Categories of applicants that are ineligible:

- Those who do not hold United States citizenship, national, or permanent resident status by the application deadline.
- Those who were previously awarded a Fellowship from the NSF Graduate Research Fellowship Program and accepted it.
- Those who have declined the offer of the NSF Graduate Research Fellowship and did not notify NSF or those who did not respond by the published deadline for accepting the Fellowship.
- Those who have earned any graduate or professional degree by August 1, 2014, except 1) applicants who have completed a joint baccalaureate-master's (BS/MS) program and have not completed any further graduate study outside the joint program or 2) applicants who are requesting eligibility consideration due to an extenuating circumstance (see Section IV.2).
- Current NSF employees.

Eligibility criteria:

1. Citizenship

Applicants must be United States citizens, nationals, or permanent residents of the United States by the application deadline.

The term "national" designates a native resident of a commonwealth or territory of the United States, such as American Samoa, Guam, Puerto Rico, United States Virgin Islands, or the Northern Mariana Islands. It does not refer to a citizen of another country who has applied for United States citizenship.

2. Degree Requirements

Fellowships are awarded to individuals in the early stages of their graduate study. Below are guidelines for determining eligibility according to the degree requirements criterion:

- Applicants are expected to have adequate preparation to begin graduate study and research by summer or fall 2015. This is nearly always demonstrated by receipt of a bachelor's degree in a science or engineering field earned prior to fall 2015.
- Individuals are typically eligible to apply:
  - During the senior year of college;
  - After graduating from college and prior to entering graduate school;
  - During the first year of graduate school; or
  - Prior to completing the fall term of the second year of graduate school.
- Applicants must have completed no more than 12 months of full-time graduate study or its equivalent as of August 1, 2014. Full-time graduate study is as defined by the universities attended. There is no credit hour limit for students who have completed only full-time graduate study; eligibility for full-time students is based on the length of time enrolled in the graduate program.
- Applicants who have completed part-time graduate study (or a combination of part-time and full-time graduate study) must have completed no more than 24 semester hours or 36 quarter hours or their equivalent as of August 1, 2014.
- All graduate, post-baccalaureate, and professional study is counted toward the allowed 12 months of completed graduate study. This includes all master's, doctoral and professional degree programs.

Applicants in joint BS/MS programs are typically eligible to apply prior to completion of any further graduate study. Joint baccalaureate-master's programs are those where an institution offers students admission to both an undergraduate and graduate degree program concurrently, with a portion of the credits earned in the undergraduate program also counting towards those in a graduate program. Pursuing separate undergraduate and master's degrees at the same institution does not constitute a joint baccalaureate-master’s program.

- In four-year joint programs, applicants may apply in the fourth year and after completion of the program. Completion of any graduate study outside of the joint program disqualifies an applicant.
- In five-year joint programs, applicants may apply in the fourth and fifth years of the program and after completion of the program. Completion of any further graduate study outside of the joint program disqualifies an applicant.

Definitions of Completed Graduate Study and Extenuating Circumstance

Completed Graduate Study

Applicants may have completed no more than 12 months of full-time graduate, post-baccalaureate and professional study by August 1, 2014. Pre-graduate participation in summer activities (e.g., bridge programs, field studies, lab rotations) offered by a graduate program prior to the start of the fall graduate program are not included in this total.

All graduate, post-baccalaureate and professional study is counted towards the allowed 12 months of graduate study. This includes the following:

- All master's programs (including research-based or coursework-based programs, and "terminal" programs as well as those that are contiguous with a Ph.D. program, and professional master's degree programs).
- All doctoral programs (including medical and professional doctoral programs).
- Graduate, post-baccalaureate and professional coursework completed outside a degree program.
- Both full-time and part-time graduate and professional degree programs.

Extenuating Circumstance

Applicants who have completed more than twelve months of graduate study or have earned a previous graduate or professional degree may be considered eligible if they have had an interruption in graduate study of at least two consecutive years prior to November 2014. To be eligible, applicants must have completed no additional graduate study by August 1, 2014. A statement describing the extenuating circumstance is required in the application.