Socio-Environmental Immersion Postdoctoral Fellowship Program

Apply Link:
Apply Online [1]
Deadline:
Nov 08, 2019

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Deadlines

Application deadline: **November 8, 2019, 5 p.m. ET.** Late applications will not be accepted.

*If invited, candidates must be available for **Skype interviews** January 30-31, 2020, and for **in-person interviews** March 2-3, 2020. Applicants selected for Skype interviews are typically notified during the third week of January. All applicants will be notified no later than late March.*

Program Overview

The National Socio-Environmental Synthesis Center (SESYNC), located in Annapolis, Maryland, invites applications from early-career scholars (≤ 4 years post Ph.D.) for two-year postdoctoral fellowships that begin **June 1, 2020**. Each Fellow works with a Collaborating Mentor of their choosing that extends the Fellow's current network of collaborators; the mentor may be affiliated with any organization or institution. Fellows are in residence at SESYNC full time but are provided travel funds to interact with their mentor and attend conferences.

Successful candidates will use synthesis methods to address a problem arising from, or associated with, the relationship between humans and nature. Priority will be given to projects that have the potential to advance understanding of socio-environmental systems, but the information synthesized may be primarily social or environmental in nature, or some mix. SESYNC particularly encourages applications from candidates who will take advantage of ecological or geoscience data sets (e.g., geospatial, hyperspectral, etc.), ongoing experiments, or modeling results, especially if they wish to link their work with social data or theory.

What is Socio-Environmental Synthesis?

Synthesis is a research approach that accelerates knowledge production by distilling or integrating existing data, ideas, theories, and/or methods to draw more reliable or generalizable conclusions and to reveal novel areas of study. Socio-environmental synthesis often involves merging large and/or heterogeneous data sets from multiple sources, researchers, or fields of inquiry, as well as critical analysis in evaluating arguments and interpreting evidence. It can employ a diverse array of theoretical and methodological approaches (e.g., statistical/mathematical, structured case studies comparison, cultural analytics, scenario studies, game theory, ethnographic studies, organizational theory, simulation/computational modeling, etc.).

Regardless of approach, Fellows' projects take advantage of **existing** data/information; **SESYNC does not fund Fellows to collect new field, lab, or survey data. Proposals that rely on collecting data or propose new data collection will not be advanced to the panel.**

What is the Socio-Environmental Immersion Program?

In addition to undertaking a synthesis research project, Postdoctoral Fellows participate in the **SESYNC's Socio-Environmental Immersion Program** [2]. Unique among environmental postdoctoral programs, a learning component of the program will steep Fellows in theory foundational to understanding socio-environmental systems and prepare them to conduct interdisciplinary and actionable research. The core of this experience is engagement with material and people from diverse disciplines that are relevant to research on socio-environmental systems. This takes the form of interactive workshops and lectures by visiting scholars and policy-makers, discussions motivated by videos, or thought-exercises and activities. The 2020-2021 Immersion Program will include a series of five multi-day workshops.

Regardless of disciplinary background, the SESYNC Postdoctoral Socio-Environmental Immersion Program provides the freedom and support to do cutting-edge synthesis research while increasing capacity to collaborate across disciplinary divides. It offers opportunities to help Fellows chart their own academic and professional path in a vibrant environment focused on actionable science for a more sustainable future.

Fellowship Opportunities

The fellowship includes professional development and mentoring opportunities beyond the Immersion Program workshop series, as well as opportunities to participate in ongoing Center activities. SESYNC currently has 15 postdoctoral scholars in residence whose expertise spans the social sciences and natural sciences. Monthly luncheons, weekly seminar talks, and informal discussion with peers provide opportunities for Fellows to form collaborations, discuss and identify solutions to challenges they face in their research, and expand their professional networks. Fellows have the additional opportunity to participate in a wealth of Center activities as observers or as active participants. These may include seminars and working groups focused on areas as diverse as: global pet trade and disease; water security and ecosystems; trait-based ecology to understand economic and social impacts of climate change; social network analysis of response to environmental disasters; health, food security and environmental impacts; coupling social and environmental dynamics in integrated models; soil microbial diversity and humans; environmental shifts, human livelihoods and mobility. SESYNC also offers extensive training and consulting resources that will speed Fellow's progress in their synthesis research and allow for the development of new and stronger computational skills.

Fellowship Elligibility Criteria

Applicants may hold a doctoral degree in any natural, physical, or social science discipline. To be eligible for the program, candidates must have received their doctoral degrees within four years prior to the start of the fellowship appointment (no earlier than June 2016). Candidates must complete all requirements for their Ph.D. by the June 1, 2020 start date. Candidates who are offered a fellowship are required to provide proof* of Ph.D. degree if they received their degree within the last 2 years.

SESYNC encourages applications from groups underrepresented in SESYNC research, including scholars from developing countries, participants from underrepresented U.S. minorities (African Americans, American Indians including Native Alaskans, Hispanics, and Native Pacific Islanders), and persons with disabilities. Please see NSF's policy on [Broadening Participation](#) [3] for more information on such efforts. The University of Maryland is an equal opportunity employer. Candidates must be eligible to work in the United States. International applicants are welcome to apply; however, please note that we follow University of Maryland visa [procedures](#) [4] and requirements; visas are not guaranteed.

*Candidates who are offered a fellowship are required to provide proof of Ph.D. degree if they received their degree within the last 2 years. Proof of degree can come in two forms: 1) final transcript showing the Ph.D. was awarded and date the degree was conferred, or 2) an official letter from the institution's Graduate School or Registrar office stating the candidate met all of the requirements and the date in which the degree was conferred.

Postdoctoral Support

Appointments will be through the University of Maryland, and **fellowship awardees will be based full-time (min. 4 days per week) at SESYNC's facilities in Annapolis, Maryland**. The fellowship provides a competitive annual stipend, full University of Maryland employee benefits, and a small annual travel allowance to attend meetings or to meet with collaborators. Postdoctoral fellowships are awarded for a maximum of two years and include professional development and mentoring opportunities beyond the Immersion Program workshop series, as well as opportunities to participate in ongoing Center activities. SESYNC Collaborating Mentors will also receive support to travel to SESYNC to work with the Fellow.

The Application Process

Step 1: Selecting a Collaborating Mentor

Applicants are responsible for initiating and developing a relationship with a **Collaborating Mentor** with whom they might be interested in co-developing a synthesis research project. **Co-Mentors** are permitted provided: 1) co-mentors both agree to contribute to the project and mentor the applicant equally, 2) there are no more than two co-mentors, and 3) co-mentors agree to share the travel funds and honorarium.

 *Special Note: SESYNC has maintained and provided access to a Collaborating Mentor Registry over the last several years; however, we have decided to abandon the use of this Registry because a majority of the applicants self-recruited their Collaborating Mentor(s). Prospective mentors wishing to co-develop a proposal with an applicant are encouraged to advertise their interest in doing so through their professional networks.

Collaborating Mentor Requirements

 A Collaborating Mentor may be affiliated with any organization or institution, and we welcome mentors from universities, NGOs, government agencies, other research institutions or the business sector.

 All Collaborating Mentors must have:

1. Demonstrated expertise in the social, natural, engineering or computational sciences (Ph.D. required);
2. Sufficient research experience to provide substantive intellectual and methodological mentoring to Postdoctoral Fellows (i.e. should be beyond postdoc career stage);
3. Ideas suitable for research collaborations using synthesis methods (e.g., data integration, quantitative or qualitative analysis, modeling, etc.).
4. Has not worked served as the prospective Fellow's Ph.D. advisor, Ph.D. mentor, Dissertation committee

member, current postdoc advisor (if relevant), or past collaborator with whom the prospective fellow has published.

SESYNC encourages mentors from groups underrepresented in SESYNC research including scholars from developing countries, participants from underrepresented U.S. minorities (African Americans, American Indians including Native Alaskans, Hispanics, and Native Pacific Islanders), and persons with disabilities (for more information on such efforts: [www.nsf.gov/od/broadeningparticipation/bp_portfolio_dynamic.jsp[3](http://www.nsf.gov/od/broadeningparticipation/bp_portfolio_dynamic.jsp) [5]]).

Collaborating Mentor Responsibilities

SESYNC Postdoctoral Fellows are independent researchers, and thus prospective Fellows should take the lead on writing and developing the proposal. Mentors are expected to work closely with the Postdoctoral Fellow on the proposed project for a period of two years beginning **June 1, 2020** and to provide mentorship on the synthesis research. Successful Postdoctoral Fellowship applications, which are primarily the responsibility of the prospective Postdoctoral Fellow, will clearly delineate the roles of the Fellow and the Mentor in the proposed project. We encourage Fellows and Mentors to discuss these roles and expectations prior to submitting the proposal.

 In addition to assisting in the development of the research proposal for the fellowship application, Collaborating Mentors will be required to write a letter of commitment, which describes:

- Your expected role in the project;
- Your view of and enthusiasm for the proposed collaboration;
- How you envision staying engaged with the prospective fellow and the project; and
- Your endorsement of the proposed project and perception of the prospective fellow's ability to conduct the proposed research.

Successful Postdoctoral Fellows will be funded by SESYNC and based full time at our Center in Annapolis, Maryland. They are expected to meet in person with their Mentor **at least twice per year**; travel funds will be provided for Mentors to visit Fellows at SESYNC, and visits are encouraged. Periodic written evaluations of the Fellows research progress will be requested. SESYNC will provide an honorarium to Collaborating Mentors at the completion of the two-year fellowship period. Co-mentors must agree to share the travel funds and honorarium.

Step 2: Proposal Co-Development with Collaborating Mentor

All proposals must be co-developed with a Collaborating Mentor, with the applicant taking the lead in writing and developing the proposal. In order to be competitive, applicants should begin working with their collaborative mentors on their proposal as soon as possible.

Step 3: Application Components

Applications must be submitted as a **single PDF**, using single spacing, **12-pt type fonts**, and **1-inch margins** with all sections in the following order:

1. Cover Sheet
2. Research Proposal
3. Status of Synthesis Material
4. Anticipated Cyberinfrastructure Needs
5. Interdisciplinary Goals
6. Full CV of the Applicant

Incomplete applications and proposals that rely on collecting data or propose new data collection are not advanced to panel. Proposals failing to follow format instructions or exceeding specified page limits will also not be advanced to panel.

Components of an Application

[1] Cover Sheet (1 page)

- Descriptive title
- Short title (25 characters max)
- Name and contact information
- Date of Ph.D. defense: If the defense has not yet occurred, applicants need a **letter** from their graduate advisor or committee member verifying the expected data of completion. **Candidates who do not expect to complete their Ph.D. by the expected start date will be removed from competition.**
- Name, title, and affiliation of Collaboating Mentor(s)
- Project summary (250 words), appropriate for the public and to be posted on the SESYNC website if applicant is awarded a fellowship
- Keywords (up to 5 keywords different from those used in the title)
- Potential conflicts of interest with members of the [SESYNC Scientific Review Committee](#) [6] or [Leadership Team](#) [7]. A conflict of interest will not disadvantage your application. Rather, we need this information to follow proper review protocol.

[2] Research Proposal (4 pages max, excluding references)

- Clear and concise statement of the project goals including specific research questions and how the project will advance understanding of socio-environmental systems.
- Methods to be used for the **synthesis** project. For computational synthesis proposals, it is particularly important to describe why proposed computationally-intensive methods are necessary to investigate the research topic.
- Description of prospective Fellow's and Research Collaborator's respective roles in the project and plans for maintaining communication throughout the project.

[3] Status of Synthesis Material (1 page max)

- Type of material (datasets, models, case studies, theories, etc.)
- Location and accessibility of material

Please note: Reviewers look at this section in detail, thus we ask that you please be specific and thorough.

[4] Anticipated Cyberinfrastructure Needs (1 page max)

If applicable, briefly describe any anticipated needs for cyberinfrastructure support. This information should include descriptions of: data sets to be used during this project; new data sets or software/databases to be developed; high-performance computing needs; required data aggregation or fusion; and visualization software needs. Applicants should review SESYNC's [Cyberinfrastructure Support Information](#) [8] to familiarize themselves with the types of CI support SESYNC can provide. If the project's needs are beyond the scope of services outlined, applicants should contact the SESYNC Cyberinfrastructure Team, prior to submission (cyberhelp@sesync.org [9]).

[5] Interdisciplinary Goals (~1/2 page)

One of SESYNC's strengths is its diverse interdisciplinary culture, which provides many opportunities for such growth. In a paragraph (~300 words), **describe why SESYNC's interdisciplinary programs are important for your career advancement**. Be specific by providing, for example, one or two topics and/or methods outside your disciplinary area of expertise that could enhance your proposed or future work. Please note: This is an important component discussed during the panel review and selection process. **Successful candidates will have made clear in their applications how progress on their proposed projects may benefit from**

participation in the Immersion program and/or how the program aligns with their specific career objectives. Candidates are strongly encouraged to *avoid generic responses* on this aspect and, instead, candidates should be as specific as possible in terms of what skills or interdisciplinary topics they hope to develop while at SESYNC and how these relate to their research or career goals.

[6] Full CV of the Applicant

Include an updated copy of your CV in the proposal package. Proposal packages missing an individual CV will be considered incomplete and will not be advance to the review panel.

Letters of Recommendation

In order to be considered, each application requires two letters of recommendation. Referees should briefly discuss how long they have known the applicant and in what capacity. Recommendation letters should also include comments on the applicant's ability to carry out both independent and collaborative research. You will be prompted on the application page to enter the names and contact information of your **two** writers. We've provided an email template that you will be able to personalize before you send the letter request, if necessary. The letter writer will receive a unique link to upload their letter to the application system. Only two letters should be included in your application file.

Letters are due by **November 8, 2019, 5 p.m. ET**. Proposal packages missing (2) letters of recommendation will be considered incomplete and disqualified from the review panel.

Letter of Commitment from Collaborating Mentor

You will be prompted on the application page to enter the name and contact information of your Collaborating Mentor(s). The letter of committment should address the following:

- Their expected role in the project;
- Their view of and enthusiasm for the proposed collaboration;
- How they envision staying engaged with you and the project; and
- Endorsement of the proposed project and your ability to conduct the proposed research.

We've provided an email template that you will be able to personalize before you send the letter request, if necessary. Your mentor(s) will receive a unique link to upload their letter and CV to the application system. **If you have Co-Mentors, please ask them to jointly submit one letter of commitment;** each mentor will be able to upload their CV, but only one mentor will be prompted to upload the joint letter of commitment.

Only one commitment letter should be included in your application file, due by **November 8, 2019, 5 p.m. ET.**

Please remember, Collaborating Mentors cannot be current or former advisors, dissertation committee members, or individuals with whom the candidate has published.

Selection Criteria

Postdoctoral applications will be evaluated by the following criteria. Each is given equal weight by the Review Committee:

- Explanation of how the proposed research will advance understanding of socio-environmental systems or the potential for the project to contribute to the solution of socio-environmental problems;
- Novelty, creativity, and/or urgency of proposed activities;
- Feasibility of producing meaningful synthetic research within a two-year time frame,

including identifying and showing ability to access appropriate data and methods;

- Applicant qualifications and experience;
- Clear delineation of the value of the collaboration and the respective roles for the Fellow and Collaborating Mentor in the project;
- Potential to contribute to and benefit from other research activities at the Center; and
- Explanation of how progress on their proposed projects may benefit from participation in the Immersion program or how the applicant's specific career objectives align with the interdisciplinary programs of SESYNC.

Questions?

Please contact SESYNC at: postdoc.application@sesync.org [10].

The University of Maryland is an Equal Opportunity Employer
Minorities and Women Are Encouraged to Apply