January 2, 2020

Dear Colleagues,

Later this month it will be thirty years since the first Hubble Fellows were chosen, and over that time the expectations of fellows in terms of their employment have changed. In particular, fellows are asking for the assurance of parental leave and the option of saving for their eventual retirement with the assistance of their employer.

NASA Hubble Fellowship Program (NHFP) Fellows who are employees of their host institutions typically have these benefits. However, a number of host institutions offer only stipendiary fellowships to NHFP fellows in lieu of employment; such fellowships do not provide employee benefits even though the NHFP (like the original Hubble Fellowship Program) is willing to pay the full cost of the employee benefits package.

Therefore the Space Telescope Science Institute and NASA Headquarters are proposing a change to the requirements for NHFP host institutions. In particular, the following stipulation will be added:

Starting with academic year 2022-2023, in order to host new NASA Hubble Fellowship Program (NHFP) Fellows, host institutions must offer their NHFP Fellows the opportunity to be employees. Employee status is being required to afford NHFP Fellows the same leave, vacation, retirement and health benefits (as applicable) given by these institutions to their postdoctoral fellows hired on grants or contracts as employees. Host institutions are also encouraged, but not required, to offer Fellows the option of choosing to be a stipendiary fellow rather than an employee if that is a better match to the Fellow’s needs.

To better gauge the implications of this policy for the community and the institutions that are hosting or wish to host fellows, I ask that you share this letter with your Sponsored Programs department and direct any questions or comments on this policy to nhfp@stsci.edu by Thursday, April 2. These emails will go directly to the three leads of the NHFP program, Andy Fruchter (STScI), Dawn Gelino (NExScI), and Paul Green (CXC), who will summarize the comments for
me and NASA HQ. We will assess the feedback we receive and incorporate it into decisions regarding the wording of the above requirement.

We have created a Frequently Asked Questions page on the policy and will be updating it as we receive comments.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely yours,
Kenneth Sembach
Director, STScI