

Janelia Research Competition Frequently Asked Questions

A. Eligibility

1. What are the eligibility requirements?

- PhD and/or MD (or equivalent).
- Group leader from a research institution in the U.S. or abroad (academic, private, or industry).
- The chosen research area can be led by one to three senior group leaders, but only one serves as the research area head at any given time.
- Group leaders and their teams become full-time employees of the Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI) and will relocate fully to the Janelia Research Campus.

2. I am a principal investigator (PI) at a U.S. federal government laboratory. Am I eligible?

Yes.

3. If my application is successful, can I become an HHMI employee with a lab at Janelia and a second lab at my current research institution?

No. Research area heads at Janelia are expected to spend 100% of their professional time at Janelia. (Janelia scientists – research area heads, senior group leaders, and group leaders – are not permitted to have second laboratories at other institutions.)

4. We are a group of PIs with an idea for a research area. Can we jointly submit a proposal?

Yes. Up to three scientists can submit a joint proposal, and they can all move to Janelia. But only one scientist can be the research area head at any one time, representing the area in leadership groups at Janelia.

B. Components of the Application

1. What must the application include?

Your application must include the documents outlined below, all submitted electronically through the HHMI Janelia competition website. Formatting guidelines, required templates for the curriculum vitae (CV) and bibliography, and further instructions will be provided there. Documents uploaded into the electronic application must be PDFs.

VISION STATEMENT: A description (not to exceed two pages, single-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman font) of the proposed research field and the scientific problems you plan to tackle. Include answers to the following: Why is this the right time for current and future conceptual and technological advances to enable progress against these problems? Why are you particularly well suited to lead this effort? Why would Janelia be the best setting to execute this program?

You may add up to one page of figures and one page of essential references. Your figures and accompanying legends may be interleaved within the body of the text. Figures, legends, and essential references are not included in the two-page limit.

OUTPUTS AND IMPACTS: A description (not to exceed one page, single-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman font) of the scientific outputs and impacts that a successful research program would bring.

LEADERSHIP, MENTORING, AND COLLABORATION EXPERIENCE AND PHILOSOPHY: A statement (not to exceed two pages, single-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman font) describing your leadership and mentoring experience and

how you would further develop both skills. Include how your mentoring philosophy will help recruit and train group leaders. Describe your personal leadership philosophy (i.e., your core values, how you express those values, what you expect of your team, and what they can expect from you). Describe your collaboration philosophy (i.e., organizational structure, levels of interactions, and integration) and how collaboration will contribute to advances in the proposed research program.

FIVE PUBLICATIONS OF NOTE: Provide five papers that you consider among your most important scientific contributions, with a focus on the most recent five years. For each publication, provide a statement that begins with a complete journal citation and then summarizes, in 300 words or less, the significance of the selected publication. Only papers that are published, accepted, or deposited in a preprint server may be included.

CURRICULUM VITAE: List up to three pages of your current research support, professional positions (listed in reverse chronological order), professional activities including significant teaching, seminars, and public engagement activities. You must use the HHMI CV template provided on the competition website.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: Include up to eight pages of peer-reviewed and preprint publications in reverse chronological order; a separate list (up to two pages) of reviews, perspectives, other articles, book chapters, and patents is permitted. You must use the HHMI bibliography template provided on the competition website.

2. May the five significant publications required in the application include one or more deposited in a preprint server but not yet published or accepted for publication in a scientific journal?

Yes. All of the following are acceptable for inclusion among the five significant publications submitted in the application:

- peer-reviewed published papers;
- peer-reviewed manuscripts accepted for publication by a journal; and
- articles deposited in a publicly available preprint server, such as bioRxiv.

3. Will I be asked to provide reference letters?

No. HHMI will not require or accept reference letters for this competition.

4. Can work supported by active or submitted grants be included in the vision statement?

Yes. While we are looking for unexplored research areas, you can include your current work in the statement if it helps provide context, background, or justification.

5. How much background information should I provide?

Background information will likely be necessary to set the stage for the description of the proposed research area and its significance. It is at your discretion how much background information you provide.

6. Do I need the endorsement or approval from my institution or company in order to apply for this competition?

No.

7. What are the review criteria?

- Sufficiently challenging problem that requires serious investment in the development of technological solutions and in the creation of interdisciplinary research teams
- Success offers significant and broad impact on science
- Unique approach to problem; program cannot easily be done in academia or industry
- Good research fit for Janelia: synergistic with technology development focus and focus on training of early career scientists.

C. Review Process

1. How does the HHMI review process for this competition work?

The HHMI review process will include the evaluation of pre-proposals by distinguished scientists, leading to the selection of semifinalists. Successful applicants (semifinalists) will have the opportunity to arrange “think tank” workshops at Janelia to further explore their ideas, refine their proposals, and identify potential partners and collaborators. These think tanks also will give semifinalists a chance to meet Janelia scientists and staff, learn about Janelia resources and technologies, and see how they might interface with their proposal. Semifinalists will be invited to submit a full proposal due in January 2020. Further review will include a symposium at which each semifinalist will present their proposal to the advisory panel and HHMI scientific leadership and meet with Janelia scientists.

2. When is the symposium at which semifinalists will present their proposal to HHMI and Janelia scientific leadership and the advisory panel?

The competition symposium will be March 17–19, 2020 at Janelia’s campus in Ashburn, Virginia. All applicants should mark their calendars for these dates. Those selected as semifinalists will be required to attend and should plan to arrive on March 16, 2020; presentations will be scheduled for March 17–19, 2020, and semifinalists will depart on March 20, 2020.

3. Does HHMI give preference to proposals from HHMI investigators, Janelia group leaders, or scientists who are currently at an HHMI host institution?

No. This is an open competition. Our goal is to identify a proposal that aims to address major unsolved problems within or across disciplines relevant to the life sciences.

4. When will I know the status of my pre-proposal?

You will be informed in late summer 2019 whether or not you will be invited to submit a full proposal and present at the symposium.

5. Will I receive written comments on my pre-proposal or full proposal, if applicable, from the reviewers?

No. We will not provide written comments.

D. Employment and Time Commitment to Research

1. What would be my functional title at Janelia?

Senior group leader and research area head.

2. What are the terms of the senior group leader and research area head appointment?

Senior group leaders and research area heads will have up to two seven-year appointment cycles, plus transitional funding for three years at the end of their second appointment period. The transitional funding can be used either at Janelia or the institution where the research area head is employed subsequently.

3. What are the responsibilities of the senior group leader and research area head?

The senior group leader and research area head is responsible for scientific and strategic leadership, recruiting, and mentoring within his/her respective area. In coordination with Janelia’s executive director and with the approval of HHMI’s president, the research area head will have general authority over the selection of senior group leaders and group leaders, as well as the distribution of their research area’s overall budget to individual laboratories within their research area.

Senior group leaders and research area heads will also be independent scientists who will direct a research laboratory of up to six members.

4. Are senior group leaders and research area heads expected to go through a renewal review?

HHMI expects its senior group leaders to be talented and productive scientists. All senior group leaders, including those acting as research area heads, will be reviewed during their last year of their seven-year appointment. The administration duties of research area heads will be recognized during their senior group leader appointment renewal. Toward the end of their residence at Janelia (two seven-year cycles), senior group leaders and research area heads can request a review for the purpose of obtaining a “transfer ticket,” which, if successful, allows them to transfer to an eligible HHMI host institution as an HHMI investigator. If they decide to forgo the “transfer ticket” review or if the outcome of the review is not positive, senior group leaders and research area heads are given three years of transitional funding, some of which may be able to be transferred to another institution. The same rules of review timing and “transfer ticket” reviews apply to senior group leaders that do not serve as research area head.

5. How much time are senior group leaders and research area heads expected to devote to research and administrative duties?

Senior group leaders and research area heads should devote at least 75% of their total professional effort to the leadership of the research area and the direct conduct of research at Janelia.

E. Scientific Organizational Structure at Janelia

1. Why is Janelia moving to a 15-year research model?

The logic for the 15-year timeframe is that it should be long enough for a successful new research area to gain sufficient traction and outside interest to be exported from Janelia and continued elsewhere. This approach enables Janelia to stay at the frontier of science and advance one to three research areas at any point in time, focusing on difficult technological and conceptual barriers that its research environment is uniquely suited to overcome.

2. What is the organizational structure of each research area at Janelia?

Each research area at Janelia will have approximately 15 independent laboratories that agree to bring to bear their individual expertise and efforts to cooperatively tackle a biological question or develop a new technology that is beyond the scope of any one laboratory. A research area will typically include:

- A research area head (and senior group leader);
- Up to four additional senior group leaders;
- Approximately 10 group leaders.

3. What types of scientific exchange and training programs are available at Janelia?

The Janelia Science and Training Department supports scientific communication, collaboration, research, and training to accelerate Janelia’s efforts to foster interdisciplinary, collaborative research; we do this through several scientific programs:

- The Scientific Recruiting and Training Program assists the executive director and research area heads in identifying, reviewing, and mentoring exceptional, independent scientists at all career levels.
- The Conference and Workshop Program gives Janelia scientists the opportunity to organize small, highly specialized events to foster collaborative interactions and the exchange of exciting new ideas.
- The Student and Postdoctoral Program supports the education and training of early career scientists through the Janelia Undergraduate Scholars Program, the Graduate Research Scholar Program in partnership with The Johns Hopkins University, the Graduate Research Fellowship, and the Postdoctoral Program.
- The Visiting Scientist Program brings together scientists to solve interdisciplinary problems, often making use of new and innovative technologies developed at Janelia.

F. Budget and Laboratory Staff

1. What does a senior group leader and research area head's budget include?

Senior group leaders and research area heads oversee the entire budget of their research area. They are responsible for the distribution of their research area's overall budget to individual laboratories within their research area. This includes the budget for their own individual laboratory. Each individual laboratory should have a budget for personnel (i.e., compensation and benefits for laboratory staff) and scientific expenses (i.e., supplies, professional services including shared resource facility services, and minor equipment).

2. Can my current, entire laboratory staff move to Janelia and become HHMI employees? Would they be eligible for health insurance from HHMI? Who sets their salaries?

Each senior group leader and research area head can have up to six laboratory members. If you currently have more than six laboratory members, you will need to make adjustments before you move to Janelia. Your six laboratory members will become HHMI employees (assuming the individuals meet the requirements for an HHMI position). Please note that the research output of a laboratory of six at Janelia typically exceeds the output of a similarly sized lab elsewhere, due to collaborative networks at Janelia and support from project teams and shared facilities.

Full-time and part-time (scheduled to work at least 20 hours per week) HHMI employees are eligible for benefits that include access to a 403(b) retirement plan, as well as health, dental, and vision coverage. You set salaries for HHMI employees in your laboratory, within HHMI salary guidelines.

G. Outside Funding

1. Can I continue to receive or transfer grant funding if I move to Janelia as a senior group leader and research area head?

Transfer of grant funding to Janelia is not permitted. You may be able to continue existing grants at your current institutions for a limited transition period.

2. Can I apply for and receive funding from other nonprofits or government agencies for research in my laboratory after I move to Janelia as a senior group leader and research area head?

Janelia researchers may not apply for or accept grants from other nonprofit organizations, and Janelia will generally not apply for or accept such grants institutionally, although limited exceptions to institutional grants may be made. Janelia researchers may not apply for or accept government grants, nor will Janelia institutionally apply for or accept government grants. For more information, please see [Janelia's policy on grants, fellowships, and awards](#).

3. Can I receive industry funding for research in my laboratory?

No.

H. Research Collaborations and Consulting

1. Can I collaborate with nonprofit organizations or industry as a Janelia scientist?

Yes. You are encouraged to collaborate to advance your research program. However, all collaborations with for-profit companies require prior approval by HHMI. For more information, please see [HHMI's Research Collaborations Policy](#).

2. Can I consult for a company?

Yes, provided the arrangements are consistent with HHMI consulting policies, are documented by an agreement that has been reviewed by HHMI's Office of the General Counsel, and have been approved by HHMI in advance. Information about HHMI's consulting policies can be found on [HHMI's policies](#) page.

Please note that simultaneous consultation for and collaboration with a company is not permitted.

3. Can I own equity in a company, including a start-up?

Yes, provided such equity ownership is consistent with HHMI policies. Please see [HHMI's policies on consulting for and equity ownership in start-up and other private companies](#) for more information.

4. Can I consult for a nonprofit organization or government agency?

Yes, provided the arrangements are consistent with HHMI's policy on [service to nonprofit organizations and government agencies](#).

I. Intellectual Property

1. How does HHMI handle intellectual property?

As an organization performing research in the public interest, HHMI is committed to ensuring that scientific advances developed in its laboratories are used for the benefit of society, including through commercialization where appropriate. All employees at Janelia, including research area heads, senior group leaders, and group leaders, assign to HHMI all rights to any intellectual property resulting from research funded in whole or in part by HHMI and must comply with HHMI policies relating to [intellectual property](#).