Lewis & Clark Law School
Public Interest Law

Post Graduate Public Interest Fellowships

Build the job of your dreams.

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Introduction–What are Fellowships?

In its most basic sense, a fellowship is money granted to you to work on a specific public interest project. Fellowship work takes place at non-profit organizations, government offices, law schools, and even private law firms. Some fellowships are found and applied for like jobs and others require an extensive grant-like application. This handbook will introduce you to the variety of fellowships and get you started on the application process.

Typically, fellowships fund short-term work (one to two years), and the pay is generally comparable with other entry-level public service work: ranging from $30,000 to $65,000 plus benefits with a few law firm sponsored fellowships paying much more. Some fellowships, however, only supply minimal compensation but may include loan deferment or other compensation.

The real benefits of fellowships come from outside the compensation package. Fellowship recipients get the chance to use their legal training to make real change in the world while acquiring the skills and reputation that will propel the rest of their legal careers. Often, a fellowship is the only way to get an entry-level position at large non-profits and NGOs, and some of these organizations hire their fellowship recipients as full time staff attorneys after the fellowship period is over. Law firm sponsored fellowships offer a chance to have the best of both worlds doing public interest work while receiving the training and paycheck of a law firm.

Fellowships are available for students in their final year of law school (to start after graduation), recent graduates, and graduates serving as judicial clerks. Depending on the funding and the job or project being applied for, recipients may also need to have passed the bar exam prior to starting work. Qualifications vary with the fellowship; for some, the best qualification is experience with social change and, for others, high grades and law review make for a top candidate.

As with any other job, the application process will differ from fellowship to fellowship. Many funders rely on the individual to develop a novel project and find an organization to sponsor their project; others provide funding to an organization and rely on the organization to hire the person best suited to carry out the project. In either case, you will need to identify the organizations providing services in your area of interest and work with them throughout the application process.

Some fellowships cover a broad range of legal areas and others have a very narrow focus on the area of law, the geographic region, or the kind of clients, but all serve the public interest. It is important to identify the kind of work or project you want to do early so there is time to find and apply for a matching fellowship.

The process is highly competitive, and the deadline for fellowship applications is typically in the early fall for work starting in the fall of the next year. Because of the long lead-time and competition for positions, it is important to start preparing early with most of the application work taking place during the spring of and summer after your second to last year of law school. There is a sample timeline at the end of this handbook.

It takes time and care to receive a fellowship, but the reward of starting your legal career with your "dream job" is unequaled. Receiving a fellowship opens many doors in the public interest law field. If you know how you want to change the world or if you see a problem that needs fixing, a fellowship may be right for you.

Types of Fellowships

Organization-Based Fellowships

Organization-based fellowships are managed by the host organizations—typically large national non-profits—themselves. You apply like a regular job, and you typically do not need to develop a project. Applications are sent directly to the organization.

Some good ways to find organization-based fellowships are to:

- Search PSJD.org
- Check the CPDC job postings for fellowships
- Participate in the Equal Justice Works Conference and Career Fair in Washington D.C. in October—www.equaljusticeworks.org

Examples

ACLU: National Prison Project Fellowship, Civil Liberties and National Security Applied Research Fellowship, and Glasser Racial Justice Fellowship; www.aclu.org

Center for Reproductive Rights: Blackmun Fellowship; www.reproductiverights.org

Human Rights Watch: International Human Rights Fellowships; www.hrw.org

Project-Based Fellowships

This is the "classic" fellowship. The applicant must develop a specific project, find a sponsoring organization to host their project, and apply to a funder with goals that match the project. When funders review applications, they evaluate the qualifications of the applicant, as well as the qualifications of the sponsoring organization, and the merits of the project in light of the funder's goals. Successful project-based fellowship applications involve considerable time to find and bring together the three components: the project, the organization, and the funder.

Developing a project

The centerpiece of a project-based fellowship is the project that the applicant develops. Although all three components of a project-based fellowship rely on each other—a project often leads to an organization or a funder and vice-a-versa or an organization leads to a funder and vice-a-versa—it is good to start the process by focusing on the project and some self-reflection.

As you will need to pitch your project to both a sponsor organization and a funder, it is important that you emotionally connect with the work you are proposing to do. A project you truly believe in will make it easier to draft a successful application. Some have had a way to solve a problem in the backs of their minds for a long time, and others need to find their mission. Either way, it pays to answer these questions taking time to write down the answers so you can check back and make sure you are satisfying your goals and needs through the fellowship process.

- What do I enjoy doing: Researching? Publishing papers? Working on impact litigation? Working directly with clients? Working on legislation?
- What type of environment do I want to work in? Do I want to be in a courtroom? In an academic setting?
- Who do I want my colleagues to be?
- Do I want to work directly with clients? Which clients? Refugees? Low-income tenants? Children? Seniors?
- Do I want to influence public policy, or do I prefer grassroots experiences?
- Where do I want the fellowship to take me? A permanent position in the organization? To start my own organization?
- What do I want to accomplish?

For some, these questions will lead to a specific problem, for others they will lead to an organization, or location, or community in need. For all, this is a good time to start talking to people at the organization you came up with, or talking to people who work with the community or region or problem that you have identified.

Your goal from self-assessment is to start coming up answers to these questions:

- What is the need?
- Whom will you help?
- How will you do it?
- Which organization will you work with?
- How will you measure change?
- Can the project carry on after your fellowship is over?
- Why do you want to do this?

You probably will not be able to answer all these questions right away; instead, the answers will come as you consider sponsor organizations and funding sources. Once you do find the answers, you will have your project: a problem and your way of fixing it. Your project should fill an unmet need and should make you something more than just another staff-attorney at an organization. Depending on where you are in the process when your project crystallizes, you may need to make refinements to fit the sponsor organization and the funder that you find.

Fellowships typically fund new, innovative projects for a limited duration of time, and many funders have a list of current interest areas. Therefore, it is important to develop an understanding of the status of the law: the "hot" topics within an area of law, the community need within that area, and the type of project that will address the need. It is also important to determine what efforts organizations and individuals are already undertaking so you are not proposing a project that duplicates or competes with another.

Connecting with a sponsor organization

Some people know which organization they want to work with at the start of the process. For these applicants, it makes sense to start talking to the organization early on about what you want to do and how you might accomplish it. For those who do not have a particular organization in mind, it can take some work and time to find the right sponsor.

Some ways to find organizations that will make a good sponsor are to

- Search PSJD.org and Idealist.org both for general organization information and for postings stating a desire to be sponsors. Sometimes these organizations have a project in mind already, and sometimes these organizations want students to apply to the organization to be the organization's fellowship applicant to a funder.
- Check the CPDC job postings for fellowships.
- Look through the Green Book, available in CPDC.
- Talk to faculty, alumni, and attorneys with experience in the area you want to work.
- Check the lists of prior fellowship sponsor organizations on funders' web sites. An organization experienced with a funder can smooth the application.
- Meet with the Director of Public Interest Law to talk.
- Use Google to find organizations and cold call or cold e-mail.

The sponsoring organization is a key part of your application, and you must be ready to show that the organization is effective, financially stable, and able to provide good support to you as a fellow. Reviewing the organization's annual report and program statistics can help you make sure there are no issues. Funders often have specific requirements of host; it is your job to make sure your host and funder are a match.

Finding a Funder

The final piece of a project-based fellowship is the funder. The funder gives the money for the project. There are a few large funders like Equal Justice Works and Skadden, but there are smaller funders that take some investigation to find. To find funders:

- Search PSJD.org. Many funders post on PSJD.org,
- Check the CPDC job postings for fellowships, and
- Ask potential sponsor organizations if they are familiar with any funders.

Often funders have criteria that restrict what projects they will fund. Some change focus year by year, and others have a specific mission that they always follow. Either way, it is very important to pay attention to the application requirements and either change your project to fit, or look for other funders if your project does not match. Criteria can include who the clients are, inclusion of direct representation, geographic location, or area of law. Some areas of law are particularly hard to find funders for: very few fellowships fund public defenders (excepting Soros) and very few fund reproductive rights work (excepting the Center for Reproductive Rights and the Women's Law and Public Policy Fellowship).

Examples

Equal Justice Works: Broad funding; www.equaljusticeworks.org

Skadden: The next generation of public interest; www.skaddenfellowships.org

Open Society Institute: Soros Justice Fellowship Program; the criminal justice fellowship, based in New York City; www.soros.org

Law Firm Sponsored Fellowships

Some law firms (typically very large ones) have fellowship programs. These programs allow the fellow to work at a cooperating public interest organization, or in-house working on firm pro bono matters. Often, at the end of the fellowship term, the fellow has the opportunity to join or rejoin the firm with seniority intact.

A second kind of law firm sponsored fellowship is with public interest law firms (for profit firms that handle plaintiff side cases for contingent fees or statutory attorney fees). These firms hire new attorneys as time-limited associates, and often offer permanent employment when the fellowship ends.

With both kinds of law firm sponsored fellowships, the hiring process is typically the same as regular law firm hiring. High grades, law review, and experience as a judicial clerk are standard qualities of applicants to these fellowships, but a demonstrated commitment to public interest also has weight.

Examples

MALDEF / Fried, Frank, Harris, Shriver & Jacobson Fellowship: work for two years at Fried Frank and then two years at MALDEF; www.ffhsj.com

Philadelphia Bar Association: Philadelphia Public Interest Fellowship; apply to work for one year full time at a Philadelphia public interest organization after receiving an offer from a participating Philadelphia firm; www.philadelphiabar.org

Gibbons P.C.: John J. Gibbons Fellowship in Public Interest and Constitutional Law; a full associate salary to work firm-sponsored public interest projects; www.gibbonslaw.com

Relman & Dane: Relman Civil Rights Fellowship; litigate civil rights cases; www.relmanlaw.com

Bernabei & Wachtel, PLLC: One-year civil rights litigation fellowship with a public interest law firm; www.bernabeipllc.com

Teaching and Research Fellowships

Law schools offer fellowships for graduates to either serve as a public interest attorney in a particular area of the law, to perform academic research, or to teach in a clinical setting. Some of these fellowships include an LL.M. degree through the fellowship process. These programs generally have applications more like regular jobs; however, some research fellowships require a detailed project.

Examples

Environmental Law Institute: research environmental law in D.C.; www.eli.org

Georgetown University Law Center: Fellowship Program for Future Law Professors; numerous fellowships ranging from appellate litigation to directing the teaching clinic to working on federal legislation; www.law.georgetown.edu/graduate/fellowships.html

Entrepreneurial Fellowships

Entrepreneurial Fellowships are very similar to project-based fellowships, except instead of finding a host organization, the applicant proposes to create their own new organization. To be successful, you will need to demonstrate that you have a compelling project and that you have a plan and the skills to put together and manage a new organization. These fellowships give you the chance to have the highest level of control over your work, but they also require the hardest work both in the application and in the execution. Entrepreneurial fellowship funders can be found in the same ways as project-based fellowship funders as well as through private foundations and family funds.

Examples

Echoing Green: www.echoinggreen.org

Ashoka Fellowships: third party nomination required; www.ashoka.org

International Fellowships

Many international fellowships fit within other categories as well, but have the common feature that they place graduates in international locations and they generally require a history of work with the community you are proposing to serve. Because international fellowships often require this connection, it is a good idea to start planning early by working on summer internships in international locations with NGOs. There are some application peculiarities like matching the style and custom of your résumé nay *curriculum vitae* to the expectations of your audience.

Examples

The ABA Rule of Law Initiative: Building democracy by supporting the justice system; www.abanet.org/rol/

U.S. Fulbright Program: www.cies.org/us_scholars/us_awards/

US Government Fellowships

The US Government offers a few alternative paths to regular employment. Opportunities range from government policy and management to assisting low-income communities and international work. All of these opportunities involve some form of public service, but they might not look exactly like other fellowships.

Examples

Presidential Management Fellowships (PMF): Fellows work in public policy/government management positions. These are typically not "legal positions" but the program has shown a preference for JDs. Students apply in the fall (October/November) of their final year and may continue to apply up to two years after graduation. Fellows are selected and then can connect with specific agency positions. Employment is for two years and can convert to a permanent position; www.pmf.gov

AmeriCorps: The government partners with non-profits and public agencies to provide full- and part-time positions. Positions cover a range of subject areas including legal work. For general work see: www.nationalservice.gov. Legal positions are coordinated through Equal Justice Works Through their AmeriCorps Legal Fellowships program. Graduates apply in the summer after graduation for positions starting in the fall; www.equaljusticeworks.org/post-grad/americorps-legal-fellowships

Peace Corps: International experience, especially right after law school can be difficult to find. The Peace Corps offers a chance to gain hands-on international experience with projects ranging from education to economic development and the environment. The time commitment is 27 months. Recent (often in the last year) Peace Corps volunteers are given preference in some federal government hiring; www.peacecorps.gov

Faith-connected Opportunities

A number of faith organizations offer long-term volunteer and stipend supported volunteer opportunities. Some of these experiences require you to share the beliefs of the sponsoring religion most do not. Experiences are generally non-legal, but some legal or law-related positions are available. Domestic and international opportunities are offered.

Jesuit Volunteer Corps: All are welcomed regardless of faith, gender, or sexual preference. Service is for a year. Simple communal housing, food-stipend, and transportation are provided. Volunteers commit to the Jesuit virtues of social justice, simple living, and spirituality. Some legal positions are available. Applications are due between January and March; www.jesuitvolunteers.org/

Lutheran Volunteer Corps: All are welcomed to apply. Service is for a year and a modest living allowance is provided. Positions have included work with public defenders, immigrant rights organizations, disability rights organizations, and LGBT advocacy groups. Two rounds of applications are accepted in January and April, both for positions starting in August; www.lutheranvolunteercorps.org

Other Non-legal Fellowships

A number of fellowship opportunities do not require a legal background. These fellowships range from work on policy issues to program development and management. With these non-legal fellowships, it is important to think about how you can leverage your legal education as an advantage over other applicants.

Examples

Ford Foundation: Strengthening democratic values, reducing poverty and injustice, promoting international cooperation, and advancing human achievement; www.fordfound.org

MacArthur Foundation: Works to defend human rights; advance global conservation and security by building a more just, verdant, and peaceful world; www.macfound.org

The Application

Job-like Applications

There are a number of fellowships that are applied for like any other job. For these fellowships, the application is typically a cover letter, résumé, list of references, and in some cases writing sample. These fellowships interview and make hiring decisions the same way other jobs do. As with any public interest job, it is important to know the goals and mission of the entity you are applying to and bring out the match between you and the entity. It is important to convey your passion for the work, and volunteer experience can be a contributor to success. There are, however, a few significant differences from other job applications.

Timing for job-like application fellowships can be different from most public interest jobs. Regular public interest jobs tend to hire as need arises which means graduates are regularly hired after graduation and after the bar. With job-like application fellowships, hiring typically takes place long before work is set to begin with the bulk of hiring happening in the fall and early spring. In order to receive a job-like application fellowship, you need to start your search significantly earlier than with a regular public interest job.

For firm-sponsored fellowships, the application process is very close to the application process for large firms. Typically, applications and interviews occur at the beginning of the fall. Firm-sponsored fellowships tend to focus more on things like grades and law review than other fellowships, but it is still important to have a connection to the work and a history of supporting social change in order to put together the best application.

Grant-like Applications

Applications for fellowships that require a grant-like application—mostly project-based fellowships—take considerably more time and planning than job-like fellowship applications. You must demonstrate to fellowship funders that your project is worthwhile and that you have approached your idea from all angles. An application must present your project to someone who has never heard about it and must show why you are the best person to execute the project. Through your application, articulate that you can answer the following questions affirmatively:

- Do you meet the qualifications they are asking for?
- Are you committed to the mission of the project or the nature of the work?
- Is your project consistent with the funder's purposes and priorities?
- Is your project significant / innovative?
- Is there a clear impact and benefit from your project?
- Is there a need for your project?

- Does your project offer a feasible (a.k.a. realistic) way to meet the need?
- Can you measure the success of your project?
- Is your project sustainable?
- Will your project have the support of others in the community?
- Is your project discrete and not duplicative?

Meet the Requirements

Grant-like applications come with a number of guidelines for the applicant and the project. These guidelines cover all areas from the kind of project allowed to the number of characters you can use in your application. It is important to follow the guidelines precisely. If you are asked for the same information twice, like being asked for a resume and a list of past volunteer experience, give the information twice rather than saying "see above". Do not try to slip anything by or ignore a requirement because it is a weak point in your application; instead, address even the shortcomings head-on to show that you have fully considered your project.

Pay Attention to the Personal Statement

Most grant-like fellowships ask you to provide a personal statement; this is often the hardest part to write and is often the most important part of an application. Good personal statements are—well—personal; meaning they speak from the applicant's heart about the issues the project addresses. Convey the human impact of the issues along with the skill, background, and connection you have with the issues.

Skills and connection include your legal skills, but they also include your experience before law school or growing up. If you have program management skills from working before law school, write about those skills. If your project is to fight acid mine runoff and you have been angry about acid mine run off since you were growing up in coal country and you couldn't catch crayfish because the creek was polluted, then write about not catching crayfish. If your project comes from your heart, then write from your heart.

In the end, you want a personal statement that shows that you are sensitive to the problems of the disadvantaged, committed to the project, committed to the funder's goals, and articulate and put together enough to be effective.

Write with Purpose

Grant-like fellowship applications require a considerable amount of writing, and it is important to make sure that your writing is articulate and concise. The people reviewing your fellowship application will likely not be familiar with the particular problem and solution you are presenting, so it is very important that you be able to explain yourself clearly. Additionally, many grant-like fellowship applications have word limits for various topics, so it is important not to repeat yourself unnecessarily; some applications even

have character limits, so every letter, comma, and space matters. You should even give thought to what you title your application; a good title is catchy, addresses the need for your project, and serves as a theme for the rest of your application.

Your application will include a description of your host organization. Often applicants are tempted to use a flat history of the organization, but this can be a mistake. Instead, it is better to talk about the needs that the organization meets, their community support, and the efficiency of their programs.

Writing care extends beyond you to your recommenders as well. It is important to select carefully recommenders who can talk about your experience and cite your connection to the issues that your project addresses. It is best to outline your experiences and your project for recommenders so they can make sure the details of their letters are correct.

Start Early

In producing your application, the earlier you start the better. In a perfect world, your first volunteer position as a first year law student would begin your application process connecting you to the community and the need that your project addresses. In reality, this is rarely if ever the case. Typically, the bulk of fellowship planning and writing occurs during the spring and summer after a student's second year. If you also spend that summer, or the summer before, working with the organization you want to host your fellowship or the community you want to serve, you will be much better prepared to put together a well thought-out and complete application.

Most fellowship deadlines are in the early fall. Remember to leave enough time for other people to review your application, time to find references, time to find an organization, time to write, time to plan your project, and time to research funders.

Other Resources

PSJD.org maintains a database of fellowship funders and sponsor organizations for grant-like fellowships and many postings for organization based fellowships. Outside the database, there are also guides and tips for making a great fellowship application.

Copies of grant-like fellowship applications from previous Lewis & Clark students are available upon request from CPDC.

Suggested Time Line

First Year

Fall

- Learn about fellowships: what they are and what types are available

- Begin building your public interest resume
  - Volunteer for pro bono and community service work
  - Be active in public interest student groups
- Begin thinking about a 1L summer position

Spring

- Conduct your 1L summer job search
  - Apply for summer work through the Northwest Public Service Career Fair
- Visit public interest organizations
- Work on the PILP Auction
- Apply for summer funding
  - PILP stipends
  - Other sources from the “Summer Funding” page at PSJD.org

Summer

- Make good contacts at your 1L summer position
- Start planning for your 2L summer and consider a law firm split summer

Second Year

Fall

- Begin 2L summer search
  - Consider summer positions that will link to fellowship possibilities
  - Talk with the Director of Public Interest Law about your goals
  - Apply for positions and attend the Equal Justice Works Conference and Career Fair in D.C. in October
- Continue building your public interest resume
  - Continue with pro bono and community service activities
  - Consider public interest externships and prepare with required classes
  - Take a clinic
  - Fulfill the certified law student requirements by the end of your 2L year

Spring

- Finalize 2L summer plans
  - Apply for positions through the Northwest Public Service Career Fair
- Work on the PILP Auction
- Apply for summer funding
  - PILP stipends
  - Other sources from the “Summer Funding” page at PSJD.org
- Talk to former fellows, alumni, and professors about your fellowship ideas

For Project-Based Fellowships

- Begin contacting potential sponsor organizations
- Begin planning your fellowship project
    - Who, what, where, how, why?

Summer

For Project-Based Fellowships

- Finalize your project ideas
- Familiarize yourself with the funders
    - Learn about funder goals
    - Determine application deadlines and procedures
- Finalize sponsor organization selection as soon as possible
- Begin writing fellowship applications with help from sponsor organization

Third Year

Fall

For Project-Based Fellowships

- Finalize your applications
    - Work with the Executive Director of Public Interest Law to review your work
    - Have others proof-read your work
- Submit your applications

For Other Fellowships

- Determine application deadlines and procedures
- Review the employers hiring for post graduate positions at the Equal Justice Works Conference and Career Fair in Washington D.C. in October and consider attending
- Submit your applications

For All

- Start considering non-fellowship public interest positions
- Prepare for interviews with practice interviews

Spring

- Submit applications for fellowships with spring deadlines (usually job-like)
- Continue considering non-fellowship public interest positions
    - Apply for attorney work through the Northwest Public Service Career Fair
- Work with PILP on fundraising

* Materials collected from a variety of sources including the PSJD *Comprehensive Fellowship Guide*, The Yale Law School Career Development Office, Equal Justice Works, and the NALP *Law School Guide to Public Interest Careers*

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Portland, Oregon