



Columbia  
Law School

SOCIAL JUSTICE  
INITIATIVES

ALL STUDENTS AND GRADUATES

FELLOWSHIPS

# POSTGRADUATE FELLOWSHIP TOOLKIT

Prepared for the exclusive use of Columbia Law School students and graduates

2022-2023

# HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This toolkit is intended to guide Columbia Law School students and alumni who are applying to postgraduate fellowship positions. **Use of this toolkit does not guarantee that an applicant will obtain a fellowship position.**

We recommend that you begin by reading the entire toolkit to gain a full picture. After, you may return to the sections that are most relevant to where you are in the process.

For additional information, please contact the [Social Justice Initiatives \(SJI\) office](#).

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2022-2023

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# FELLOWSHIP OVERVIEW

## Introduction

Postgraduate fellowships are a critical component of the job search strategy for all public interest students. Fellowships serve as an entry to a public interest career and provide access to many public interest jobs. Fellowships afford new lawyers with opportunities to do social justice work in settings that match their passions. Fellowships enable these lawyers to launch themselves, obtain invaluable experiences, perform meaningful work, and forge contacts and relationships that will serve them throughout their careers. As a general matter, fellowship funding is provided for a fixed period (usually one to two years). Fellows may have the opportunity to stay on at the organization as a staff attorney, however. Regardless, fellowships are valuable opportunities that open many doors.

## Types of Fellowships<sup>1</sup>

There are many different types of fellowships. Fellowships fall into five general categories, which are outlined below. Note that the first two categories (organization-based fellowships and project-based fellowships) are the most common.

### **Organization-Based Fellowships**

Some nonprofit organizations administer their own fellowships. Essentially, these are junior attorney positions within a legal organization that last for a finite time. Fellows receive a stipend directly from the organization, and the organization determines the fellow's salary and benefits and the duration and scope of the work. The fellowships vary as to eligibility and advantage—some prefer recent graduates or judicial clerks, while others welcome applications from 3Ls. These are the most common types of fellowships.

To apply, candidates go through a formal process directly with the organization. Deadlines fall throughout the year. Potential applicants should begin checking postings on [PSJD](#) (the Public Service Jobs Directory) in the spring of 2L year and should set up email alerts for new postings. Many fellowships are also on [Simplicity](#). We recommend you monitor both sites.

*Examples:*

*Center for Appellate Litigation Fellowship (criminal defense appeals)*

*Center for Reproductive Rights Fellowship (Women's Rights)*

*Equal Justice Initiative Fellowship (Capital Defense, Mass Incarceration, Racial Justice)*

*George N. Lindsay Fellowship, Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights (Voting Rights,*

*Employment, Criminal Justice, Education, or Housing and Community Development)*

*Human Rights Watch Fellowship (International Human Rights)*

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<sup>1</sup> Please be aware that not all fellowships qualify for Columbia Law School's Loan Repayment Assistance Program (LRAP). For example, fellowships for non-legal work and academic fellowships that do not include substantial law teaching may not qualify. If you plan to apply for LRAP, check with the Office of Financial Aid before accepting a fellowship.

*Karpatkin Fellowship, ACLU National Legal Office (Racial Justice)*

### **Project-Based Fellowships**

Some foundations provide fellowships for applicants to partner with a “host” nonprofit organization of their choice to work on a specific project. The project is developed in partnership with the host organization. Thus, the applicant will secure a host organization first (more on that later), and then apply to the funder with the project they have identified with their host. In addition to evaluating the applicant, the funder assesses the host, the project idea, and how well these pieces fit together. These fellowships usually are open to current 3Ls and judicial clerks but also vary as to whether they prefer/allow 3Ls, clerks, or recent graduates to apply.

The term of the fellowship is finite (usually one to two years), and the funder generally disburses the stipend amount to the host organization, which in turn pays the fellow. Different funders have different rules as to whether the funder or the host organization provides benefits to the fellow.

Funders typically have limitations on the types of projects they will fund—for example, funding may be limited to certain issues or approaches (like direct legal service poverty work) or to work taking place in specific geographical locations. Applicants must evaluate their projects against these restrictions.

An applicant may present a potential host with their own project idea if it is in line with the mission of the organization. Many organizations, however, have their own project ideas and are looking for candidates to carry them out. Ideally, projects are developed with input from both the candidate and the hosting organization. Be aware that organizations may have a formal application process for selecting a candidate to host. Check [PSJD](#), [Simplicity](#), and the organization’s website for that information.

Note that applications for project-based fellowships require several steps, and some have early deadlines (for example, in September). We strongly encourage interested students to meet with SJI during the spring of 2L year and attend relevant information sessions. We will work with you throughout the summer. Contact SJI’s [director of public interest professional development](#) if you intend to apply for project-based fellowships.

*Examples:*

*David W. Leebron Human Rights Fellowship*

*Equal Justice Works (EJW) Fellowship*

*Kirkland & Ellis Fellowship*

*Skadden Fellowship*

*Soros Justice Fellowship*

*Justice Catalyst Fellowship*

### **Law Firm-Hosted Fellowships (Not Project-Based)**

Some law firms offer fellowships in which the fellow is paid by the firm to work in the public interest.

### ***Public Interest Law Firms***

A fellow may be hired by a public interest law firm to work for a limited term directly on its docket, which is usually made up of civil rights-related cases.

*Examples:*

*Neufeld Scheck & Brustin, LLP*

*Cochran Fellowship*

*Shute, Mihaly & Weinberger LLP Fellowship*

*Cohen Milstein Sellers & Toll PLLC Fellowship*

### ***Corporate Law Firm with a Public Interest Docket***

A corporate law firm may hire a fellow for a limited term to work on its pro bono public interest docket.

*Examples:*

*Gibbons Law Firm, John J. Gibbons Fellowship in Public Interest and Constitutional Law*

*Hunton & Williams Pro Bono Fellowship*

### ***Law Firm-Funded Public Interest Fellowship***

A fellow may be hired to work for a limited time as a staff attorney at a public interest organization but be paid by a firm. There may be an expectation that the fellow will also work for the firm for some amount of time.

*Examples:*

*BLBG Fellowship*

*Fried, Frank, Harris, Shriver & Jacobson/NAACP LDF, MALDEF Fellowship*

*Norton Rose Fulbright Fellowship at The Door Legal Services Center*

### **Academic Fellowships**

Academic fellowships assist candidates seeking graduate degrees or pursuing scholarly or research-oriented projects. Some include a stipend and tuition for the fellow to obtain an LL.M. degree, and some provide teaching experience—in most cases, clinical teaching experience.

*Examples:*

*Fulbright Scholar Program*

*Georgetown University Law Center Fellowships*

*Yale Law School Robert M. Cover Fellowship*

In addition, many law school clinics throughout the country will hire a “staff attorney” or “clinical fellow” to assist with handling cases and supervising students. Generally, these opportunities require some post-law school experience in the practice area.

### **Entrepreneurial Grants**

Graduates can also fund their own projects by starting a new organization with seed money, or by applying directly for grants, the way many nonprofit organizations do. Because of limitations on grant-giving to individuals, you may need to find a nonprofit organization to submit the

proposal as your host. To apply directly for grants, see the [Candid \(formerly known as the Foundation Center\) website](#).

*Examples:*

*Ashoka Fellowship*

*The Echoing Green Fellowship*

## Planning and Timing

Fellowship applications take varying amounts of time to complete, and deadlines fall throughout the year. It is important that you give yourself enough time to identify the fellowships of interest, note deadlines and application requirements, and ready all the pieces you will need to apply. Always double-check an application deadline by looking on the organization’s website or by calling to confirm.

***Project-based applications*** are due beginning in September of the year before the fellowship is to begin (although, as the timelines contained in this *Fellowship Toolkit* demonstrate, work on these applications should begin in the late spring). Project-based applications involve advance preparation, generally requiring a project description, personal essays, and several letters of recommendation—all this after securing a host organization and identifying and developing a project. If you are planning to apply for a project-based fellowship, it is *strongly* recommended that you start early. Please consult the “Getting Started To-Do List” and “Securing a Host Organization/Networking” sections in this toolkit for more information. Note that Columbia Law School offers several project-based fellowships with deadlines in the late fall and winter, thus allowing you to develop a project and apply after other project-based fellowship applications are due.

If you are exploring project-based fellowships, be sure to contact SJI’s [director of public interest professional development](#) as soon as possible. They will serve as your primary fellowship adviser throughout the summer.

You do not have to apply for a project-based fellowship. The process is not for everyone.

***Organization-based fellowships:*** There are many organization-based fellowships, and their applications are more straightforward. These require the typical job application materials: cover letter, resume, transcript, and references, making the application process more familiar. You can apply for as many of these positions as you like throughout the year.

## Beginning the Search

Because each fellowship has different application requirements and deadlines, you will want to start your research early and get organized. Beginning in the late spring, make sure you are monitoring [PSJD](#) and [Simplicity](#) for fellowship postings. SJI also maintains our own spreadsheet tracking fellowship opportunities. Contact SJI’s [director of public interest professional development](#) to gain access.

## **PSJD (Public Service Jobs Directory)**

[PSJD](#) offers the most comprehensive list of organization-based fellowships and project-based fellowship funders. A good number of organizations seeking to host a fellow for a project-based fellowship also post there.

### *Finding Fellowship Postings*

Select the “Search Jobs” tab, and then, under the “Refine Search” sidebar on the right, “Job Qualities.” Under “Job Type,” you will find the following categories of postgraduate fellowships:

- Organizational (Fellowships administered and funded by the same organization)
- Project-Based (Fellowship funders as well as host organizations seeking candidates with whom to develop a project proposal)
- Clinical/Academic (Fellowships with a teaching component)

To save this search, click the bell icon. We recommend that you opt to receive email alerts!

### *Other Resources on PSJD*

If you select the tab “Explore Advice” and then “Postgraduate Fellowships,” you can access helpful resources, including a calendar of application deadlines. You can also get to the calendar while searching postings—simply click the calendar icon that appears once you’ve chosen fellowships as the job type.

## **Symplicity**

Any notice that is sent to anyone within SJI is posted on [Symplicity](#).

## **Organization Websites**

Organizations offering fellowships will usually have information and instructions on their website. Organizations seeking to host a fellow may have a posting on their website, but many do not. Finally, funders’ websites (e.g., Skadden, EJW) have a lot of useful information about their fellowships, as well as lists of former fellows, organizations, and project areas.

## **People**

Do not underestimate the value of talking with people, even at the early stages. Alumni, current and former fellows, faculty members, former internship supervisors, and SJI advisers are all valuable resources available to you. They can connect you with practitioners in your interest areas and help you identify and evaluate organizations and fellowships and develop project ideas.

## **Questions to Ask**

### **As you conduct research, you will be asking such questions as:**

What work do I want to do? Where do I want to be? What kind of project excites me? What are the funder’s priorities? What kind of work can I anticipate doing over the course of the fellowship? What level of supervision do I want?



**In evaluating a potential host organization, you will want to ask:**

Do I like the work of this organization? Can I see myself working there? Are its values and goals compatible with mine? How familiar is the organization with the project-based fellowship application process? Does the organization have specific project ideas? What kinds of projects does the organization have the capacity to support and supervise? Will there be someone to work with me on the application? Is the organization hosting more than one candidate?

**And in the process of developing project ideas, you will be asking:**

What population or community do I want to work with? What are their current needs? What can I do that will address unmet needs and fit with my skills, experiences, and interests? Will this project help launch the career I hope to have?

## Columbia Law School Fellowships

Columbia Law School offers [several fellowships](#) to its students and graduates. It also partners with fellowship funders that designate spots for our students and graduates. They fall into several of the categories described above.

- **David W. Leebron Human Rights Fellowship**  
This fellowship enables a J.D. or LL.M. graduate to spend one year working in human rights, either in the United States or abroad, in pursuit of a career in human rights law.
- **Global Public Service Fellowship**  
This twelve-month fellowship, available to graduating J.D. and LL.M. students and to alumni who completed their degree within the past two years, supports work with a public service organization, intergovernmental agency, national supreme court, or international court host abroad. Preference is given to organizations based in the Pan-Asia region who are engaged in issues of international law and global consequence. Applications involving environmental work in Asia will be given special consideration.
- **Herbert and Nell Singer Social Justice Fellowship**  
A one-year fellowship for a J.D. graduate who demonstrates the commitment, ability, and preparation to make a difference as a public interest lawyer. The fellow may propose a project or serve as a staff attorney at a U.S. nonprofit.
- **Kirkland & Ellis New York City Public Service Fellowship**  
This fellowship provides one Columbia J.D. graduate the opportunity for a year of postgraduate public service that meets serious human needs in New York City.
- **LL.M. Public Interest and Government Fellowships**  
For LL.M. graduates who demonstrate commitment to, and preparation for, careers in public interest, government, or human rights. Recipients work at a host in the U.S. or abroad.
- **Mark Haas Public Interest Fellowship**  
This fellowship supports one to two graduating J.D. or LL.M. students from China to pursue public interest legal work in the U.S. for three to five months.
- **Millstein Fellowships**  
These include a fellowship to fund to a recent Columbia Law School J.D. graduate to do legal work on issues related to financial regulation within the U.S. Congress or an Executive Branch agency and another fellowship to fund work on Capitol Hill.

- **Sandler/Human Rights Watch Fellowship**

The Sandler Fellow, a J.D. graduate, spends one year at Human Rights Watch in New York or Washington, DC, monitoring human rights developments in various countries, conducting onsite investigations, drafting reports, and engaging in advocacy to publicize and curtail human rights violations.

**Fellowships with Designated Spots for Columbia Law School Graduates:**

- **BLBG Fellowship**

This fellowship provides J.D. graduates the opportunity to work in a litigation role at a public interest organization for two years before joining the firm's world class investor-side litigation practice.

- **Excelsior Service Fellowship Program**

This two-year fellowship supports J.D. graduates to work in New York State government alongside senior members of the administration.

- **J.D. Public Interest and Government Fellowships**

J.D. graduates who demonstrate serious commitment to and preparation for careers as public interest lawyers are eligible for these one-year fellowships, which are designed to allow graduates to gain experience and skills and to provide talented new lawyers to nonprofit organizations and government agencies confronting great demand and diminished resources.

- **Norton Rose Fulbright Fellowship at the Door Legal Services Center**

This fellowship is awarded to one Columbia Law School or NYU graduating J.D. to work at The Door, New York's premier youth development agency, for 16 months.

- **Social Justice Legal Foundation Hueston Hennigan Fellowship**

Hueston Hennigan Fellows, who are J.D. graduates, work for the foundation for two years, receive top caliber training in trial and appellate advocacy from a professional legal team and private law firm mentors, and gain meaningful hands-on trial experience litigating impactful cases with the entrepreneurial spirit and resources of a top law firm.

View additional fellowships on [our fellowships page](#).

## Conclusion

Whether you are developing a project-based fellowship, applying to other fellowships, or both, remember to get assistance from SJI. We can help you research an organization, contact former fellows and graduates, and organize and edit fellowship applications. Please contact SJI's [director of public interest professional development](#) for more information.

# GETTING STARTED TO-DO LIST

This schedule is geared to 2Ls, but most target dates will apply to other applicants.

- Preliminary contact and discussions with SJI.  
*Target date: March/April of 2L year*
- Attend fellowship information sessions this spring and in the fall.
- Set up [PSJD](#) alerts and begin regular monitoring [Symplcity](#) for organizations seeking to host a fellow and for organization-based fellowships.  
*Target date: early April and continuing*
- Complete Self-Assessment and review other materials in the *Fellowship Toolkit*.  
*Target date: March*
- Have preliminary conversations with contacts you have identified.  
*Target date: May/June*
- Update resume. Make sure to refer to this toolkit for guidance.  
*Target date: before first meeting with your adviser, but continue to update as needed throughout summer*
- Create an initial list of fellowships in a fellowship application chart to track required materials, due dates, etc. (See the sample Fellowship Application Chart in this toolkit.) Note any early deadlines for fellowships or host organizations. Applications for the George N. Lindsay Fellowship with the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights are due in May.  
*Target date: mid-April with ongoing updates*
- Make an appointment to discuss clerkships. If you are interested in clerkships and haven't yet applied, make an appointment with a clerkship adviser via [Symplcity](#).  
*Target date: within the month of April*
- If you are interested in applying to government honors programs, make an appointment with SJI's Director of Government Programs on [Symplcity](#).  
*Target date: early June, as deadlines are generally August-September*
- Research hosts for project-based fellowships (unless a previous employer is hosting you). Look for organizations of interest; begin to think about project ideas. Conduct outreach, have conversations, network, seek ideas; consult with SJI/your fellowship adviser.  
*Target date: May/June*
- Check in with your adviser. Advisers are available for phone or Zoom calls if you are not located near campus over the summer.

*Target date: every few weeks throughout process*

- Assemble your “team” of support (more information later in this toolkit).  
*Target date: June and ongoing*
- Create a networking chart. Unless a previous employer is serving as your host, a chart will help organize your progress in securing a host. See the sample host tracking chart in this toolkit.  
*Target date: early June with ongoing updates*
- Develop strategies for host outreach: may be formal application materials or informal outreach. Plan for interviews/meetings with potential hosts; conduct interviews/outreach; continue to follow up. Consult with adviser and make sure to refer to the *Fellowship Toolkit* for guidance.  
*Target date: early June with ongoing outreach*
- Continue to monitor [PSJD](#) and [Symplicity](#) and continue alerts for new postings.
- Think about potential references. Make sure to refer to the *Fellowship Toolkit* for guidance and discuss potential references with your adviser.  
*Target date: early June. Generally, you will wait until you have secured a host organization and project idea before reaching out to references, but it is sometimes appropriate to reach out earlier for preliminary discussions.*
- Think about whether you are interested in being hosted by your summer internship organization. Approach them and find out their timeline and procedure for selecting a fellowship candidate.  
*Target date: mid- to end of June*
- Finalize your fellowship list. Make decisions about which fellowships to apply to.  
*Target date: mid-July*
- Order transcripts. When you know which fellowships you will apply for, order transcripts to be sent from the registrar to accompany your applications upon completion.  
*Target date: mid-July*
- Secure your host organization.  
*Target date: end of July, if possible, but do not panic if you have not secured your host by then*
- Work on finalizing project ideas with your host organization.  
*Target date: early August*

- Once you have secured a host is secured and developed a project idea, contact references. Consult this toolkit for guidance.  
*Target date: early August*
- Draft application essays. With your adviser and host, set a schedule for draft essays and edits.  
*Target dates vary! EJW, Skadden, and Independence Foundation, for example, have deadlines in September. Therefore, it is best to begin the drafting process in early August.*
- Share finalized project details. Set up date for three-way call between you, adviser, and host organization (if all parties are willing) to finalize project details and application plans.  
*Target date for EJW and Skadden: early August.*
- If you are applying for a Skadden Fellowship, contact Skadden Foundation Executive Director Kathleen Rubenstein. When you have made substantial progress on your project, ask her a question about it.  
*Target date: mid- to late August*
- Continue work on application drafts, sending drafts to adviser and others for feedback.  
*Target date: ongoing*
- Ensure recommendations are ready to be sent out to accompany fellowship applications.  
*Target date for EJW and Skadden: late August*
- Finalize applications. Submit them at least a day before they are due.  
*Key target dates:*
  - *EJW applications should be submitted online at least one day before the due date. They are typically due in September.*
  - *Skadden applications should be emailed at least one day before the due date. They are typically due in September.*
  - *Keep your eyes on other fellowship dates (including Singer, Millstein, and Soros).*
- Begin thinking about applying for other project-based fellowships with later deadlines (such as Kirkland & Ellis, Leebron, etc.). Meet with adviser to discuss applications.  
*Target date: meeting with adviser or SJI adviser in November*
- Complete other fellowship applications.  
*Target dates depend upon the application. [PSJD](#), [Simplicity](#), and SJI's Monday newsletter are great sources of information. Consult SJI's [director of public interest professional development](#) for guidance.*

# SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

You are encouraged to fill out this questionnaire because you have expressed interest in fellowships. It will help you and your fellowship adviser think about whether this is a good option for you and which fellowships would be a good fit. If you are interested in project-based fellowships, the questions will help you think about hosts and projects. Don't worry if you do not have an answer to every question!

**If you already know which fellowships interest you, please list them here:**

## Goals and Values

If you could do anything after graduation, what would it be?

What are your short- and long-term career goals?

## General Interests and Experience

How have you spent your time in law school (including summers)? Please list specific activities within each category or write N/A.

1L summer

2L summer

Term-time internships or pro bono projects

Clinics

Externships

Journals

Student organizations

Work for professors

Favorite classes

Moot court

Other

Outside of law school, what hobbies and activities have you been drawn to?

Do you have any relevant work experience prior to law school?

## Specific Interests: Legal Area and Population

What substantive area(s) and/or legal issue(s) interest you the most? Why?

What population do you want to serve?

Have you worked with this population prior to or during law school (including summers)?

## Advocacy Methods

Which advocacy methods interest you? Check all that apply.

<input type="checkbox"/> Direct legal services	<input type="checkbox"/> Grassroots advocacy/community organizing
<input type="checkbox"/> Impact litigation	<input type="checkbox"/> Legislative/regulatory work
<input type="checkbox"/> Policy	<input type="checkbox"/> Media

Other:

Have you used any of these tools in your prior work experience? How and where?

## Location

What geographic regions are you open to working in? Check all that apply.

\_\_\_\_\_ Specific city/state/country/region:

\_\_\_\_\_ Domestic

\_\_\_\_\_ International

\_\_\_\_\_ Urban

\_\_\_\_\_ Rural

\_\_\_\_\_ Other:

## Type of Organization/Work Environment

What qualities are important to you?

How do you want to spend your time on a day-to-day basis? Check all that apply.

\_\_\_\_\_ Research and writing

\_\_\_\_\_ Oral advocacy

\_\_\_\_\_ Investigative reporting,  
documentation

\_\_\_\_\_ Drafting legal education  
materials/policy manuals

\_\_\_\_\_ Interviewing and representing clients

\_\_\_\_\_ Organizing grassroots efforts

Other:

Do you have experience with any of these activities? Where?

Would you be interested in returning to any of the organizations at which you previously worked, either for a project-based or an organization-based fellowship? If so, which organization(s)?

Other organizations that interest you?



## Next Steps

The following people might be helpful for me to speak with:

I want to find out more about:

Questions I have currently:

# THE APPLICATION

Fellowship applications all differ from one another, and so careful attention must be paid to the specific goals of each fellowship, and the requirements and components of each application. In addition to the available written instructions, it is helpful to speak with SJI and former fellows to gather other useful information. Overall, think about your application as a piece of advocacy: its purpose is to convey why you are the right person for this project or work and, if you are proposing a project, that the project addresses an important need and is realistic within the time frame given.

## Some Preliminary Considerations

### **Are You Qualified?**

This is an essential question asked in all fellowship applications, but different funders set different qualifications, and emphasize them differently. Some fellowships value grades and other indicia of academic success; some even prefer that a candidate complete a clerkship first. Others put greater emphasis on relevant experience and demonstrated commitment to the issue or client population. Again, conversations with SJI and former fellows are helpful in assessing how your qualifications are likely to be viewed, and what you should highlight.

### **Are You Committed to the Work and the Goals of the Organization?**

All fellowship funders look for commitment. But what exactly is that? Essentially it is an expression of, and demonstration of, deep caring for the issues and goals of the fellowship, thoughtful articulation of why you want this fellowship and how you have developed the necessary skills and knowledge to carry it out. Prior work with the fellowship organization, experience with the legal issues and/or client population through clinics, externships, coursework, summers, *pro bono* and even pre-law school involvements are good ways to demonstrate this commitment. Some connection or familiarity with the community you wish to serve is often extremely valuable. Your cover letter and/or personal statements will pull together your experiences (which may be personal, academic, and work-related) to present a cohesive “journey” and compelling narrative.

## Components of an Application Package

Different fellowship funders may request different materials, and applicants are expected to follow the instructions precisely. Many organization-based fellowships require the same materials as job applications: cover letter, resume, law school transcript, writing sample, and recommendation letters or a reference list. Project-based fellowships require additional materials such as: a personal statement(s), a project description, and a letter from your host organization. SJI has past sample application packages available for you to review.

Note that it is extremely important that your materials be free of errors and conform to application requirements and restrictions. Your materials and those from your recommenders and hosts must be consistent and relevant and address the priorities of the funder. It is always the case that putting the application package together takes more time than anticipated.

For project-based fellowship applications, your application should provide information and support for the following:

- The project is consistent with the funder's goals and priorities.
- There is a significant need that can be addressed by your project.
- You have a connection to the work/community/issues involved in your project
- Your project proposes a feasible way to meet the need.
- You have the skills, knowledge, and abilities to carry out the project.
- The project has support within the community/from existing organizations.
- Your project is different from the work of a staff attorney.
- Your host organization has the capacity to provide good supervision and support for your project.
- The fellowship period will provide enough time for your project to succeed and have an impact.

# ESSAYS, PERSONAL STATEMENTS, AND COVER LETTERS

You may be asked to provide a personal statement. If not, you will certainly write a cover letter. These are opportunities to highlight and explain your commitment and abilities to the work you will do as a fellow. This can be difficult, and it is often helpful to talk through your ideas with your fellowship adviser. The key is to articulate why you are committed to this work, and how your experiences, skills, knowledge, abilities, and commitment will enable you to excel as a fellow. What has motivated YOU to do this work? Think about a personal narrative that pulls together your experiences and how they have impacted you. Sometimes a personal anecdote or story can be effective in expressing why you care about an issue or community.

For project-based fellowships, your project proposal is central. Whether you begin by identifying an organization you are interested in, an issue you want to address, or a community you want to work with, the details of the project itself will be developed by collaboration between you and your host organization. The proposal itself will need to convey a lot of information in a concise way. This requires spending a good amount of time developing the project and working on details with your host organization, seeking guidance, information, and ideas from former fellows and relevant experts, and going through several written drafts.

# APPLICATION ATTACHMENT CHECKLIST

The required submissions for fellowship applications vary. Each will clearly state the required components, and you will need to make sure to comply strictly. In addition to essays and, for project-based fellowships, a project proposal and materials from the host organization, most fellowships also require resumes, references, and transcripts. Below are some helpful tips for these parts of the application.

## Resumes

- You should use the *Public Interest Job Search Toolkit* for general guidance on resumes. It is available on the [Job Search Tools page](#) of the SJI website.
- Included here are a resume “checklist” and some sample resumes for reference.
- Make sure to update your resume to include your 2L summer internship, as well as 2L and 3L (done or certainly to be done, not speculative) clinics, externships, pro bono work, student group leadership positions and so forth. In other words, add any experiences (including non-legal work) relevant to the work you are applying to do and that you may have omitted from earlier versions of your resume (but be clear in indicating timeframes).
- Focus on the descriptions of your public interest work and community service activities. You want to give a detailed picture of your commitment, your experience with and knowledge of the work you are proposing to do, the skills you will use, and the community you propose to work with. Make sure you have highlighted the experience and skills more relevant to your proposed project and the priorities of the funder.
- Make sure your international experience is framed in terms that will appeal to domestic employers (or vice versa).
- For fellowships, it is generally fine if your resume goes beyond the typical one page, but we recommend that you consult with your adviser.
- Make sure that there are no typos!

## Transcripts

- Some applications (like Skadden, Singer, Kirkland & Ellis, and Leebron) require transcripts.
- Official transcripts can be obtained at University Registration Services in Kent Hall.
- Some funders care about grades; others are interested in the classes that you chose to take.

## Letters of Recommendation/References

- Most fellowships require written letters of recommendation. Some funders also contact references by phone. Some specify at least one employer reference, others a law professor.
- Read and follow specific requirements set forth in the application instructions.
- If not specified, aim for a mix of law school professors (preferably clinic or externship professors) and legal employers (such as a summer job supervisor or pro bono supervisor). Make sure your references know you well and have a good sense of your

experience, goals, and skills. It is better to have someone who knows you well than someone who has a fancy title or is better known in the field but does not know YOU as well.

- Make sure your references are willing to serve as (and will be good) references. This includes being someone who will submit the letter before the deadline.
- Be clear whether you need written references, or oral references, or both.
- Discuss with your recommender the fellowship you are applying for, the kind of work you will be doing, and why you are eager to do it. Provide references with a copy of your resume. Follow up, IN WRITING, with the name and details of the fellowship and your project and host organization if applicable. Remind them of the work you did for them; prepare key points (a bulleted, easy-to-read list) that you would like them to highlight in the reference.
- For written references, give clear instructions about where and when the letters should be sent. Some fellowships require electronic submission of references, while others want hard copies. Some require that the letters be submitted with the rest of the application materials.
- Give plenty of lead time – do not wait until the last minute.
- Some references will ask you to draft a letter that they will edit. This is a common practice, and you should agree to do it. Use the bulleted list you prepared as your starting point but ask for feedback from an SJI adviser to be sure you are positive and effusive enough about your accomplishments.

### **Letter from Host Organization**

Project-based fellowships applications will invariably call for a letter from your host organizations (sometimes referred to as the employer’s letter of support). Some employers will be familiar with crafting this kind of letter, and some will not. You should discuss this letter with those you are working with at your organization to make sure that the letter will contribute all that it can to your application.

Ideally the letter should address—and provide support for—the need for the proposed project, the organization’s position and capacity to host the project and supervise you, and why you are exceptionally well- suited both to carry out the project and to work within the organization.

The following is a checklist of details that the employer should include in its letter of support (though not necessarily in this order):

### **Information About the Employer**

- What the organization does (its work, goals, and methods).
- The role of the individual writing the letter within the organization (and the individual’s relevant experience).
- If applicable, that the organization has hosted fellows previously.
- Why the organization is the perfect host for this project (the organization’s knowledge base, place within the community, history, and expertise).
- That the organization would not otherwise be able to undertake this this work.
- The organization’s capacity and capability to provide excellent supervision.

**Information About You (the Applicant)**

- The applicant's history with the organization (if applicable)
- The organization's opinion that you are especially well-suited to carry out this project (and work within this organization) and the basis of this conclusion.

**Information About the Project**

- The need for the project broadly (e.g., what problem will it address? Why is this project timely? What will be accomplished within the fellowship period? What impact might there be after?)
- A description of how the project will be distinct from or will supplement the work the organization is currently doing. It might also address how the project is distinct from work of other organizations in the same field.
- Clear indication that the applicant and the organization have a full and mutual understanding about the goals and parameters of the project.
- How the fellow (and the project) will be supervised and integrated into the organization.
- If applicable, how the fellow (and the project) will be part of a larger advocacy community and will work in collaboration with community partners.

To produce a strong letter, the writer therefore must be familiar with the project proposal, knowledgeable about why it is needed, and able to articulate why you are the right person to carry it out. Sometimes the writer is someone you have met and worked with to develop the project proposal, but sometimes not. Be sure the writer has your resume and has reviewed drafts of the project proposal.

To further assist with the letter, applicants should provide written guidance to the employer outlining:

- Information about and key priorities of the funder.
- Key projects that you have worked on for the employer.
- Key items from your resume, work history or personal background that you believe are particularly relevant or would be useful for the employer to mention.
- Other information you think should be referenced in the letter.

# RESUME CHECKLIST

## Yes No FORMAT

- The document is one page in length or, if appropriate, two pages
- 11- or 12-pt font (such as Times New Roman or Garamond) with generous margins
- NO Typos or grammatical errors
- No underlining or bullet points
- Format is similar to our samples
- Resume is not cluttered and is easy to read

## Yes No CONTENT

- The resume has a top header and “Education” and “Experience” sections
- Your contact information is professional and up to date
- The resume is tailored to the position/organization you’re seeking
- All relevant jobs, volunteer work, and activities are included
- You have included pro bono work, internships, externships, clinics, journals, on-campus organizations, and research for a professor
- There are no “Interests” (unless special circumstances exist) or “Objective” sections
- You have not included computer skills, classes (except clinics or externships), or grades (except honors)
- All high school information has been removed (see an SJI adviser if special circumstances exist)
- You have included (if applicable) Languages, Bar Membership and Publications



**Sample 3L Resume****GERALD DAVINGNON**

222 West 121<sup>st</sup> Street, Apt. 3K, New York, NY 10027  
 (212) 555-6677 • ghd323@columbia.edu

**EDUCATION**

**Columbia Law School**, New York, NY

J.D., expected May 2022

Honors: *Columbia Law Review*, Senior Editor  
 Harlan Fiske Stone Scholar (for academic achievement): fall 2019, spring 2020

Activities: Rightslink  
 Human Rights Internship Program  
 Capital Appeals Project (death penalty relief trip, March 2020)

**Columbia University**, New York, NY

B.A., received May 2017

Major: Economics and Political Science  
 Honors: Dean's List  
 King's Crown Leadership Award

Activities: Middle East Initiative, Co-founder (Arab-Jewish discussion group)

**International School of Geneva**, Geneva, Switzerland

Bilingual International Baccalaureate Diploma, received August 2017

**EXPERIENCE**

**Center for Constitutional Rights**, New York, NY Summer 2021

*Summer Intern*

Researched and wrote memoranda on immigrants' due process rights, governmental infringement of the Fourth Amendment, racial discrimination patterns in law enforcement, and various issues arising out of international human rights litigation in U.S. courts.

**National Coalition for Haitian Rights**, Port-au-Prince, Haiti Summer 2020

*Summer Intern*

Assisted activists and lawyers in monitoring the judiciary, police, and other governmental institutions. Organized basic legal and human rights education seminars for members of grassroots organizations. Investigated abuses of Haitian migrant workers in the Dominican Republic.

**Lawyers Committee for Human Rights**, New York, NY/ Beirut, Lebanon 2019-2020

*Intern*

Trained youths in the use of video equipment and interviewing techniques at the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon for *Witness*, a LCHR film project. Helped gather testimony.

**U.N. Conference on Trade and Development**, Geneva, Switzerland Summer 2017

*Intern*

Researched and wrote on North-South inter-firm cooperation in the construction industry and its effects on technology transfer and development.

**LANGUAGES** Fluent in Arabic and French.

## Sample 3L Resume

### J. Collins

2 Prospect Place, # 8, Brooklyn, NY 11217 • (555) 555-5555 • jc3232@columbia.edu

#### EDUCATION

##### **COLUMBIA LAW SCHOOL**, New York, NY

J.D., expected May 2022

Activities: Environmental Law Moot Court  
Harlem Tutorial Program  
*Columbia Journal of Law and Social Problems*

##### **UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO**, Chicago, IL

M.A. in Social Sciences, received May 2013

##### **HARVARD COLLEGE**, Cambridge, MA

B.A., *cum laude*, in Social Studies, received May 2012

Activities: Director of Operations, Harvard Square Homeless Shelter

#### EXPERIENCE

##### **IMMIGRATION CLINIC**

*Student Participant*

New York, NY

Fall 2021

##### **MFY LEGAL SERVICES**

*Intern*

New York, NY

Summer 2021

Conducted intake interviews, staffed weekly clinic at supported housing sites. Assisted attorneys in civil matters, including housing, public benefits, and workers' compensation claims. Drafted portions of brief in suit claiming insufficient services in federally funded nursing home.

##### **FUND FOR MODERN COURTS**

*Intern*

New York, NY

Summer 2020

Assist in lobbying and coalition-building efforts for structural reform of New York's judicial system. Wrote a report identifying areas in which that court failed to comply with New York court regulations.

##### **PROFESSOR RICHARD BRIFFAULT, COLUMBIA LAW SCHOOL**

*Research Assistant*

New York, NY

Summer 2020

Researched state-level campaign finance and lobbying regulations.

##### **LAMP COMMUNITY**

*Development Consultant*

Los Angeles, CA

Summer 2016-Winter 2017

Coordinated fundraising efforts for a non-profit corporation in the Skid Row area of downtown Los Angeles providing housing and supportive services to mentally ill homeless people.

##### **SRO HOUSING CORPORATION**

*Case Manager*

Los Angeles, CA

Fall 2013-Spring 2015

Assisted homeless and very low-income senior citizens in their efforts to secure permanent housing and access social services. Generated and submitted reports documenting aid provided.

## Sample 3L Resume

### DOUGLAS POVINELLI

22 West 102<sup>nd</sup> Street, Apartment 4C, New York, NY 10025  
(917) 677-7777 • douglas.povinelli@law.columbia.edu

#### EDUCATION

##### **Columbia University School of Law**, New York, NY

J.D., expected May 2022

Honors: James Kent Scholar 2019-2020 (for outstanding academic achievement)  
Emil Schlesinger Labor Prize (for student most proficient in the subject of labor law)  
Class of 1912 Prize (for first-year student most proficient in the subject of contracts)

Activities: Unemployment Action Center

##### **Columbia University, Columbia College**, New York, NY

B.A., summa cum laude, received May 2018

Honors: Phi Beta Kappa, inducted junior year (for the top two percent of the graduating class)  
Dean's List, all semesters  
Columbia University Named Scholarship

Activities: Columbia University Student Health Outreach, Coordinator

#### EXPERIENCE

##### **Fried, Frank, Harris, Shriver & Jacobson LLP**, New York, NY

*Summer Associate*, May-July 2021

Conducted research and wrote memos on a variety of tax law questions, with a particular focus on the taxation of real estate and real estate transactions. Wrote a report on proposed Treasury Regulations for the NYS Bar Association. Conducted research for a matter litigated before Tax Court.

##### **South Brooklyn Legal Services, Foreclosure Prevention Project**, Brooklyn, NY

*Summer Intern*, June-August 2020

Drafted motions on behalf of foreclosure defendants. Conducted research and wrote memos on predatory lending and related real property questions for ongoing litigation in both state and federal court. Advocated for clients facing foreclosure by calling lenders to negotiate loan modifications. Staffed a walk-in clinic at Brooklyn Supreme Court and advised clients of their rights before and during foreclosure.

##### **Lenox Hill Neighborhood House**, New York, NY

*Health Care Advocate*, June 2018-August 2019

Advised clients of legal rights with respect to public benefits and tenant-landlord disputes. Represented clients who were erroneously denied benefits at administrative hearings. Enrolled individuals into public health insurance programs. Assisted clients in applying for food stamps, Medicare Savings Programs, Unemployment Insurance Benefits, Public Assistance, and other public benefits. Conducted self-help workshops on public benefits.

##### **Food Bank for New York City**, New York, NY

*Policy Intern*, May-August 2016, May-August 2017

Prepared agency directors for testimonies before the New York City Council on summer meals and obesity. Researched and coauthored policy papers that proposed legislative and community-based approaches to hunger relief. Facilitated meetings of emergency food providers and elected officials to discuss implementing hunger policy.

## Sample Graduate Resume

### MARY CUMMINGS BROWN

200 New Jersey Ave., NW, Apt. 12E, Washington, DC 20001  
marybrown@gmail.com | (202) 222-2222

#### EDUCATION

##### COLUMBIA LAW SCHOOL, New York, NY

J.D., received May 2019

Honors: Pauline Berman Heller Prize Fund (highest-ranked female graduating law student)  
Best Oral Argument, 1L Moot Court Competition  
*Columbia Law Review*, Notes Editor

Activities: Law Students for Reproductive Justice

##### YALE UNIVERSITY, New Haven, CT

B.A., received May 2016

Honors: Degree awarded *cum laude* and with departmental honors in Art History  
Activities: *Yale Daily News*, Staff Reporter

#### EXPERIENCE

##### NATIONAL WOMEN'S LAW CENTER

Washington, DC

*Staff Attorney*

2019 – present

Draft amicus briefs for pending Supreme Court cases and federal court cases on a variety of women's health and employment issues. Draft testimony for legislative hearings, including *Violence Against Women Act* reauthorization hearings. Present updated state-by-state analysis of contraceptive equity laws, and draft edits to consumer guide entitled "Contraceptive Equity Laws in Your State: Know Your Rights – Use Your Rights" (available on website at <http://www.nwlc.org/pdf/concovstateguide2009.pdf>).

##### DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROSECUTION EXTERNSHIP

New York, NY

*Assistant DA (under special student practice order)*

Spring 2019

Handled own prosecution of misdemeanor domestic violence cases at Queens Family Justice Center, in conjunction with Columbia Law School externship placement at Queens District Attorney's Office.

##### CENTER FOR REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

New York, NY

*Legal Intern*

Summer 2018

Researched evidentiary issues for challenge to state law requiring pregnant women to view ultrasounds prior to scheduling abortions. Drafted memo assessing potential legal challenge to recently introduced state fetal personhood law. Participated in national conference calls on state and federal legislative issues.

##### LINCOLN CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS

New York, NY

*Legal Intern*

Summer 2017

Drafted memoranda and assisted the General Counsel on a broad range of legal issues, including entertainment law, intellectual property law, labor and employment law, and trusts and estates.

#### BAR MEMBERSHIP

Admitted to NY and DC Bars. Member of DC Bar Committee on Gender and the Law.

## Sample Graduate Resume

### SAMIR PATEL

202 West 99<sup>th</sup> Street, New York, NY 10024 | sjp@gmail.com | 202-228-2297

## EDUCATION

### COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF LAW, New York, NY

J.D., received May 2018

Honors: Kent Scholar 2015-2016 (for outstanding academic achievement)  
 Stone Scholar 2016-2017 (for superior academic achievement)  
 Hamilton Fellowship (merit-based full tuition scholarship)

Activities: *Columbia Journal of European Law* (member of editorial board)  
 Student Senate (Graduation Co-chair)

### GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY, Washington, DC

B.A., *magna cum laude*, in History and English, received May 2015

Honors: Phi Alpha Theta, National History Honors Society

Activities: *The Georgetown Voice* (staff writer)

## EXPERIENCE

### FEDERAL RESERVE BANK OF NEW YORK

New York, NY

*Recent Law School Graduate Fellowship*

Summer 2018-present

Brief senior staff in preparation for congressional hearing; analyze Dodd-Frank rule proposals; assist in the implementation of transparency initiatives; help craft legislative proposals for aiding underwater mortgage holders.

### FEDERAL TRADE COMMISSION

Washington, DC

*Law Clerk, Bureau of Consumer Protection*

Summer 2017

Surveyed state law on fair hiring practices; prepared training memo on the commission's consumer protection jurisdictional constraints; surveyed emerging legal concerns with social networking websites.

### NEW YORK CITY LAW DEPARTMENT

New York, NY

*Extern, Administrative Law Division*

Spring 2017

Wrote answers to Article 78 petitions for the NYPD Licensing Division and the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene; researched a variety of agency practices; prepared documents for court submission.

### NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

Raleigh, NC

*Legal Intern, Consumer Protection Division*

Summer 2016

Interviewed consumers and wrote declarations; drafted CIDs; participated in e-discovery; prepared legal memoranda on issues of federal law; filed consent decrees at state courthouse; wrote criminal appellate brief regarding plea bargaining.

## BAR ADMISSIONS

Admitted in New York State and Southern District of New York

## Portion of Resume with Joint Degree: Option 1

### ERIC ANDERS

105 W. 120<sup>th</sup> St., Apt. 2n, New York, NY 10027  
212.699.9999 • Eric.Anders@law.columbia.edu

### EDUCATION

#### COLUMBIA LAW SCHOOL, New York, NY

J.D., expected May 2022

Activities: American Constitution Society Moot Court  
*Columbia Human Rights Law Review*  
Columbia Society of International Law

#### PRINCETON UNIVERSITY, WOODROW WILSON SCHOOL OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS, Princeton, NJ

M.P.A., expected May 2022

Concentration: International Relations

#### RICE UNIVERSITY, Houston, TX

B.A., *magna cum laude*, received June 2018

Activities: Semester Abroad at University of London  
Big Brothers Big Sisters Program

Thesis: *The Remaining Resistance: The Role of the South African Council of Churches (SACC) in the Anti-Apartheid Struggle*

## Portion of Resume with Joint Degree: Option 2

### ERIC ANDERS

105 W. 120<sup>th</sup> St., Apt. 2n, New York, NY 10027  
212.699.9999 • Eric.Anders@law.columbia.edu

### EDUCATION

#### COLUMBIA LAW SCHOOL/PRINCETON UNIVERSITY, WOODROW WILSON SCHOOL OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS, New York, NY/ Princeton, NJ

Joint J.D./Master of Public Affairs Degree, expected May 2022

Concentration: International Relations

Activities: American Constitution Society Moot Court  
*Columbia Human Rights Law Review*  
Columbia Society of International Law

#### RICE UNIVERSITY, Houston, TX

B.A., *magna cum laude*, received June 2019

Activities: Semester Abroad at University of London  
Big Brothers Big Sisters Program

Thesis: *The Remaining Resistance: The Role of the South African Council of Churches (SACC) in the Anti-Apartheid Struggle*

## Portion of Sample Resume with Permanent Address

### SOLOMON A. KING

Solomon.King@law.columbia.edu • (347) 847-9923

#### Current Address:

400 West 120<sup>th</sup> Street, Apt. 9  
New York, NY 10027

#### Permanent Address:

31 Weaver Drive  
Philadelphia, PA 99999

## EDUCATION

### COLUMBIA LAW SCHOOL, New York, NY

J.D., expected May 2022

Activities: Public Interest Law Foundation  
Student Senate  
ACLU

### UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA, Charlottesville, VA

B.A. with distinction, received May 2017

Major: Political Science  
Honors: Holland Scholar (full-tuition scholarship)  
Activities: College Democrats

## EXPERIENCE

### NEW YORK STATE OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

New York, NY

*Extern, Civil Rights Bureau*

Spring 2022

Assisted lawyers in Civil Rights Bureau through Columbia Law School's externship program. Investigated potential claim concerning an employer's denial of a request for religious accommodation. Performed legal research about ADA's public accommodation provision pertaining to polling site.

### PROF. MATTHEW WAXMAN, COLUMBIA LAW SCHOOL

New York, NY

*Research Assistant*

Summer 2021

Researched U.S. national security intelligence and surveillance restrictions. Researched and edited content for casebook on privacy issues and 4<sup>th</sup> Amendment jurisprudence in light of new digital technologies.

### TEACH FOR AMERICA

Oregon City, OR

*Kindergarten Teacher*

Summer 2017- Spring 2019

Taught 30 students to exceed one year's growth in reading and mastery of key state benchmarks in math. Established after-school program and new reading programs.

## Portion of Resume for Transfer Student

### **AKEYLA HARRISON**

222 Riverside Drive, #2, New York, NY 10026  
212-227-9153 • akeyla.harrison@law.columbia.edu

#### **EDUCATION**

##### **Columbia Law School**, New York, NY

J.D. expected May 2022

Honors: Human Rights Internship Program

Activities: Harlan Fiske Stone Moot Court Society

*Columbia Journal of Environmental Law*, Submissions Editor

Note: Legal Measures to Curtail Global Warming, 22 *CJEL* (2022) (forthcoming)

##### **Brooklyn Law School**, Brooklyn, NY

September 2019-May 2020 (then transferred)

Honors: Phi Delta Phi Honor Society

Activities: Black Law Students Association

Health Law and Policy Association

##### **McGill University**, Montreal, Canada

B.A. with great distinction, received May 2017

Honors: Edward Beatty Scholarship

Activities: Greenpeace University Chapter, President

QPIRG, Board of Directors

Simply Sweetly Choir

#### **EXPERIENCE**

##### **Environmental Law Clinic, Columbia Law School**

New York, NY

*Student Participant*

Fall 2021

Researched environmental impact (including pollution and waste) of proposed expansion of slaughterhouse in Brooklyn on low-income communities and communities of color. Advised residents of their rights and resources.



# BUILDING YOUR TEAM AND FINDING YOUR HOST ORGANIZATION



## Introduction

If you plan to apply for a project-based fellowship, you will need to devote a significant amount of time and energy to securing a host organization and developing a project idea. Most likely you will be thinking about both at the same time.

Some students begin this process with a specific project idea—usually growing out of work done with a clinic or externship, or during a summer job—and some students do not. If you can identify the population you are interested in serving, or an area of law in which you have been and want to continue working, you can get started.

**It is most important to remember that you are not expected to do all this alone.** As noted earlier, you will be “building your team” as you go through this process. Your “team” will be helpful in a range of ways from the early stages to the end—from suggesting fellowships, organizations, and issues

that might be of interest to you and developing project ideas, to helping you prepare for interviews and evaluate options.

At the outset, as you begin to think about project ideas and organizations, you will identify resources to help you. The specific resources you use will depend on your individual interests, experiences, and goals. Of course, begin by talking with your fellowship adviser. Together you will develop some initial strategies, likely along these four avenues:

1. Approaching a previous employer or supervisor, or your 2L summer organization. If you are interested in working with them, ask about their fellowship process, and what they might be looking for.
2. Monitoring [PSJD](#) and [Simplicity](#) for postings from organizations looking to host an applicant for a project.
3. Identifying other people who might be helpful at this stage (such as alumni, former fellows, clinical professors, and faculty).
4. Identify current issues in your areas of interest. Talk with practicing lawyers about the current needs of the clients and communities they serve.

Whether or not you have a host organization, consulting with others is an important element of *all* fellowship applications. This enables you to:

- Learn about current issues, needs, and “hot topics.”
- Meet practitioners in a field.
- Begin formulating project ideas.
- Get the “inside scoop” on an organization or funder (especially if you network with former fellows).

It is also often fun and inspiring to meet people doing the work you want to do.

## How Do You Build Your Team?

There are various ways to do this. The easiest way is to talk to your contacts (such as your SJI fellowship adviser, other SJI staff, former employers, supervisors for pro bono, internship, and externship positions, Columbia professors, and so forth) about your interests and fellowship goals. You should also try at law school or summer intern events to meet any speakers or panelists of interest to you. In turn, those individuals may be able to give you advice and information about an organization and/or introduce you to individuals at that organization or others in the field.

You can also do your own research to find organizations or individuals doing work you are interested in. For example, you can:

- Look at organizational profiles in [PSJD](#), the SJI Public Interest Database on [LawNet](#) (under “Student Services”), and other informational databases.
- Check out the list of [postgraduate fellowship recipients](#) on Columbia’s website to find current and former fellows and their fellowship hosts.
- SJI website that list Columbia Law School graduates who are current and former fellows and the places they worked.

- Review job postings on [PSJD](#) and [Symplicity](#) (both include postings for organizations looking to host fellows).
- Use LinkedIn and your existing network of friends and colleagues.
- Look at lists of previous fellows on fellowship websites.
- Search the Internet for legal issues or organizations that interest you.

Your fellow students can be a good resource. Some may have had summer internships at organizations of interest. Current and former fellows are usually happy to share their experience and insights with applicants as well.

Unless you are committed to a particular geographic area, consider organizations or practitioners in a range of locations (keeping in mind the parameters of the fellowships you are considering).

## Setting Up a Meeting

Once you have a list of organizations to explore and/or individuals to contact, your next step is setting up meetings. Although it may feel awkward, the process is quite straightforward: it simply requires contacting individuals at organizations or in fields you are interested in and asking to meet with them. You might be surprised to find how receptive and helpful public interest lawyers can be!

Remember, you are not asking for a job; you are seeking knowledge and ideas so that you can pursue work you both deeply care about.

We tend to think of two different kinds of meetings:

- One is intended to explore the possibility of that organization hosting you for a fellowship application, along with learning the organization's interests and priorities. As mentioned, sometimes there is a formal application process you must go through (in which case your formal application materials will be more in sync with what the organization is looking for), but sometimes there is not. In either event, you want to think of this kind of meeting as something like a job interview.
- The other kind of meeting is to gather background information; that is, your goal is more to learn about the issues you are interested in or to get recommendations of offices to explore, rather than to secure a fellowship host. These kinds of meetings might be less formal but remember that worlds are small—you still want to prepare and make a good impression. Anyone you speak with can connect you with or make an informal recommendation to someone else. For these reasons, Columbia faculty, SJI advisers, supervisors who already know you, students, and sometimes alumni are the best places to start.

Once you identify an organization of interest and are ready to reach out, the next question is who to contact. If you have a specific contact at an organization (either because you know the person or someone has suggested the person to you), then reach out directly to that individual. If you don't, consult your SJI fellowship advisers. You might also look at the staff list of the organization and figure out who is likely to be the best person to approach by considering expertise, role in the organization, and their affiliations (such as Columbia alumni). It is fine to

contact someone with whom you have no direct connection. That person may not be interested in meeting with you, but there is no harm in trying. Even if the person you contact is not available to meet with you, they may direct you to someone else—for example, there may be a more appropriate person at the organization to talk to about fellowships, or they may know someone at another organization seeking to host a fellow.

Once you have identified the person to contact, you should send an email to request a meeting. Look at the attached sample for guidance but remember that you should frame your correspondence so that it reflects who you are. There is not one “right” way to draft your request; however, you should follow these simple guidelines—while not making the email too lengthy:

- Introduce yourself and clearly state the purpose of your email (i.e., that you are looking for a host organization for a fellowship or looking to discuss their work for your project).
- If you know which fellowship(s) you plan to apply for, make sure to identify them.
- If applicable, mention who referred you or any other mutual acquaintance or relationship. If you already met the person you are writing to (such as at a law school event), include the context in which you met them.
- If you have not met or spoken with anyone at the organization, explain how you discovered or became interested in the organization.
- Briefly convey your background/experience in the field. Consider mentioning project ideas (if you have any) to show you have thought about it—but don’t sound too wedded to them.
- Explain that you would like to meet or speak with them. (This can be in person, by Zoom, or by phone.)
- It is often a good idea to attach your resume to the email.

Please note: if you are responding to a posting by an organization that indicates they are looking to host a fellowship applicant, you should not follow the steps outlined here, but instead should respond to the posting more formally (i.e., with a resume and cover letter indicating your interest). Include any other application materials as required. Alert your networking contacts that you are applying for the opening (in case they have contacts there). If you know anyone on staff at that organization, let them know about your application. And, of course, consult with your fellowship adviser. Some organizations will ask also for a project proposal. This is often challenging because you may not know the organization well. Also, you want to offer a thoughtful proposal, while at the same time conveying flexibility. Your adviser will be able to help with this.

## Preparing to Meet

Especially for your meetings with potential fellowship hosts, preparation is key. These meetings could be structured like formal job interviews (for example, if the organization posted a job listing for a fellow) or could be more informal (for example, in response to your request for a meeting). Sometimes a meeting can be both formal and informal. You need to be prepared for both scenarios.

**Remember: you have a fellowship adviser, and you should consult them!**

In either kind of meeting, you want to get across your knowledge of the area of law, as well as your familiarity with the work of their organization (and with the person you are meeting with, if possible). Be prepared to answer questions about your interest in their field and their organization specifically, as well as about your experience, your goals, and so forth. Also, be prepared to explain why you want to do a fellowship and why you are interested in that organization. (That is, why you want to devote yourself to the organization's efforts; not why you believe this fellowship will be good for you.) Come in ready to offer some potential project ideas and to discuss your application plans. You may be asked whether you are applying for more than one fellowship and whether you are approaching other organizations to be your host as well. Be honest!

To prepare for interviews, read everything you can about the organization and its work – and about the field in general. Review the *Public Interest Job Search Toolkit* section on public interest interviewing and practice the sample questions. If you have not interviewed recently, consider setting up a mock interview with SJI staff. Additionally, come with questions to ask your interviewer(s), such as:

- Do you have any current fellows? What are they working on?
- Have you hosted fellows in the past? What did they work on? (Note: if the organization has never had a fellow, you may need to educate them about the benefits and commitments of having a fellow, as well as the process and basic timelines for applying for a fellowship.)
- Are there particular fellowships you are interested in having an applicant apply for?
- What are you looking for in a fellow?
- Does your organization have needs, goals, or projects which you would like to see (or which could be addressed) in a fellowship proposal?
- Who would supervise me if I was a fellow here?
- What kind of training do you offer to new attorneys or fellows?
- Are you anticipating any big changes in the office or in your work in the next few years? Do you think the organization's priorities will stay the same?
- Is there anyone else on staff I should meet with?

## Following Up

At the close of the meeting, ask when you can expect to hear from the organization. Make sure to send a short thank you note (email is fine) within 24 hours of the interview to anyone you met with (see the sample in this toolkit). Keep in contact without being imposing or invasive. Follow up on other potential leads until you hear back. If you receive another offer but prefer this organization, contact the preferred organization immediately, explain the situation, and ask when they will decide. If you accept another offer, withdraw your name from consideration ASAP and thank them again for their time.

## Finding a Host: Tracking Chart

This is a sample chart to track outreach to potential host organizations.

HOST ORGS	Email w/resume	Follow-Up Call	Meeting	Thank You Sent	Follow-Up Calls	Decision	Other
Sanctuary for Families PO Box 1406 Wall Street Station New York, NY 10268 (212) 349-6009 sanctuaryforfamilies.org Contact: Mary Smith	6/2 sent to Mary Smith	6/9	6/18 w/ M. Smith, Jane Donovan at office	6/18	6/28 to M. Smith	Email rec'd 7/1: rejection	
The Door NYC 121 Ave. of the Americas New York, NY 10013 (212) 941-9090 door.org	6/3 sent to Joe Francis	6/10 to J. Francis; referred to Lizbeth Norris; sent follow-up email	6/12 w/ L. Norris via phone	6/12	6/22 w/ L. Norris; scheduled 2nd phone meeting for 6/29	Call rec'd 7/3: will host project! Meet in person on 7/16 to discuss ideas	Research project ideas by 7/16

## Sample Emails

### Sample Email Requesting Meeting with Potential Host

#### *Option 1*

Dear [redacted],

I just finished my second year at Columbia Law School, and I am planning to apply for postgraduate fellowships in a few months. I am particularly interested in [identify area of law/legal issue/ population] and would like to craft a fellowship proposal focusing on this issue. Because [name of organization] is a leader in this field, I would love the opportunity to meet with you to discuss whether you would be interested in serving as a host organization for my fellowship.

#### *Option 2*

I am in my second year at Columbia Law School, and I am planning to apply for postgraduate fellowships in a few months. I am particularly interested in [identify area of law/legal issue/ population] and would like to craft a fellowship proposal focusing on this issue. [Name of contact] suggested that I contact you to learn more about [name of your organization] and to

explore whether you might be interested in serving as a host organization for my fellowship.

As you can see from my attached resume, I have a strong background in [area of law/legal issue/population] [Add a couple of sentences about your experience in this area of law, mentioning relevant summer jobs, internships, *pro bono* work, externships, clinics, and so forth.]

OPTIONAL: I would be especially interested in doing a fellowship focusing on [add details here—don't sound wedded to this focus but use it to demonstrate some of your project ideas and your knowledge of the field/organization's work]. I would love to discuss with you the needs that your organization currently faces and how I could develop a project to address those needs.

I would welcome the opportunity to meet with you soon. Thank you in advance.

Regards,

[Your name]

### Sample Thank You Note (Via Email)

Sent: Monday 6/3/21 6:47pm

To: Mara Youdelman; Deborah Reid; Wayne Turner CC:

Subject: Thank you

I wanted to thank you all again for meeting with me earlier today. I enjoyed learning more about the work of the DC office of National Health Law Program (NHeLP) and meeting your dynamic staff. The work of NHeLP is incredibly important, and I am especially interested in the direction your work has taken after the Supreme Court decision upholding the Affordable Care Act (ACA). I would welcome the opportunity to work on a fellowship project focusing on the issue of low-income workers' right to healthcare coverage under ACA, as you suggested. I look forward to hearing from you soon about hosting my fellowship.

Best,

Carlos Sanchez

cs4455@columbia.edu

(212) 454-4554 (home)

(917) 692-6685 (cell)

# FELLOWSHIP TRACKING CHART

A chart like this can be an invaluable tool for tracking the pieces of your project-based fellowship applications.

FELLOW-SHIP	RESUME	ESSAYS	TRAN-SCRIPT	REFS & RECS	ORG COMMIT. LETTER	APPLI-CATION	OTHER TO-DO	NOTES
Skadden Due:	Required  (updated 6/16)	Essay 1: second draft to adviser on 9/1; awaiting comment  Essay 2: received first draft comments from adviser  Essay 3: In progress	Required  (ordered 7/1)  (received 7/5)	2 recs required  Contacted Prof Smith 8/12; sent follow-up email with resume and other info 8/16; check in by 9/5 if not received	Being drafted; expect to receive by 9/10; will attach 501(c)(3) qualifying letter	Need to fill out forms	Called SBP on 8/2	Remember to email by close of business day 9/17 – one day before the due date
K&E Due:	Required  (updated 6/16; need to update again in Dec)	2 Essays required  (haven't started drafting yet)	Required  (received 7/16)	2 written refs required;  Will use Skadden refs w/ tweak	Host org will tweak in early Dec; need 3 docs: commit. letter, host letter & 501(c)(3)	Need to fill out forms		Adviser away Dec 19- Jan 5
Equal Justice Initiative Due:	Required  (updated 6/3)	Letter of Interest (meet with SJI re 1st draft)	Required  (received 7/16)	Not yet	N/A	Just cover letter	Contact the 2 former fellows from Columbia	



# THE FELLOWSHIP/FUNDER INTERVIEW

Once applications are completed and submitted, the review process begins. Fellowship funders have different approaches to narrowing the pool of applicants (some send applications out to different readers, others have all applications reviewed by a committee within the funding organization), as do organizations with their own fellowships. Inevitably a select group of applicants will be invited to interview, most often with a small group of interviewers. The interview is a very important part of the process, and you should consult with your fellowship adviser to learn as much as you can about what to expect. **Also, we cannot stress enough the value of mock interviews.** SJI, alumni with prior fellowship experience, and your host may all play a role in helping to prepare you. You should also consult the *Public Interest Job Search Toolkit* for general interviewing tips.

## What Are Funders and Host Organizations Looking for?

At this stage, you can assume your written materials have been evaluated very highly. So, what are funders looking for from the interview? Overall, they are looking for fellows who have the skills, knowledge, insight, and personality to carry out the work or proposed project well. This includes the ability to serve clients compassionately and effectively, to work productively with stakeholders, other organizations, community partners, etc. as needed, and to be organized and able to follow through. Often funders will invite fellows to present their work, and thus poise and the ability to speak about your project are important. Finally, you are an investment, and so funders look for individuals who are deeply committed and likely to engage in the work long-term, and who will learn and grow from the fellowship experience. Generally, this amounts to a combination of self-confidence and humility, with passion and careful preparedness thrown in. Think about how you might convey this in an interview.

## Getting Prepared

Before the interview:

- Research as much as you can about the fellowship from the fellowship website. Also look at who and what they have funded in the past.
- Speak with former fellows and alumni who have been through interviews with the funder/organization.
- Know everything on your resume and cover letter and other application materials. Consider bringing relevant material.
- Develop two to three questions for the interviewing committee.
- Schedule mock interviews. Your fellowship adviser and host organization can be good resources.

As you prepare, keep in mind the importance of the following:

- Showing a personal connection to and a passion for the work you are proposing.

- Being able to articulate why you have chosen this organization.
- When proposing a project with a host organization, talking about how great the supervision will be there.
- Focusing on the clients and the impact of the work, not on you.
- Being up to date and ready to discuss current events that relate to your project or the organization.
- If relevant, being ready and able to discuss cultural or racial barriers that you may confront in your project/work and how you will deal with those barriers.
- Knowledge of the former fellows/projects active in the same space.

## The Interview

Remember that interviews start in the elevator. That is, you don't know who is in the elevator or waiting room, or who is at the reception desk or welcoming you in. Consider yourself being interviewed from the moment you walk in the building. Be kind, courteous and respectful.

Fellowship interviews are often done by a small committee, so you are likely to be interviewed by more than one person at the same time. For project-based fellowship interviews, the funder selection committee is often comprised of individuals with different levels of knowledge about your project and about the legal issues that will be involved in your work. You will need to keep this in mind as you present your project and answer questions. Often answering a question with a personal story or anecdote can work well to help you avoid too many generalities and convey your personal qualities and thoughtfulness.

Finally, think about connecting with your interviewers. A good handshake and eye contact go a long way. Being human is good, as is demonstrating your ability to relate to clients and others with whom you will be working.

Think confidently and be enthusiastic, but don't forget the value of self-awareness and humility. You are not expected to have all the answers or to have finished your learning.

Interviews for organization fellowship are likely to be similar to those for public interest jobs, and so you might review the section on interviewing in the *Public Interest Job Search Toolkit*. If you are interviewing with a funder for a project-based fellowship, consider the following common questions:

- How did you pick your project?
- Why did you pick this topic (e.g., healthcare, domestic violence)?
- What kind of impact do you expect to have?
- How will you measure success?
- Why are you the right person to do this project?
- Where do you see yourself 10 (five, 20) years from now?
- What was the toughest situation you ever found yourself in, and how did you resolve it?
- What would you do about your issue (e.g., domestic violence, healthcare) if you were "queen/king for a day"?
- What are your career plans if you do not get this fellowship?

- Describe the supervision you will be given if you are a fellow.
- What is it about your hosting agency that makes you want to work with them?
- Who exactly will be your clients? Describe their lives.
- Where did you grow up? What was your life like?
- Why did you choose Columbia Law School?
- Do you have questions for us?

Depending on the work or your project, you might also be asked questions such as:

- What about this project requires a lawyer? Can this work be done by very skilled social workers?
- Where will your clients come from? How will they find you?
- What happens if a client comes to you and says she needs a place to sleep? How are you going to keep from taking one of your clients to your home? How are you going to deal with the emotional stress of dealing with such difficult lives and issues?
- How will you involve community partners?

## Closing Words

Please don't forget that SJI is here to ensure you have the support you need, and to help you all along the way. Reach out at any time for any reason!

As your research progresses, you may change your mind about what opportunities interest you. You may find it difficult to know which options you prefer. That's all ok—just keep in touch with your fellowship adviser. As you might predict, we advise you to cast a wide net.

And, while it is true that applying for project-based fellowships requires a good amount of work, it is almost always beneficial. Whether or not you are awarded one of these fellowships, the work you put into developing an application invariably pays off. You will have thought deeply about your interests and goals, developed ways to articulate your interests and experiences, met people doing work you admire and learned about substantive issues, needs, and work being done within your focus area. You will have developed written documents that you can draw on for other applications and met people and discovered organizations interested in working with you.

Finally, a word about timing and decisions: each public interest fellowship, staff attorney position, government honors program, and clerkship is likely to have different application deadlines and extend offers at different times. This often means you are asked to consider an offer before you hear from all the entities you have applied to. If you find yourself in that position and you are not sure the first offer is your first choice, please consult with SJI. These are coveted positions, and decisions are not always easy. An acceptance should be honored, and when an offer is accepted, other applications should be withdrawn. It is sometimes possible to get a deadline extended or find out the status of outstanding applications, but it is a delicate process.