

Columbia J.D. Pathways Fellowship 2026

Application FAQs

Please review the following frequently asked questions about Columbia J.D. Pathways Fellowships. If you continue to have questions, please contact Rebecca Hinde at rh2523@columbia.edu. Please read this document before contacting her.

IMPORTANT NOTE:

Some intergovernmental organizations, such as the United Nations and the World Bank, require that fellows who are not U.S. citizens or permanent residents and who want to serve their fellowship in the United States obtain a G4 visa. **Unfortunately, Columbia is not able to fund J.D. Pathways Fellows who are G4 visa-holders.** Columbia Law School students should speak with a PI/PS adviser about alternative hosts. Students from other law schools should speak with their own advisers. Please note that only fellows who meet all three criteria are impacted. For example, if you will be working at the United Nations while based in the U.S. but you have U.S. citizenship or legal permanent residency, or you do not but will work at the United Nations while based in another country, you are not impacted by this restriction.

Applicant Eligibility

I am not a Columbia Law School student. Do I still qualify to apply?

Yes. Students from other law schools are eligible to apply, provided that 1) your law school is in the United States and is ABA-accredited and 2) you are a member of your law school's *current* graduating J.D. class.

I am in a dual degree program, but one of the degrees will not be completed within the current academic year. Do I still qualify to apply?

You must complete both degrees within the academic year to qualify. If the structure of your program does not allow for this, you are unfortunately not eligible for this fellowship.

Is there a GPA requirement?

No.

Does Columbia Law School prioritize any areas of focus within public interest or public service law when awarding the fellowship?

No. What is important is that you are passionate about the issue or practice area and prepared to work within that issue or practice area.

Host Organizations

My potential host is _____. Does it qualify?

A qualified host is a public interest organization or government employer (federal, state, local, multinational, or international) that commits, contingent upon the applicant's receipt of a fellowship, to provide the applicant with a one-year position that will require the use of their legal education, supply appropriate training and supervision during the fellowship period, and consider the fellow for an appropriate permanent full-time paid position if applicable funding becomes available.

Please note that the host must be able to provide the fellow supervision by a lawyer.

Examples of qualifying hosts include the following. This list is not exhaustive but is intended to provide a helpful sample.

- Public defender offices and other civil or criminal legal service providers
- Impact advocacy organizations
- Government agencies in the U.S. or abroad, including tribal governments*
- U.S. Congressional committees
- Prosecutor offices
- Labor unions
- Nongovernmental organizations
- Intergovernmental organizations, including U.N. agencies (but see the [above note](#) about G4 visas)

*Some U.S. federal agencies will not take postgraduate fellows; applicants are responsible for verifying that their desired placement will host a fellow.

Are there public interest or government organizations that do NOT qualify for Pathways Fellowships?

The following are NOT eligible for Pathways Fellowship funding:

- Positions in judicial chambers, such as clerkships
- Law schools, including faculty and clinical programs (but review the fellowship notice for exceptions that may be made for certain law school *centers*)

The following *generally* do not qualify as hosts, but in certain cases, we are able to make an exception. Please read the fellowship notice carefully and note the steps you must take in order to obtain an exception.

- Law school centers
- For-profit public interest or civil rights law firms

Can an organization host multiple candidates?

Yes.

My potential host wants to know what to put in the commitment letter.

For guidance, please consult the application instructions, which call for:

A commitment letter from your host that demonstrates its qualifications for purposes of this fellowship and describes the work you will be assigned and the training and supervision you will receive if your application is successful. If you are a Columbia Law School student, the letter MUST also state:

- a. The term of the fellowship (one year).*
- b. That Columbia Law School will provide funding of \$50,000 per year.*
- c. The amount that the host will supplement your stipend with its own funds, if applicable.*

The letter is also an opportunity for the host to give a general explanation of their mission and work and to convey why you are a good candidate to carry out the work of the fellowship.

If I receive this fellowship, what does Columbia expect of my host?

Hosts commit, contingent upon the applicant's receipt of a fellowship, to provide the applicant with a one-year position that will require the use of their legal education, provide appropriate training and supervision, and consider the fellow for an appropriate permanent full-time paid position if funding becomes available. The

fellow's supervisor must be a lawyer.

Hosts are not required to enter into a formal agreement or to complete reports. We may contact hosts during or after a fellowship to gather feedback or other information, however.

Additional guidance for potential host organizations:

- We leave it to fellows and their host organizations to determine the fellow's work schedule, vacation time, and sick time, but we encourage hosts to provide paid time off as they would any other first-year staff person.
- If host organizations elect to have a fellow's stipend transferred to them, they will be required to complete paperwork and submit invoices according to a schedule set by Columbia. The stipend will be paid out to the host in installments.
- If host organizations elect to have a fellow's stipend transferred to them and the fellow leaves the fellowship early, the host must repay the prorated portion of the stipend.

Stipend and Payment Process

When and how do fellows get paid?

Most fellows are paid directly by Columbia via monthly direct deposits that begin when they start their fellowship. Some fellows elect to have their stipend transferred to their host organizations so that they may be added to their host's payroll, usually because their host organization has agreed to provide them with benefits.

NOTE: If you are offered and accept a Pathways Fellowship, you will receive a formal offer letter, an online acceptance form to complete, and instructions on how to set yourself up for payment. *Delay in completing these instructions may delay your stipend payment, so please respond quickly.*

Can Columbia advance me part of my stipend to help with travel or moving expenses?

Unfortunately, no. You should not anticipate receiving any payment until you start work.

Will my stipend be taxed?

Fellows who have their stipend transferred to their host organization will work with their host on questions such as payment and taxation. For other fellows, the following applies. If you serve your fellowship within the United States OR you are a U.S. citizen or legal permanent resident, stipends are subject to U.S. income tax. Columbia will not withhold taxes from payments to fellows who are U.S. citizens or legal permanent residents and will issue an IRS Form 1099-MISC for tax filing purposes. Columbia will withhold taxes for noncitizens/nonpermanent residents who perform their fellowship in the United States and will issue an IRS Form W-8BEN unless their country of citizenship has a tax treaty with the United States that dictates otherwise. Noncitizens/nonpermanent residents who perform their fellowship outside of the United States will not have taxes withheld and will not be issued a tax reporting form.

Recommenders and Reference Lists

Is it ok if my faculty recommender is a clinical supervisor or adjunct professor?

Yes.

Can my letter of recommendation be written by an attorney at my potential host organization?

Yes.

Can my reference list include an attorney at my potential host organization?

Yes.

Other Questions

How many fellowships will be awarded?

The number of fellowships awarded varies each year. Recipients include Columbia Law School students and students from other law schools. We do not share the number or makeup of recipients.

Does the fellowship committee interview applicants?

No.

When do fellows typically start their fellowship?

Most fellows start after the bar exam in July, usually in August or September. They must start no later than five months after their law school graduation date. It is up to you and your host to determine your exact start date.

Are fellows employees of Columbia?

No, fellows are not employees of Columbia Law School or Columbia University.

Does Columbia provide benefits? Or does the host organization?

Columbia does not pay for health insurance or other benefits for J.D. Pathways Fellows. Some hosts provide fellows with benefits; you must arrange this with your host.

If I receive the fellowship, can Columbia complete my Public Service Loan Forgiveness certification form?

Columbia CANNOT complete your Public Service Loan Forgiveness certification form because fellows are not employees of Columbia.