

NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF LAW 2007 GUIDE TO POST-GRADUATE PUBLIC INTEREST FELLOWSHIPS

One of the best ways to ensure that you will be able to work in a public interest position after you graduate is to receive a public interest fellowship funding a job for you for one or two years. Many of the fellowships also allow you to decide the type of work that you will do by designing your own position and selecting the organization with which you would like to work. Most students who receive these fellowships are able to continue with public interest work when their fellowship ends if they so desire, either at their sponsoring organization or somewhere else.

The most important thing to do when applying for these fellowships is to start the process early. For fellowships that require you to design your own project, you will need time to develop an idea, find a sponsoring organization, work with them to refine the project, line up references, and complete the application. Applications for the largest public interest fellowship program in the country, Equal Justice Works, are due in September. Sponsoring organizations often select their fellowship candidates in early to mid-summer. You will not have time to develop and submit a successful application for many of the fellowship programs if you wait until you return to school in the fall to start the process.

TYPES OF FELLOWSHIPS

There are many different fellowships available. They generally fall into one of the following categories¹:

1. Fellowships with a particular organization for a particular position.
2. Fellowships that require the applicant to propose a particular project with a sponsoring organization.
3. Academic fellowships with a law school.
4. Fellowships offered by a private law firm that allow a new associate to split time between public interest work and work for paying clients.
5. Foundation grants that fund an independent project that the applicant develops and proposes.

A list of most public interest post-graduate fellowships and the application deadlines is on the PSLawNet website, www.pslawnet.org. Click on the Fellowship Corner link at the top of the page.

¹ This list has been adapted from the National Association for Law Placement's Law School Guide to Public Interest Careers, Susan Feathers, Jacqueline Ortega and Janet Smith editors, written by Judith Goldfarb with contribution from K. Jill Barr (1998).

Fellowships with a Particular Organization

A number of organizations offer their own fellowships. These fellowships are generally open to graduating law students or lawyers with limited experience. The organizations select the fellows and determine the type of work they will do. The fellowships generally last for one to two years.

Examples

Polikoff-Geatreux Fellowship, Business and Professional People for the Public Interest, Chicago, IL. A one year fellowship, renewable for a second year, open to a recent law or masters of public policy graduate to work on a variety of projects for BPI. .

ACLU Reproductive Freedom Rights Project Fellowship, ACLU Reproductive Freedom Project, New York, NY. A fellowship open to recent law graduates to work on reproductive rights issues.

Southern Poverty Law Center Education Fellowship, Southern Poverty Law Center, Montgomery, AL. A two-year fellowship open to recent law school graduates to work on civil rights litigation.

Fellowships Requiring a Project Proposal and a Sponsoring Organization

These fellowships require that an applicant develop a proposed project and find a non-profit organization that will sponsor the applicant and the project. These funders generally consider not only the applicant's qualifications, but also the work, reputation, and supervisory capacity of the sponsoring organization, as well as the need for the proposed work and the feasibility of the project. The fellowships generally last for one to two years. Some of the fellowships will only fund particular kinds of projects or prefer certain subject matters over others.

Examples

Skadden Foundation Fellowship: Each year the Skadden Foundation awards twenty to twenty-five fellowships to graduating law students and outgoing judicial clerks who have developed a particular proposal in conjunction with a sponsoring organization. Selection is based not only on the qualifications of the applicant, but also on the demonstrated effectiveness of the sponsoring organization. Fellowships are awarded for one year, with the expectation of renewal for a second year.

Equal Justice Works Fellowship: The organization awards fellowships to approximately 50 graduating law students and recent graduates. Fellows develop a particular proposal with a sponsoring organization. Selection is made by the

Equal Justice Works staff and sponsoring law firms, foundations, and corporations.

Soros Justice Postgraduate Fellowships: The Open Society Institute funds these two-year fellowships for graduating law students and recent graduates. The applicant develops a project with a nonprofit agency whose mission is related to criminal justice.

Academic Fellowships

A number of law schools offer fellowships to recent graduates designed to encourage careers in law school teaching or public interest law. Some of these fellowships are in the form of free tuition and a stipend for an LL.M program, while others offer compensation for teaching or working at the law school without a link to an LL.M program.

Other academic fellowships include the Fulbright Grants and the Marshall Scholarships, which are not limited to law school graduates. These grants provide support for pursuing further graduate education or for a variety of scholarly research projects. Candidates must often apply internally through their own university. The university then selects students to nominate for the fellowships.

Examples

William H. Hastie Fellowship, University of Wisconsin School of Law, Madison, Wisconsin. This program prepares ethnic minority law graduates for careers in law school teaching. The fellow will enroll in the LL.M program while also engaging in scholarly research and writing a major research paper. Tuition waiver and \$20,000 stipend.

Georgetown University Law Center Fellowships, Georgetown University Law Center, Washington, D.C. Georgetown offers a number of fellowships in its clinics and policy centers. Many of the fellowships involve teaching clinical students and representing clients. Most positions include pursuit of an LL.M degree.

Law Firm Fellowships

A number of private law firms offer public interest fellowships that pay fellowship winners for working on public interest projects. There are a variety of models. Some involve working for a specified period of time at a nonprofit organization and then joining the firm with full seniority. Others include working exclusively on the firm's pro bono matters. Other fellowships are sponsored by private firms that specialize in public interest law.

Examples

Fried, Frank, Harris, Shriver & Jacobson Fellowship: The fellow works for two years as a litigation associate at the firm, then spends two years at either the NAACP LDF or the Mexican-American Legal Defense and Education Fund. The fellow may, but is not required to, rejoin the firm at full seniority.

Sullivan & Cromwell Pro Bono Fellowship: Applicants must have completed a clerkship. The fellow will work for one year represented pro se indigent plaintiffs in federal court. The fellow will be paid at the full associate rate and is expected to remain as an associate at the firm at the end of the fellowship.

Chatten-Brown & Associates Fellowship: Chatten-Brown & Associates is a small, public interest law firm specializing in environmental law, land use, natural resources, and municipal law in Los Angeles. The fellow works for two years on firm cases, with the possibility of remaining as an associate at the firm at the end of the fellowship.

Foundation Grants for Independent Projects

If you have an idea for a public interest project, you may want to apply to a foundation for a grant. Some foundations are willing and able to fund individuals. Others are more willing to fund organizations, so you may want to find a sponsoring nonprofit organization with whom to partner. You may also want to consider forming a new nonprofit organization, although that step increases the amount of work and responsibility. You can find a good list of resources to assist you in grant writing in Yale Law list of Fellowship and Grant Resources, Yale Career Development Office, 2003-2004, Appendix A (available at <http://www.pslawnet.org/fellowship/index.php>).

THE APPLICATION PROCESS

As emphasized above, it is very important that you start thinking about possible fellowship applications early. Although you will not submit the actual applications until your third year in law school or during a clerkship, it is never too early to start thinking about what type of work you would like to do and where you would like to do it. In considering where to work during the summers or which placement to choose for the Public Interest Practicum, you may want to consider whether the organizations you select could be potential fellowship sponsors for you when the time comes to select a sponsoring organization.

Developing a Project

For the Skadden, Equal Justice Works, Soros, and Echoing Green fellowships, and perhaps some others, you will have to develop your own proposal for a project. You may already have an idea for a project based on your own work experiences or research.

If you do not, one good place to start is the lists of project descriptions of past fellowship winners. Those lists can give you a good idea of what types of projects the fellowship organization has funded in the past. The absence of projects funded dealing with controversial subjects, such as abortion, may indicate a funder's reluctance to fund such projects. Remember that the Equal Justice Works fellowships are co-sponsored by EJW and a law firm or foundation. You may need to think about projects that would be attractive to these co-sponsors. For example, some law firms try to sponsor fellowships that might provide the firm with pro bono projects. Other firms are reluctant to fund fellowships that might engage in litigation and take positions contrary to those of their clients, such as an employment discrimination project.

You should also look carefully at the information made available by the foundations awarding the fellowships and the criteria that they use in their selection process. Some common project restrictions include: civil legal services only; domestic U.S. projects only; projects limited to a certain geographical area; projects limited to a particular legal subject.

If you have worked at a public interest organization that you would like to be your sponsor, talk to the staff at that organization about their ideas for a project. Often project ideas are the result of a sharing of ideas between organizations and the applicant. If you have identified sponsoring organizations that interest you, but you have not worked at those places, still try to talk to staff members about their ideas for a project. If you have identified some potential subject matter areas, try to determine which organizations are working on those issues, and talk to staff at those organizations. Also use your resources at the law school: clinical and other faculty, past fellowship winners, and the Public Interest Advisor in the Career Strategy Center.

Once you have an idea for a project, you may want to discuss it with staff at the foundation that will be awarding the fellowship. The staffs at Soros, Skadden, and Equal Justice Works have all indicated that they are willing to discuss project ideas with students. Although these staff members cannot tell you whether or not they will fund your project, they can tell you whether it is the type of project that they would consider funding. Before you call these staff members, however, have some concrete ideas and some knowledge of the subject matter of your proposal.

Finding a Sponsoring Organization

One obvious choice of a sponsoring organization is an entity with whom you have worked in the past. The advantages of selecting an organization with which you are familiar are that you know the working environment and your potential co-workers, the organization knows you and your work and can write an enthusiastic letter of support, and you can get started right away on developing and refining your proposal. If you have such an organization, contact them and share your ideas for a proposal as well as solicit their ideas for where help is needed. Developing a proposal is often a give and take, back and forth process between the applicant and the sponsoring organization.

If you do not have a past employer that you would like to solicit as a sponsoring organization, there are a number of sources to help you identify an appropriate sponsor. Once again, look at the list of past fellowship winners and their sponsors. If you have a particular area of law that interests you, research who are the leaders in that area of law. The Harvard Public Interest Job Search Guide (available in the Career Center) contains information on many public interest organizations across the country. PSLawNet (www.pslawnet.org) has a database of public interest organizations as well as a listing of organizations seeking to sponsor applicants for fellowships. PSLawNet's Fellowship Calendar includes due dates for organizations seeking candidates to sponsor. Use your law school contacts: clinical and other professors, students, and the Public Interest Advisor.

You should research any organization you are considering as a sponsor. Use the internet, files in the Career Center, and other sources to get a good idea of what the organization does, its size, types of cases, mission, etc. Once you have gathered information about the organization, you should write, e-mail or call someone at the organization. Try to speak with the person who is coordinating fellowship applications. You can find out if the organization has an idea for a fellowship proposal or propose your own.

More and more sponsoring organizations are designing their own selection process to decide with whom to go forward on a fellowship application. The deadlines for these processes can be as early as June, so it is important to contact potential sponsoring organizations early. You should explore sponsorship possibilities with more than one organization. Some of these organizations may not decide which few candidates to sponsor until August. If you have only talked to one organization and they do not choose you to go forward in the process, it may be difficult to find another sponsor in time to develop a project and complete the application. While you can only apply to each fellowship with one organization, you should try to maximize your opportunities by having initial discussions with a number of organizations.

Before you agree to develop and submit a proposal with a sponsoring organization, you should get some sense of the sponsoring organization's financial status, reputation in the public interest community, and past success rate in sponsoring fellowship applicants. Organizations that have previously sponsored successful fellowship applicants are good places to consider. If the organization has no proven track record with the fellowship program and is not nationally recognized, you may need to spend additional time in your application demonstrating the high quality of the organization's staff, its experience supervising new attorneys, statistics on clients served, and other information.

It is also important to find out if a potential sponsoring organization will be sponsoring any other students for fellowships that year. The foundations awarding the fellowships will rarely award fellowships to more than one student at any organization in a single location. There are, of course, exceptions to this general rule, but it is a factor you should consider. If your sponsoring organization has agreed to sponsor six other

students for a Skadden fellowship application, your chances of being awarded the fellowship are diminished.

Preparing the Applications

Once you have developed a project and found a sponsoring organization, you need to start working on your applications. It is advisable to apply for more than one fellowship. You may want to apply for a number of different fellowships using the same project and the same sponsoring organization, apply for different fellowships using the same project and different sponsoring organizations, or apply for different fellowships using different projects. In addition to the fellowships that allow you to design your own project, you should consider applying to fellowships that are for a particular position at a particular organization.

General Points

Follow the directions on the application carefully. Some of them have very specific page or word limits, which you should follow. In particular, the Skadden application puts very short word limits on your essays. It does not, however, limit the length of the letter of support from the sponsoring organization. Information that will not fit in your essays may be incorporated into the letter of support.

Continue to check application deadlines; they can change from year to year or even overnight. Do not rely on the deadline printed on the application form; double check it against information on the fellowship's website or other information.

Your application and all supporting information must not contain any spelling or other errors. Be sure to proofread all the application materials and ask someone else to proofread them as well.

Essays

Some applications require one or more essays. They may include a personal narrative, a project description, your thoughts on a particular public interest topic, and others. While you should review essays in applications of past fellowship recipients, you should obviously use your own ideas and thoughts in your essays. Pay attention to any guidelines provided by the organization. For example, Equal Justice Works provides "Tips on Developing an Application."

Use the essays to give the funder a good sense of who you are and why you are proposing a particular project. Do you have a personal connection to the issue or client group? Highlight any prior public interest work that is related to your proposed project or that helped inspire the project. If you do not have a long history of involvement in public interest work, use the essays to explain why you have now decided to choose that path.

The project description should be concrete and realistic. Try to demonstrate the need for the project as well as specifics about how you propose to address the identified problem. Work with attorneys at the sponsoring organization to make sure you are proposing a project that can actually be done in the time allowed. Try to have other people who are familiar with the problem read your essays and give you suggestions.

Cover Letter

For applications that require a cover letter, use the letter to demonstrate that you have an understanding of the work involved in the fellowship and highlight how your experiences or interests are linked to that work. For example, in a cover letter for the ACLU Reproductive Freedom Fellowship, you might want to include the fact that you wrote a seminar paper on reproductive rights in developing countries and volunteered for Planned Parenthood while you were in college. In a cover letter for the BPI Fellowship, you might want to omit the previous information but include your work on public housing issues in the Clinic. If you have no prior experience in the area of work covered by the fellowship, try to explain why you are interested in that type of work and point out common issues between that work and your own experience. Cover letters may include personal information that would not normally be found on a resume, as long as it is relevant. For example, you might want to explain that your interest in assisting low-income families started when you were a child and volunteered with your family in a soup kitchen.

Resume

Your resume may be more than one page, as long as all the information included is relevant. Your resume is the key document for showing a long-term commitment to public interest work. Be sure to detail all your public interest experience, whether in a job, a volunteer role, an externship, or in the clinic. Include significant public interest activities from college, and even high school, if relevant. Rather than simply listing groups with which you have volunteered, provide a brief explanation of what type of work you did with each group. Remember that you may have different resumes for different applications. You may want to stress different experiences for different fellowships.

Recommendations

Carefully select the people you would like to write letters of recommendation for you. Be sure that the person feels comfortable giving you a strong recommendation. In most cases, it is best to have someone who is very familiar with you and your work rather than someone who does not know you well but who has a famous name. It is helpful if the person writing the recommendation can tie your strengths and skills to the project you are proposing. It is therefore helpful to provide your references with information about the fellowship and your proposed project. Discuss your application with the references to make sure that they have a clear understanding of what you are proposing. If there are particular aspects of your work that you would like your references to highlight, discuss those with them.

Sponsoring Agency Letter of Support

Fellowships that require a sponsoring organization often request a letter of support from the sponsoring agency. This letter, which generally does not have a page limit, is an excellent opportunity for the sponsor to supplement your application. The sponsor is generally in a good position to discuss the nature of the problem that you intend to address, the need for the project in the client community, the number of people who may be assisted by the project, and other such issues. If you have worked with the sponsoring agency, they can also write about your qualifications for the job. The sponsor letter should also include information about supervision and training that the organization will provide. Ensuring that fellows have adequate supervision and support is often an important part of the selection process.

Writing Sample

For applications that require a writing sample, select a sample that is between six and ten pages long, unless the application requests something else. If you have a good writing sample that deals with a public interest topic, use it. You may want to use different writing samples for different applications. For a position dealing with reproductive rights issues, you may want to submit part of a paper you drafted dealing with reproductive rights. For a job doing housing discrimination work, you may want to submit an employment discrimination brief that you drafted in a summer job. Be sure that you exclude or black out any confidential client or work product information contained in the writing sample. Obviously, be sure that there are no spelling or grammatical errors in your submission.

Interviews

If you make it past the initial screening for a fellowship, you will probably be asked to come in for an interview. The larger fellowship programs schedule regional interviews. For the Skadden Fellowship, you will not be given a choice for the date, so be prepared to live with their schedule.

The Skadden interviews for applicants residing in Chicago are usually conducted by Susan Plum, the Director of the program, and Frances Kao, a partner in the Chicago office. The Equal Justice Works interviews may include an Equal Justice Works staff member and a representative of the organization that is funding part of the fellowship. Try to find out who the funding organization is and conduct some research on the organization.

Be prepared to answer questions on all aspects of your project, as well as anything included in your resume or application. Try to talk to past fellowship winners about the interview process. A list of sample questions from past Skadden interviews and information from Equal Justice Works about interview questions is included in this fellowship book.

Final Points

The Public Interest Advisor in the Career Center is available to work with you on your applications. Consider asking one or two other people to review your application, as well. It is important that the final product be as strong and convincing as possible, and free of errors. Finally, remember to double check deadlines and be sure that you adhere to them. Make sure that you get the application deadline from the funder, not from a fellowship guide or general public interest website.

Included in this fellowship packet is a listing of some of the available fellowships. The most comprehensive list of post-graduate public interest fellowships and other fellowship information is on the website of PSLawNet at www.pslawnet.org, in the Fellowship Corner section. Northwestern has paid a membership fee to PSLawNet which allows you to use the service as a student or after you graduate. The Career Center also has a number of files on fellowship opportunities.

This fellowship book also contains a list of some post-graduate fellowships, a post-graduate fellowship guide from Yale Law School, *Post-Graduate International Fellowships* from Georgetown Law School, information on the Skadden and Equal Justice Works fellowships, profiles of past winners of the Skadden and Equal Justice Works fellowships, and successful applications from Northwestern Law students and graduates. Please be sure to check the websites for the fellowships to get updated information.

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