

USF Postdoctoral Research Fellowship: Mentorship Best Practice Guidelines

The expectation for USF Postdoctoral Research Fellowship awards is that all Fellows will have an appropriate and experienced Mentor within the host institution at which they are based for the Fellowship duration. The Mentor should be present to help initiate and successfully complete the proposed research plan, and to assist with the Fellow's career development. This role will therefore include interfacing with the host institution and local research community, and perhaps also external bodies if relevant (e.g. research funding bodies, NGOs, industry, etc.).

This document comprises best practice guidelines for the relationship between the Mentor and the USF Fellow.

Mentorship role

The USF expects that discussions over all aspects relevant to the formulation, conduct and presentation of the Fellow's research will be undertaken with the Mentor. The USF does not anticipate needing to intervene in this relationship, and will trust the Mentor to treat the Fellow fairly throughout the award.

However, there are certain expectations that the Mentor should fulfil:

- It is anticipated that the Mentor will be willing to assist the progress of the Fellow to ensure that they are able to fully realise their research ambitions during the fellowship (in practice this has also sometimes led to jointly authored publications).
- The Mentor should be willing to commit to regular and frequent meetings with the Fellow, typically at least once a month, and there is an expectation that the Mentor should be available for the entire duration of the Fellowship.
- The Mentor should ensure that the Fellow is welcomed into the relevant local research groups, networks and community at the host institution, and where available, other useful local institutions.
- The Mentor should ensure that the Fellow fully understands, and can make use of, the local resources and funds available to them at the HEI. This includes ensuring that the Fellow is in proper contact with the relevant staff and departments at the HEI (e.g. finance, research expenses, other support services etc.), and understands all the relevant local grant administration processes.

- The Mentor should be supportive in seeking out other appropriate academic opportunities for the Fellow.
- The Mentor should approach the USF directly (via USF Director of Operations) should they have any concerns regarding the Fellow and their progress throughout the duration of the Fellowship. Since, if challenges to a Fellow's progress do occur then the USF will always endeavour to assist if possible; and it is therefore crucial that an open line of independent communication exists between all parties.

Reporting

The Fellow has an obligation to produce Annual Progress Reports for the USF, and these reports include an obligatory section for substantive comments from the Mentor. There is also a final progress report due upon completion of the award which contains the same sections.

The USF provides a template form for completion of these reports, and it is expected that the Mentor will give due attention to their respective section. The USF considers evidence of a productive, creative relationship between the Fellow and the Mentor as vital to continuing financial support (see terms in award Memorandum of Agreement).

The Mentor's contribution should include:

- Confirmation that the Fellow's report is accurate, to the best of his/her knowledge.
- A detailed assessment of the progress of the Fellow over the duration of the USF grant.
- A detailed statement of how the Mentor has assisted the progress of the Fellow over the duration of the USF grant (e.g. mentoring arrangements, progress meetings, joint authorship, joint organisation of events, joint impact activity work, etc.)
- A statement of difficulties, if any, the Mentor has encountered with the Fellow over the duration of the Fellowship.

The Mentor's section of the Report may be submitted separately from the Fellow's report if this is deemed appropriate. The Fellow should be informed if this option is chosen, and the Mentor may send the final report with their section completed directly to the USF Director of Operations.

In order to provide sufficient time for the USF to process the first and second reports prior to the date by which new payments are due, the USF requires that the first and second reports be submitted a month before the end of the year in question. The first report must, therefore, be submitted by a deadline of 11 months after the formal start date of the Fellow, followed by a second

report by a deadline of 23 months after the start date. The third and final report must be submitted by a deadline of 36 months after the start date.

The USF will review these reports, and reserves the right, if unsatisfied by a report, to withhold or even cancel the subsequent payment (at the start of the second and/or third years of the Fellowship award). The USF expects that any serious break-down in relations between the Fellow and the Mentor or host institution should be reported to the USF by one or both parties. In such an eventuality, the USF may reserve the right to refuse to pay the next installment of the award. To underline, the USF cannot undertake to act as an intermediary in such cases, but would seek to make decisions appropriate to the specifics of the case in question.

Other support

The USF is committed to supporting its fellows and mentors as best possible throughout the duration of their award. Whilst awards made by the USF are typically final with regard to the terms and conditions of the award (amount of funding, duration, purpose, etc.), the USF recognises that certain circumstances may result in: hardship or other difficulties for the fellow, a limited research support budget, or new and unforeseen opportunities that may justify amendments to the original award and/or small top-ups of funding. Therefore, in some cases, the USF may provide a limited source of additional support funding.

In such instances, the Mentor is strongly encouraged (if appropriate) to contact the USF Director of Operations to discuss any situations that arise which might give concern and/or reason for the further support of a Fellow beyond the original funding award made.

However, in all cases the USF expects the Mentor to have first adequately assisted and advised the Fellow on what other avenues of support may exist to benefit the Fellow, and the USF certainly cannot guarantee any additional funding over and beyond the original award made.