



## J.D. Pathways Fellowships 2026

### Max Berger '71 J.D. Pathways Fellowships 2026

### Monica Shah '05 J.D. Pathways Fellowships 2026<sup>1</sup>

Columbia Law School is pleased to offer J.D. Pathways Fellowships for J.D. graduates of ABA-accredited law schools interested in beginning their careers in public interest law, including human rights, or in government service.<sup>2</sup> The fellowships serve two important purposes. First, they allow graduates to gain the experience, skills, and professional networks they need to obtain permanent paid positions in their fields. Second, they enable public interest organizations and government employers confronting great demand and diminished resources to benefit from the services of talented lawyers.

The J.D. Pathways Fellowships pay a stipend of \$50,000 for one year of full-time work. Fellows must commit to work full-time at their host (at least 35 hours per week) for twelve consecutive months. Fellows are not considered employees of Columbia Law School or Columbia University. Columbia Law School cannot pay for health insurance or other benefits. In some cases, fellows are able to receive benefits through their hosts. This packet contains information about eligibility requirements and application and selection procedures, including deadlines. **Please read carefully.**

#### Applicant Eligibility

In addition to the aforementioned, the fellowships are available to class of 2026 members who:

- Have or will have completed the requirements for their J.D. degree (and all joint degrees, if any) by the end of May 2026.
- Are unemployed and do not have a fellowship, stipend, or other source of funding to work in 2026-2027.
- Intend to take the February or July 2026 bar examination.

Priority for the fellowship will be given to applicants who:

- Demonstrate a substantial commitment to pursuing a career in public interest law or government service.
- Demonstrate preparation for a career in public interest law or government service.
- Will endeavor to obtain employment in the public interest or government sector before or immediately following the fellowship's conclusion

Please note that there are many ways to demonstrate a substantial commitment to public interest law or government service. For example, working for a public interest employer during your first and second

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<sup>1</sup> A subset of applicants will be awarded fellowships generously funded by Max Berger '71 or Monica Shah '05. The terms, stipend, and application process for these fellowships are identical to those of the standard J.D. Pathways Fellowships. In this document, both the standard J.D. Pathways Fellowships and the Berger and Shah J.D. Pathways Fellowships are referred to as "Pathways Fellowships."

<sup>2</sup> The fellowship is open to applicants receiving their J.D. from any ABA-accredited law school in the U.S. as part of that school's class of 2025; Columbia Law School does not need to be the degree-granting institution.

summers is a strong indication of such commitment. There are other ways to demonstrate a substantial commitment, however, including on-campus student group involvement, experiential learning opportunities, course selection, and extracurricular or volunteer activities.

The following are NOT eligible for the fellowship:

- Applicants who are completing a law degree other than a J.D., such as an LL.M., as part of the class of 2026 but will not complete a J.D. as part of the class of 2026; applicants who are completing a joint degree as part of the class of 2026 are eligible if one of those degrees is a J.D.
- Applicants who have completed a J.D. as part of a class earlier than the class of 2026.

### Host Eligibility

To be considered for a Pathways Fellowship, applicants must first obtain a written commitment by a “qualified host” to provide meaningful legal work and supervision. A qualified host is a public interest organization or government employer<sup>3</sup> (federal, state, local, multinational, or international) that commits, contingent upon the applicant’s receipt of a fellowship, to:

- Provide the applicant with a position for a one-year period that will require the use of their legal education.
- Provide appropriate training and supervision during the fellowship period. The applicant's supervisor should be a lawyer.
- Consider the fellow for an appropriate permanent full-time paid position if applicable funding becomes available.

The following do not qualify as Pathways hosts (but pay attention to the noted exceptions).

- Law schools, whether Columbia or other law schools, do not qualify as hosts. This includes clinical programs and faculty members. Most law school *centers* do not qualify, but exceptions may be made for centers that are not primarily funded by the school. Columbia Law School students interested in a law school center host should speak to a PI/PS adviser to obtain approval prior to applying. Students from other law schools can contact Rebecca Hinde at [rh2523@columbia.edu](mailto:rh2523@columbia.edu) to obtain approval.
- Positions in judicial chambers, such as clerkships, are not eligible for Pathways Fellowship funding.
- Most for-profit civil rights or public interest law firms do not qualify as Pathways hosts, but students may seek an exception. Columbia Law School students with a proposed public interest firm host must contact the Columbia Office of Financial Aid (OFA) at [LRAP@law.columbia.edu](mailto:LRAP@law.columbia.edu) by April 1, 2026, to seek a determination of whether the firm is likely LRAP-eligible. If OFA affirms that the firm is likely LRAP-eligible, the firm qualifies as a Pathways host, and the student may upload the letter with their application materials. Students from other law schools must provide a similar letter from their own school’s financial aid office. The letter must state that the school will approve the firm for loan repayment assistance and should be uploaded with the other application materials.

Please note that applicants must submit a commitment letter from their prospective host. **See the last page of this document for instructions on the specific information this letter must include.**

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<sup>3</sup> Some federal employers will not take postgraduate fellows; applicants are responsible for verifying that their desired placement will host a fellow.

## Application Process

1. Meet with a career adviser at your law school. In order to be eligible for a Pathways Fellowship, **Columbia Law School students must meet with Emily Harris or Murphy Mitchell in the PI/PS Office to discuss their proposed Pathways fellowship no later than March 15, 2026.** You do not need to have a finalized host or application, but you must meet with the PI/PS Office to discuss your proposed application by that date. Applicants from other law schools are encouraged to meet with career advisers at their own institution.
2. Apply directly to potential hosts.
3. Submit a fellowship application by 11:59 p.m. ET on May 3, 2026. For application instructions, see the last section of this notice.
4. Applicants will be notified of selection decisions by the end of May 2026.

## IMPORTANT NOTE FOR STUDENTS WHO WILL NEED VISAS

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.

## Questions?

If you have questions about the application or payment process, please review our [J.D. Pathways Fellowship FAQs](#). If you still have any questions, please contact:

Rebecca Hinde  
Office of Public Interest/Public Service Law and Careers at Columbia Law School  
[rh2523@columbia.edu](mailto:rh2523@columbia.edu)  
212-854-3535

## Application Instructions

Please visit [cglink.me/2it/s62229](https://cglink.me/2it/s62229) to submit the following materials.\* **Applications are due at 11:59 p.m. ET on May 3, 2026.** If you have difficulty accessing the online application portal, please contact Rebecca Hinde at [rh2523@columbia.edu](mailto:rh2523@columbia.edu).

1. Your resume.
2. An essay explaining how a position with the host will help you begin a career in your chosen field (no more than one single-spaced page). **PLEASE INCLUDE YOUR NAME ON THE DOCUMENT.**
3. An **unofficial** copy of your transcript. **PLEASE DO NOT SUBMIT AN OFFICIAL COPY.**
4. A letter of recommendation, preferably from a member of the faculty of your law school. If the recommender would prefer, they may email the letter to [rh2523@columbia.edu](mailto:rh2523@columbia.edu) no later than the deadline for the rest of the application.
5. A list of two references with their titles, affiliations, and contact information. We recommend that at least one be someone who supervised your legal work. **PLEASE INCLUDE YOUR NAME ON THE DOCUMENT.**

6. 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.
7. If your proposed host is a for-profit firm, a letter or email verifying that the firm qualifies for loan repayment assistance, as described earlier in this document.
8. If you are a joint degree candidate, please upload certification from the institution conferring the joint degree that all requirements will be completed in time for you to receive both degrees by the end of May 2026.