity

1. [Sign in to InfoRAP](#). (Contact rap@nas.edu if you require your login credentials.)
2. Select **RAP Lab Opportunity Management**.
3. Select the vertical ellipsis (:) to the right of the **active** or not active column to open the ACTIONS box for the research opportunity you wish to request a change in status for.
4. Select one of the following actions for **active** research opportunities:
 1. **Deactivate** – Deactivated research opportunities are not publicly viewable online and are not available for applicants to select in online applications. They appear in your list as not active.
 2. **Archive** – Archived research opportunities are not publicly viewable online and are not available for applicants to select in online applications. They do not appear in your list and remain dormant in the research opportunity database.
5. Select one of the following actions for **not active** RO's:
 1. **Activate** – Active research opportunities are publicly viewable online and are available for applicants to select in online applications. They appear in your list as **active**.
 2. **Archive** – Archived RO's are not publicly viewable online and are not available for applicants to select in online applications. They do not appear in your list and remain dormant in the research opportunity database.
6. Confirm the request to send a notification to the Fellowships Office to process the change.

Fiscal Matters

This section does not apply to NIST Advisers and Associates.

All funds for the conduct of the program at a laboratory are provided to the National Academies by means of a contract or cooperative agreement (CA) with the agency. The contract or CA allocates funds for various expenses, including stipends, allowances for relocation and travel, and contributions toward a health insurance program. Details about the various expenses are provided below to assist you in your role as a Research Adviser with an Associate on tenure. Please note that this information is intended as a guide and may not cover all specific circumstances or contingencies.

Stipend - The annual base stipend for new doctoral graduates receiving a Research Associateship award is determined by the sponsoring agency. This stipend is advertised in the details of each Research Opportunity for a specific laboratory or agency. Sponsoring labs can offer increments for each year an awardee has held the doctorate at the time of application, for a specific field of study, and for a cost-of-living differential. The Fellowships Office usually advises sponsoring agencies to regularly increase their base stipend level, aligning it with inflation and any increases in the cost of living.

Relocation - A Research Associate is reimbursed for expenses incurred in relocating from their current place of residence to the vicinity of the laboratory if the laboratory is more than 50 miles from the Associate's address at the time of the award offer. Relocation expenses are paid or reimbursed in accordance with Federal Travel Regulations and Joint Travel Regulations. Expenses include up to seven days of per diem and may be used, in part, for one house-hunting trip.

For appointments of six months or longer, travel expenses for immediate family members are also reimbursed. Domestic movement of household goods is performed by a national moving company that contracts with the National Academies. Those relocating from and returning to foreign countries and senior Research Associates on leave from a permanent position are usually reimbursed for return relocation. The cost of relocation travel includes a number of variables: number of persons relocating, mode of relocation, days required for relocation, distance of move, and options for movement of household goods. Initial budget estimates for movement of household goods are based on the maximum possible expenses that might be incurred.

Professional Travel - Research Associates are given a travel allowance to allow them to attend scientific meetings and for professional training. As with the base stipend, the exact amount of the travel allowance is determined by the sponsoring laboratory. All professional travel is approved using a Travel Authorization form that must be approved by the Research Adviser. Travel expense reimbursement is requested on a Travel Expense Report (TER), which must be submitted directly to the RAP Travel Office. Travel reimbursement adheres to Federal Travel Regulations, the Fly America Act, and other published policies regarding travel and payment is issued directly to the Associate. For more information regarding the RAP travel policies, please refer to the [Travel Guide](#).

Health Insurance - The National Academies negotiates coverage for all Research Associates with a health insurance company on a cost-participation basis with each sponsoring agency. Under this plan, participating Research Associates pay a portion of the premium and the remaining balance is paid by the sponsoring agency. Like all health insurance plans, premiums are adjusted periodically and are published for each program year.

Staff Visits

The Fellowships Office conducts periodic staff visits to participating laboratories as needed to maintain good communication and to ensure that program objectives are being met. Staff visits are arranged by the LPR and Program Administrator. These visits give Research Advisers and Research Associates the opportunity to meet with staff from the Fellowships Office to discuss the program and provide any feedback that can be used to improve the quality of the program.

Program Promotion and Recruitment of Applicants

The Fellowships Office collaborates with laboratory/agency staff to attract top-tier scientists and engineers to the Research Associateship Programs. This outreach includes online and print promotions, as well as attendance and recruitment booths at scientific conferences. However, data shows most RAP applicants learn about the program through Research Advisers or professional networks. As an Adviser, it's vital to leverage your professional reputation and network at scientific conferences to highlight opportunities within your laboratory. If you require any outreach materials to distribute, please contact the Fellowships Office (rap@nas.edu).

Application and Review Processes

Preparing the Application - As an initial step, prospective applicants are encouraged to select one or more Research Opportunities from the RAP website and to contact the corresponding Research Advisers to discuss ideas for specific research projects. The idea for the proposed project should be generated by the applicant; however, Research Advisers may give scientific or technical advice and, if time permits, provide an informal review of the proposal.

Laboratory/Center Review Form - Prior to National Academies' panel review, you will be tasked with reviewing any applications to your Research Opportunity and providing scientific evaluation of the project, its relevance to the scientific interests of the sponsoring organization, the availability of support facilities, and an indication of your willingness to serve as a Research Adviser to the prospective Research Associate. After your review of the application, the LPR will be asked to affirm their interest and support for the project should the applicant be recommended for an award. This recommendation allows the application to proceed to review by the scientists and engineers that make up the RAP review panels.

The NRC Research Associateships Panel Review - The Fellowships Office staff assembles panels of scientists and engineers to evaluate and score applications during quarterly reviews. Each application is read by at least three reviewers and some applications may be read by reviewers across two or more panels.

Roster of Recommended Candidates - After all applications are scored, a roster of recommended candidates is made available to the LPR. Applicants are divided into Quality Groups of A, B, and C on each roster. Applicants in the A and B categories are recommended for awards, with the higher scoring applicants being given priority. Applicants in the C category are not recommended but may reapply in any subsequent review. Any applicants who score lower than a C are prohibited from reapplying for a year.

Awards

Processing Awards - After receiving a roster of approved applicants, the LPR may authorize awards through InfoRAP. Awards are typically made to applicants in Quality Group A before any offers are made to applicants in Quality Group B. However, each sponsoring laboratory has its own award determination process. Please consult with your LPR for specific details

Notification of Awards - Once the LPR authorizes awards, award offers are extended to the approved applicants by the Fellowships Office. The award notification is sent via e-mail and includes a link to the Associate's module in InfoRAP where the awardee can accept or decline the award. Once accepting the award, the applicant can enter a proposed start date and begin completing certain contingencies and laboratory requirements. New awardees are provided information and guidance on program policies and procedures including relocation, movement of household goods (if applicable), professional travel, health insurance, and direct deposit payments.

Terms and Conditions of Awards - The awardee must fulfill certain contingencies prior to starting tenure. All awardees must provide proof of obtaining a doctoral degree and, typically, must complete a security review for access to the laboratory and other facilities. Foreign nationals must also provide proof of holding an appropriate visa.

An Associate's First Day at the Laboratory

Start Date Notification - On the first day in the laboratory the Research Associate must complete the Start Date workflow in InfoRAP. Upon submission by the Research Associate, you, as the Research Adviser, will receive an email notification requesting that you confirm that the Research Associate has reported to the laboratory or other remote station. This confirmation is required before stipend payments can be distributed.

Orientation to the Laboratory - Since each sponsoring laboratory has a unique environment and safety requirements, you are expected to provide orientation materials to any Research Associates who are starting tenure in your lab. Additionally, please ensure that the Research Associate is informed about any safety training that is required for them to conduct their research.

Professional Travel

Research Associates are encouraged to attend and/or participate in professional meetings. Prior to travel, a travel authorization (TA) form must be completed by the Research Associate, which will be sent to RAP Travel after approval by you and the LPR. After approval by RAP Travel, the Research Associate is authorized and encouraged to order prepaid tickets from the travel agency with whom the National Academies has contracted. Foreign travel requires additional approval by the National Academies, and in some cases, the sponsoring agency headquarters. Travel to collect data or use equipment or facilities at other locations is sometimes paid by the sponsoring laboratory, either directly to the Research Associate through invitational travel orders or by a supplement.

Award Renewal

An initial award for a postdoctoral Research Associate is for 12 months, renewable for additional 12-month periods, up to a maximum of 36 months, depending on the laboratory or agency. In special cases, renewals for periods of less than twelve months can be considered. Senior Research Associate awards and renewals may be as short as three months and may include a gap of up to one year between the initial award and the renewal.

You and your Research Associate will be notified 90 days before the expiration date of the Research Associate's tenure. If you and the Research Associate express mutual interest in renewal or extension, the Research Associate must complete and submit an online application form, which will be sent to you for approval. The LPR must authorize the renewal or extension. If a laboratory does not plan to recommend renewal or extension, the Research Associate should be so advised at least four to six months before the end of tenure to allow for the arrangement of follow-on employment.

Final Report

Before the last day of tenure, a Research Associate is required to submit a Final Report. These reports assist the National Academies in assessing the overall quality of the Associate's research experience and the benefits of the Research Associate's scientific productivity to the laboratory. The National Academies are contractually obligated to submit periodic reports to the sponsoring agency. Among a number of items, the periodic reports summarize information provided in the final reports of Research Associates completing their tenure.

Assistance with Career Placement

One of the primary objectives of the NRC Research Associateship Programs is to enhance the careers of the participants. As a Research Adviser, you play an important role in guiding postdoctoral Associates toward challenging and rewarding professional employment. Research Advisers frequently have extensive professional contacts with other scientists and administrators at universities, in private industry, and in other government agencies. These contacts can serve as a network for Research Associates seeking career placement. You are encouraged to play an active role in assisting Research Associates nearing the end of their tenure with obtaining permanent employment consistent with their professional qualifications and aspirations.