

## **NESCent Postdoctoral Fellowship FAQ**

### **What is special about a NESCent postdoc?**

There are two aspects of a NESCent postdoctoral position that are highly unusual. First, you are allowed exceptional independence to define and complete work of interest to you. Second, you are a member of a broad, interdisciplinary and synthetic community in evolutionary biology. The opportunity provides exposure to and training in the full range of evolutionary biology in a way that is unmatched by traditional postdoctoral positions.

As a NESCent postdoc you work on the project that you define. We endeavor to provide you with scientific and career mentoring, as well as informatics and research support. However, a NESCent postdoc does not work for any senior scientist. This postdoc provides unparalleled scientific independence.

As a member of the NESCent community you are encouraged to interact with scientists visiting the Center for scientific projects and to participate in NESCent funded meetings and workshops. In a typical year, close to 800 evolutionary biologists visit the Center. This allows unmatched chances for interacting with the very best evolutionary biologists in the world.

NESCent is sponsored by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, North Carolina State University and Duke University. Postdocs have access to facilities and faculty at each of these universities, and are encouraged to set up working relationships at any. Many postdocs meet with lab groups and journal clubs of one or more faculty at these institutions. A NESCent postdoc provides an extraordinary opportunity to work with a wide variety of evolutionary biologists.

NESCent postdocs are encouraged to help define NESCent programs. We encourage postdocs to help organize and define workshops and symposia, and invite external speakers and visiting scientists. This provides outstanding opportunities for scientific development in areas of your interest.

### **Who is best suited for a NESCent postdoc?**

The most successful postdoctoral fellow will be one who is highly independent and motivated and has established a well defined project and plan of research. While we make all efforts to help the postdoc receive proper career and scientific mentoring, a NESCent postdoc does not work for any senior investigator. Individuals who need close supervision or assistance in developing projects and methods are probably not well suited for this particular postdoctoral position.

### **What kinds of projects does NESCent fund?**

NESCent's mission is to enable highly integrative and synthetic work in evolutionary biology. We fund postdoctoral projects that are consistent with this mission. These projects often include the assembly and analyses of databases to

address broad evolutionary questions or the development of new analytical models or techniques. A list of present and past NESCent postdocs may be found on our website.

**Do I need to have a local sponsor or mentor?**

Applicants for NESCent postdocs are not required to define a local sponsor or advisor before applying. Each postdoc will be assigned an informal mentor, who is normally a NESCent Director or Operations Committee member. The mentor will help with professional development and provide input on research directions. Postdocs are strongly encouraged to establish working relationships with local scientists, although no formal relationships are required. Additionally, postdocs will be required to develop a mentorship and collaboration plan that identifies local and non-local scientists to serve as mentors, advisors and collaborators.

**Must I be a US citizen or resident?**

No, NESCent accepts and funds postdoctoral applicants who are not US citizens or residents. We will work with you on securing the appropriate visa if you are awarded a postdoctoral position.

**How are NESCent postdocs chosen?**

NESCent postdoc proposals are reviewed by our Advisory Board. This board is composed of outstanding evolutionary biologists from a very broad range of areas (current membership may be found on our webpage). This group makes recommendations to the NESCent Directors, who will make a final decision based on quality of science, availability of positions, and general balance of scientific fields.

**What service or other activities are expected of a NESCent postdoc?**

While postdocs are allowed a great deal of independence, we do expect postdocs to participate in and contribute to the NESCent community. This includes regular participation in the weekly noontime lunch seminar and journal club as well as other NESCent activities such as our annual retreat and Darwin Day symposium.

In addition, outreach to the broader community is a fundamental mission of NESCent and the National Science Foundation and we expect all postdocs to participate at some level in outreach activities. Such participation may include giving an occasional (once or twice a year) lecture or talk at a local college or university, or contributing to other outreach activities. NESCent's Education & Outreach staff will work with you to identify and arrange these opportunities, as well as providing assistance and feedback in preparing presentations and guest lectures. As federal granting agencies increasingly expect outreach and broader

impact activities, participation in such activities as a NESCent postdoc will be of significant advantage to you as you apply for federal grants in the future.

**Must I be in residence at NESCent?**

We consider the participation in and contribution to the NESCent intellectual community to be a key component of a NESCent postdoc, and expect postdocs to reside at NESCent. Postdoctoral fellows are, of course, encouraged to attend meetings and workshops and visit other universities and institutions. However, NESCent does not fund postdoctoral fellowships that will primarily be conducted off site.

**Does a NESCent postdoc allow field or lab work or data collection?**

Although we do not fund postdoctoral applications when the major objective is to collect new data, we do not prohibit such activities if they are a minor component of the research. Postdocs may continue ongoing field projects to a limited extent, complete laboratory studies (if facilities can be identified), or undertake new, small scale data collection activities. We do not, however, provide facilities for laboratory work or data collection.

**What kind of support is provided to NESCent postdocs?**

In addition to salary, NESCent postdocs are provide with a \$5000 annual stipend for travel and research expenses. Funds are also available for NESCent postdocs to hire undergraduate research assistants and for exceptional publication costs. NESCent postdocs are also supported by our informatics program, and provided with basic software and IT assistance, as well as specialized informatics consulting as appropriate. You are provided with a shared office and access to general office equipment, support and supplies. In addition we provide a “postdoc professional development series” in which topics of professional development (applying for jobs, grants, publication, teaching, etc.) are discussed. These sessions generally occur once a month.

**What benefits are NESCent postdocs eligible for?**

NESCent postdocs are employees of Duke University and are eligible for benefits (health insurance, etc.) as Duke University employees. Information of Duke University employee benefits may be found at: <http://www.hr.duke.edu> . Duke University is currently putting in place a policy regarding postdoc compensation and benefits; when finalized, this will apply to NESCent postdocs. Further information may be found at: <http://www.postdoc.duke.edu> .

**Does a NESCent postdoc include teaching requirements?**

NESCent postdocs are focused on research projects; however, opportunities exist for improving teaching skills. These include presentations in the NESCent professional development series, the opportunity to present guest lectures at local

Universities, and the chance to mentor undergraduate or graduate student research projects. Because of the nature of NESCent funding, postdocs should not expect to accept teaching positions during their period of NESCent funding.

**Is funding limited to two years?**

NESCent postdocs are granted for two years; the second year is granted after the receipt of an annual report indicating that the postdoc is making good progress on the initial project. Postdocs may request a third year of funding, although such funding is not guaranteed. Requests for a third year of funding must be clearly justified on scientific grounds. Such scientific grounds include opportunities to take research in new directions or the development of new techniques or approaches. In order to receive a third year of funding postdocs must demonstrate significant progress and productivity during their first two years of funding.

**Where have NESCent postdocs gone after their funding is complete?**

NESCent postdoctoral fellows have been successful in finding positions after completing their fellowship. Thus far all postdocs have either moved on to a second postdoc or have accepted a university tenure track position.