



National Evolutionary Synthesis Center

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NESCent Postdocs Submitting Grants With or Without PI Status

There are three levels of regulation/concern we have to deal with regarding a NESCent postdoc submitting grant proposals. The first level is Duke regulations. Duke will in some cases allow postdocs to be PIs. The department must certify why the postdoc should be a PI, and then it must be approved by the Vice Provost for Research. We believe that if NESCent elects to permit a postdoc to serve as a PI, NESCent can make the arguments to obtain approval. The issue revolves around the fact that the grant actually goes to Duke and not to you – they have to take responsibility for many aspects of a grant, such as scientific ethics, various spending rules, etc. They also are guaranteeing that you have a stable job for the duration of the grant and that you have the facilities to do the work supported.

The second level is NSF rules and percent effort requirements. Your NESCent postdoc is considered 100% effort, which basically means you can't get additional salary from another source, or commit time to work on a project that is significantly different from the one NESCent is funding you to work on while funded by NESCent. This is a federal regulation, and if we violate it we both could be in big trouble (you don't want to start your career with a federal fraud charge!!).

The third level is NESCent policy. We assume you'll work basically at NESCent on the project you proposed for the time we are supporting you. Because of space limitations, we can't guarantee you space indefinitely, even if you have your own funding. Below are some scenarios that illustrate the issues.

One, is the possibility that you might want to apply, perhaps as a co-PI with someone, for a grant that is closely related to your NESCent project. Say your co-PI will be gathering data and you'll be analyzing it, using techniques that are in your NESCent project. You'll be doing the work at NESCent, with perhaps a trip or two a year to the other lab; maybe you'll switch to a full time postdocs (funded by that grant) at that institution when your NESCent postdoc is finished. As long as you aren't getting any salary on the grant while you are getting paid by NESCent ("double dipping") and are basically working on the general project we funded you for the grant wouldn't essentially change your NESCent status for the duration of your postdoc. In that case, the grant would be processed entirely from that other institution – no funds would be coming to NESCent/Duke, and we wouldn't even have to sign off on it. Whether or not you could be listed as a co-PI would be up to that institution. It would probably be good to have a letter in the grant from our Director, Allen Rodrigo, saying it was OK with NESCent, but we probably would have no objections.

Another possibility is that you see an exciting extension to your work at NESCent, and would want to apply for a grant to extend it, perhaps to work with our informatics program to hire a dedicated programmer, and pay your salary for a year or so after your NESCent funding was over. This would

be a grant that is run through NESCent. We would consider this and if we all approve, we would try to get Duke to give you PI status. Whether it would work would depend on the details.

A grant where you would be undertaking a major new project while at NESCent that would involve a lot of data collection, a lot of time away, either by yourself or in collaboration with someone else, or would pay you salary while a postdocs here wouldn't be permissible – in part because of the effort regulations from NSF, and in part because it violates our basic understanding in funding you.

Finally, if you are writing a grant for work to be done after leaving NESCent (i.e., if you have a job or another postdoc arrangement), that isn't our concern. It would be administered through the institution you'll be going to, and we don't need to be involved.

The bottom line is that if you are considering a grant, it would be best to talk to Allen Rodrigo and/or Susan Alberts, preferably the two of us together, to see what we can do. Because of the complexities of regulations, we can have any blanket policy. Within the regulations, we'll do what we need to aid your professional development and your science.