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### A Competitive Fellowship

Jeffrey Mervis  
United States  
4 April 2008

The U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF) is hoping to launch a small, novel training program next year in the physical sciences that would cover everyone from undergraduates to mid-career scientists. Its 2009 budget request to Congress contains a program, dubbed ACI fellows, that is intended to complement the Bush Administration's American Competitiveness Initiative to bolster federal support for the physical sciences.

Each of the five divisions within the mathematical and physical sciences (MPS) directorate expect to tackle a pressing issue impeding progress in that discipline. The diversity reflects NSF's approach to solving problems, says Tony Chan, who heads the MPS directorate. "We want to start small and see what works, then scale up those things that are having the biggest impact on U.S. competitiveness," explains Chan. "The goal is to increase the economic impact of fundamental scientific discoveries and to strengthen the scientific workforce."

The chemistry division is first out of the blocks, with a [\\$1 million program this year](#) for postdoctoral students who want to build ties with industry while remaining in an academic setting. Officials hope to spend \$2.5 million in 2009. Also this year, the materials science division plans to give a dozen or so young scientists who show exceptional promise a 2-year "creativity extension" of their current grant to explore new directions, offsetting some of the conservatism that comes with a stagnant budget.

Next year, the mathematics division will begin a \$2 million program to make the undergraduate math curriculum an entry point rather than a bottleneck for science majors, whereas the physics division is planning a \$1 million effort to help established scientists move into new fields. The astronomy division hopes to strengthen the career track for those involved in instrumentation.

Jeffrey Mervis is a reporter for <i>Science</i> magazine in Washington, D.C.	Comments, suggestions? Please send your feedback <a href="#">to our editor</a> .
Image, top: courtesy National Science Foundation	DOI: 10.1126/science.caredit.a0800048

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