

KGFP Call 2027 – Webinar Q&A

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Eligibility – PhD Date

1. Is the January 2023 PhD cut-off strict? Are there any exceptions for earlier PhD award dates?

Yes, this cut-off is applied firmly. Rare exceptions may be considered for documented parental leave or military service, adjusted only by the exact length of legal leave taken (e.g., 2 months leave = 2-month shift), with supporting documentation required. We hold this line to keep eligibility consistent and fair.

2. Does my degree need to be obtained at the time of application, or only by the start of the fellowship?

A PhD is not required to apply; it's required to start the fellowship. Since fellows are expected to join between July and December 2027, your degree needs to be officially conferred before you physically join KAUST (practically, by the end of 2027).

3. Which date counts toward eligibility – the provisional certificate date or the formally conferred degree date?

The officially conferred/awarded date mentioned on the Ph.D. degree is the one that counts for eligibility. Ensure that this is the date included in your application form and CV.

4. I'm a current or former KAUST postdoc - am I eligible to apply or transfer to this fellowship?

Current KAUST postdocs can apply if they joined KAUST after January 2026 and meet the general eligibility criteria. If you joined before that (e.g., December 2025 or earlier), or are a Postdoc alumni, you are not eligible for this call.

Eligibility – Age, Nationality, and Career Background

5. Is there an age limit for applicants?

No age limit.

6. Does my nationality affect my eligibility or chances of selection?

No, this is a global fellowship, open to outstanding early-career researchers worldwide. You need, however, to be eligible to get a visa in Saudi Arabia to join the Fellowship.

7. Do career gaps (including maternity, pregnancy during the application process, or health-related gaps) affect eligibility?

Career-gap exceptions tied to the PhD-date cutoff are covered above and remain rare and case-by-case. Applying while pregnant doesn't affect eligibility. Once selected, fellows get 12 weeks of paid maternity leave (plus optional unpaid leave), which typically doesn't extend the 3-year term.

8. Do factors like the ranking of my PhD-granting university, my academic performance (GPA/CGPA), or my current institution type (e.g., private vs. public, teaching vs. research-focused) affect my eligibility or chances of selection?

None of these are direct eligibility factors, and your current institutional affiliation has no bearing on your application. What matters is your academic and research profile - publication record and reference letters - regardless of where you studied or work. Current fellows tend to come from universities with strong research programs in their specific field; that matters more than ranking or prestige.

9. Is prior postdoctoral experience required, or are fresh PhD graduates equally competitive? Do candidates with significant industry experience get equal consideration?

Prior postdoctoral experience is not required, fresh PhD graduates are equally welcome to apply, with expectations calibrated accordingly. Industry-experience is not weighted specifically during the review process; however, if this experience has the potential to support the successful implementation of the proposed research it could eventually positively benefit the application.

10. Is a PhD mandatory, or can Master's degree holders apply?

A PhD (in hand or imminent) is mandatory. A Master's degree alone is not sufficient for this fellowship.

Finding and Contacting a Host PI

11. How do I find a suitable host PI at KAUST, and when/how should I approach them?

Check the KAUST faculty and division websites (kaust.edu.sa/en/study/faculty) for current faculty and their research focus. You can reach out directly by email at any point, even before the application opens - introduce yourself, read their recent work first, and lead with a specific research idea (share your abstract) rather than a generic message sent to multiple PIs. Let them know you plan to name them as a potential host. Keep in mind that Host PI support isn't required at Stage 1, so don't expect a response or ask for a support letter at this stage.

12. What happens if a PI won't/ can't support my application?

If none of the named PIs supports your application, then you won't be invited to submit a full proposal.

13. Does KAUST or the program team help match applicants with potential hosts, including during the Stage 2 matching process?

Yes. After Stage 1, we share eligible concept notes with the named PI(s), who review them and decide whether to support the applicant (a PI can support up to two applicants per call). A deferred-acceptance process then pairs applicants with a supporting PI before the full-proposal invitation.

14. Who can serve as host PI? Can my host PI be based outside KAUST or outside Saudi Arabia (e.g., a joint/co-PI arrangement)?

The host PI must be current KAUST faculty. Adjunct professors, professors of practice, and instructional faculty are not eligible to serve as host PIs. Regular-track faculty, including Assistant, Associate and Full Professors as well as Research Faculty are eligible.

15. How many host PIs should I name in my application, and how does this change if I already have an agreement with a specific PI or my preferred PI isn't yet active KAUST faculty?

Name at least one host PI, up to three - three is optional, not mandatory, and one is enough if you already have an agreement in place. If you already have an informal invitation or agreement with a specific KAUST professor, name only that PI; listing others can cause confusion during matching or even risk disqualification. Only faculty already active at KAUST can be named - if your preferred PI hasn't joined yet, you can't list them, and we'd advise applying in the next call (2028) once they're active.

Research Fit and Interdisciplinary Projects

16. How does KAUST evaluate the fit between my proposed research and a host PI's lab, especially for interdisciplinary projects, and can I still apply if no PI's research exactly matches my specific interest?

PI/lab fit is one of three formal criteria used to assess full proposals (alongside scientific excellence and research merit) - specifically, how well the host PI and lab genuinely see value in your project, background, and expertise. For interdisciplinary work, lead with the division and program that matches your proposed host PI's affiliation. Applying with a PI whose work is only broadly related is workable only if there's genuine alignment - a clear mismatch between your proposal and your named PI's research will weaken an otherwise strong application, since PI fit is explicitly reviewed.

17. For interdisciplinary projects spanning multiple divisions, do all listed PIs need to be from the same division, or can they span different divisions? Can a fellow be co-hosted by two PIs for a multidisciplinary project?

Yes, a fellow can be co-hosted by two PIs for multidisciplinary projects, and they don't need to be from the same division. You can name both PIs in your application as potential hosts (or just one if you already have agreement); if one PI agrees to support you, you can then also bring in the second PI, but both must agree to co-host, and one must be designated as the main PI.

18. Does my research idea need to be fully developed at the Concept Note stage, and what makes an idea genuinely "independent" rather than an extension of my PhD work or the host PI's ongoing research?

The Concept Note is a shorter, more general version of your idea - meant to save you the effort of a full proposal before knowing if a PI is interested. It's refined further with your host PI before the full proposal stage. That said, independence is assessed from the start, mainly through your track record, reference letters, and how clearly the Concept Note frames your own contribution. Your research shouldn't simply continue an ongoing project in your named PI's lab or be a direct extension of your PhD - reviewers want to see the unique contribution you bring, whether that's a new direction or your PhD work taken to the next level.

19. Is a multidisciplinary background or research project viewed as an advantage?

We do encourage interdisciplinary research, but this is not a criterion - proposals are evaluated on genuine fit, independence, and scientific merit regardless of disciplinary breadth.

Application Process and Concept Note

20. What is the overall application process and timeline (including Stage 2 deadlines)?

The 2-step application process opens on September 1, 2026: Stage 1 (Concept Note) deadline on October 1st & Stage 2 (Full Proposal) upon invitation with a deadline on January 15, 2027. Internal/ external review and interviews will be contacted between February – May 2027. Anticipated fellowship start: July-December 2027.

21. What should the Concept Note include, is there a required template or page limit, and how much supporting literature/ referencing is expected?

A template with section guidelines is available on the KGFP website - the Concept Note is essentially a shorter version of the full proposal, with a 3-page maximum (excluding references/citations, which don't count toward the limit). How much literature review is expected depends on your field and proposed research; be clear and specific, but keep it brief - you'll provide an extended review in the full proposal if invited.

22. Will KAUST share my Concept Note with my nominated PIs, or do I need to contact them myself?

KAUST shares your concept note with your named PI(s) as part of the formal review after submission - this is separate from (and in addition to) any informal outreach you may choose to do beforehand.

23. Can I submit more than one Concept Note, or apply jointly with a colleague?

No to both - only one concept note per applicant is allowed, and only individual submissions are accepted (one application per candidate). If you're considering multiple potential hosts or research angles, focus your single Concept Note on the specific area and PI(s) most relevant to you, rather than submitting multiple applications to increase your chances of receiving a PI's support.

24. Can I reuse a proposal I previously submitted to another fellowship?

You may do this as long as the proposed work has not been already conducted or published under another fellowship.

25. Is there an interview stage?

Yes - shortlisted applicants, after internal and external review of the full proposal, are invited to interview in front of a committee/panel.

26. Does the Concept Note need to include a budget?

Yes, include a general overview of your budget in the Concept Note as per the template directions; a detailed budget will be required at the full proposal stage.

27. Who reviews Stage 1 submissions (Concept Notes), on what criteria, and on what timeline?

There's no formal committee or weighted criteria at the Concept Note stage - this step simply lets your named host PI(s) review your idea and decide whether to support you, without requiring a full proposal upfront. Eligible Concept Notes are shared with named PIs after the call closes, not on a rolling basis. The three formal weighted criteria - scientific excellence, research merit, and PI/lab fit - only apply at the full-proposal stage.

28. Will every Concept Note submission be invited to Stage 2 (full proposal)? How many typically advance, and can I update documents like my CV between stages?

No - advancing to Stage 2 depends on at least one named PI agreeing to support you through the matching process. There is not a specific number of applications to advance to the next stage. You will be able to resubmit your CV with the full proposal if you wish to.

29. Where can I download the presentation slides, guidelines, and Concept Note template, and where can I direct further questions after the webinar?

All templates and guidelines as well as the slides will be available on the [KGFP website](https://www.kaust.edu.sa/kgfp). For personal or case-specific questions, contact us at kgfp@kaust.edu.sa

30. If I'm not selected, can I reapply in a future call?

Yes, given that you still meet the eligibility criteria of the new call.

Reference Letters and Publications

31. How many reference letters are required, when are they due, and what should they contain?

Two signed reference letters are required with your Concept Note by October 1, 2026. Each should cover: the referee's relationship to you; concrete examples of your research skills and originality; your soft skills; your readiness for independent research and leadership; and the feasibility of your proposed research given your background. No fixed format or length. Referees who prefer not to share the letter with you can email it directly to kgfp@kaust.edu.sa.

32. Must one letter come from my PhD supervisor? What if my supervisor is unavailable, retired, deceased, or unresponsive?

One letter should come from an academic supervisor; your PhD supervisor is encouraged but not compulsory. If your PhD supervisor is retired, deceased, or otherwise unavailable, a postdoctoral supervisor or other relevant supervisor is a fine substitute - what matters is that the referee can speak to your academic caliber and progress.

33. Can my referees be based outside KAUST or outside my current institution (e.g., must they be KAUST professors)?

Referees do not need to be KAUST-affiliated, or affiliated with your current institution.

34. Are there minimum publication requirements, and what counts as a qualifying publication?

No fixed publication minimum - expectations scale with your career stage and field norms. First authorship isn't required but helps. Submit your two strongest or most relevant publications (not necessarily PhD-derived). Only published, verifiable papers count - no preprints or under-review papers (conference papers accepted where that's the field norm).

35. Are publication costs (e.g., journal open-access fees) covered separately from the research budget?

No - publication fees are explicitly one of the allowed uses of your annual research budget, not a separate line item.

Funding, Stipend, and Budget

36. What is the total stipend and research budget, and what does the fellowship fully cover?

\$75,000 annual stipend plus up to \$40,000 annual research budget (division-dependent). Also includes full medical insurance, 22 days annual leave plus holidays, on-campus housing, a relocation allowance, and schooling/daycare support (see below for relocation, family, and PI stipend-contribution details).

37. How does the "PI covers 50% of stipend" requirement work, where does that funding come from, and what happens if my PI cannot cover it (even if the research otherwise aligns well)?

When a PI agrees to support/host an applicant, that commitment includes covering 50% of the fellow's stipend once the applicant is nominated. If a PI cannot provide this funding, they are not in a position to formally support that applicant, regardless of how well the research aligns.

38. Can I request additional budget beyond the standard amount costly project needs (e.g., prototyping, specialized equipment or a topic that exceeds the standard research budget cap)?

Not from the fellowship itself - the research budget is fixed from the outset and cannot be increased through KGFP funds. If your proposed research requires more, you and your PI, can pursue external funding opportunities or other internal KAUST funding programs, arranged separately from your fellowship budget. For this reason, it's worth scoping your Concept Note proposal to realistically fit within the standard budget where possible.

39. How should I estimate research costs and budget in the Concept Note, including costs for KAUST's core facilities, if this pricing isn't publicly available?

For the Concept Note, provide a reasonable estimate based on publicly available pricing, quotes you're familiar with, or your own prior experience budgeting similar work - it doesn't need to reflect exact KAUST costs at this stage. If you're invited to submit a full proposal, you will be able to refine these figures together with your host PI, who can share actual core lab rates and local costs to help finalize a realistic budget.

40. Is there a penalty for leaving the fellowship early?

There is no penalty for leaving the fellowship early. We understand that certain opportunities arise and our goal is to provide you with a head start to your future career.

41. What relocation costs are covered, and is there a fixed allowance or cap?

A fixed relocation allowance of \$3000 is provided to help cover your move to KAUST, along with visa and related medical expenses for you and your family (if applicable).

Fellowship Structure, Duration, and Positions Available

42. How long is the fellowship, when does it start, and is the timeline flexible if I have existing commitments elsewhere?

The fellowship is 3 years (36 months) total, with an expected start window of July-December 2027. Some flexibility exists for circumstances outside your control (e.g., visa delays), but if you expect you won't be able to join by then because of other commitments, we'd encourage you to apply to the next call (2028) instead.

43. How many fellowship positions are available overall, and is this split per division?

There isn't a fixed headcount quota per division. We aim to nominate at least 5 Global Fellows per call. The research budget scales by division to reflect real research costs typical to each field - this is explicitly not a signal of relative importance or a proxy for number of available spots.

44. What's the difference between the KGFP and a standard PI-hired postdoc position (e.g., in benefits, housing, schooling)?

KGFP is fellow-led: you pursue your proposed research agenda rather than joining someone else's existing project, and have a dedicated research funding to do so.

45. Do fellows need to be based at KAUST full-time and on-site, and can any fieldwork take place outside Saudi Arabia?

Fellows should be based at KAUST on-site full-time; there is no remote option. By applying, you're committing to relocating physically to KAUST and working there for the full three years if nominated. That said, you can budget for some research visits or fieldwork outside Saudi Arabia if it genuinely cannot be conducted in the Kingdom- but we encourage you to focus your research within the Kingdom for the most part.

46. Are fellows expected to teach or mentor students, or is the role fully research-focused?

Fully research-focused. Postdocs are not expected to teach. You may get involved in some teaching activities voluntarily, with your PI's and the Dean's support, but this isn't a fellowship obligation.

47. Are there other postdoc or research pathways at KAUST for candidates who don't meet KGFP eligibility?

For other opportunities at KAUST you may check the below links:

[KAUST Open Positions](#)

[Biological and Environmental Science and Engineering \(BESE\)](#)

[Computer, Electrical, and Mathematical Science and Engineering \(CEMSE\)](#)

[Physical Science and Engineering \(PSE\)](#)

[Biomedical Sciences \(BioMed\)](#)

Research Fields and Scope

48. Which disciplines and divisions are eligible for this fellowship, and are fields outside these covered (e.g., non-STEM/ social-science fields like finance, policy studies, or family medicine; or fields like animal science)?

This fellowship is limited to STEM fields aligned with KAUST's four academic divisions – check the relevant division and faculty pages for current host PI availability in your specific field. Any fields outside the four divisions and 14 academic programs are not eligible.

49. How should my proposal align strategically – does it need to be Saudi-focused, fit within a specific mission area's scope, be directly applied rather than fundamental, or align with Saudi Vision 2030?

Your proposal needs to align with at least one KAUST strategic research area (Food, Water, Energy, AI, Red Sea, Health), which supports Saudi Vision 2030 - but it doesn't need to be Saudi-specific, and fundamental research is just as competitive as applied work, provided the alignment is genuine. Mission scopes can shift, so check your target division's website for current priorities before finalizing your Concept Note; reviewers actively look for this alignment.

50. Where can I check which specific labs, equipment, or research facilities are available for my field?

Check the relevant division and faculty pages (kaust.edu.sa/en/study/faculty) to review individual PI research areas and lab focus. You can also check the KAUST core labs website.

Relocation, Family, and Logistics

51. Is on-campus schooling available for staff dependents, and from what age is it free?

Yes - there is an on-campus school from pre-K through grade 12. Schooling is free for children aged 4 and up, and this is covered under the fellowship (not deducted from your stipend). For younger children, daycare comes with an additional subsidy of roughly 50%.

52. Which family members are eligible to accompany me as a fellow - does this include unmarried partners or other dependents beyond a spouse and children?

Only immediate family - a legally married spouse and children - are covered under this fellowship. Unmarried partners are not eligible for a spouse visa, and the policy does not extend beyond spouse and children to other dependents.

53. Are there job opportunities for accompanying spouses in Saudi Arabia?

There are job opportunities offered by KAUST for spouses; however, they should pursue these opportunities themselves as we cannot guarantee that they will be able to find a job in their field of interest or specialization.

54. What is it like for female researchers at KAUST in terms of safety and support, and are women in underrepresented fields (e.g., engineering) given any additional support or priority?

Whereas the same criteria apply to all applicants independent of gender, we encourage female applicants as a way to support better gender equality in all fields.

55. Does KAUST provide any accommodations or support for neurodivergent researchers?

KAUST is committed to providing a supportive and inclusive research environment for all fellows.

56. Is a specific English proficiency certificate (e.g., IELTS/TOEFL) required to apply?

No certificate is required. That said, English proficiency is effectively assessed informally: your named PI(s) may contact you directly and will get a sense of your communication in English, and later, the selection interview itself (conducted in English, covering technical and non-technical questions) is where this is genuinely tested.

Selection Statistics and Outcomes

57. What is the success/acceptance rate for the fellowship in relation to the typical number of applications received every year, and how many advance from Stage 1 to Stage 2?

The KAUST Global Fellowship is highly competitive and open to outstanding early-career researchers worldwide. Applicant volume varies year to year, and there's no fixed number of applications expected to advance to Stage 2 - anyone who secures host PI support is invited to submit a full proposal. Expect a rigorous process overall, with successful candidates showing strong scientific merit, a well-matched host PI, and clear research independence.

58. Can you share statistics on current fellows' or past fellows' typical publication record (e.g., number of Q1/SCIE papers) at the time of selection?

No specific numbers were given. Qualitatively, current fellows tend to come from universities with strong research programs in their specific field, with solid publication records (calibrated to career stage) and reference letters that speak clearly to their independence and potential.

59. Were the selected projects from the previous call (2026) announced, and where can I see them?

The Global Fellows and projects nominated in the last call 2026 will be soon published on the Fellowship website under the “Global Fellows” tab.

60. What happens to fellows after the program ends – is there support transitioning to a faculty or permanent position, and what are some notable achievements of past fellows?

Of the 20 Global Fellows nominated to date, 16 are currently active and 4 are now alumni – some have moved into KAUST Research Scientist positions internally, others into industry or academia elsewhere. There is no formal structured “path-to-faculty” program after the fellowship, but our Global Fellows have gone on to receive prestigious awards, launch startups, and publish their work in high-impact journals.