POSTGRADUATE PUBLIC
INTEREST FELLOWSHIP HANDBOOK

I. What are Fellowships?

Postgraduate public interest fellowships provide an opportunity for graduating law students, recent alumni and judicial law clerks to join public interest and nonprofit organizations in entry-level attorney positions. There are several forms of postgraduate fellowships. The most common allows an applicant to create a project with a host public interest organization that is funded by an outside fellowship provider. Others include programs that lead to an LL.M degree or that allow the fellow to teach or supervise students in a clinical setting; programs sponsored by public interest organizations; and programs sponsored by law firms or bar associations.

More information on the variety of postgraduate fellowships is contained in Section III of this handbook.

II. Scope of this Handbook

This handbook will primarily address fellowships that allow an applicant to create and carry out a project with a host public interest organization for a specific period of time, usually one to two years. These types of fellowships allow you to create your day to day job with support from a public interest organization. These are not staff attorney positions, but projects that fit into the mission and purpose of the sponsoring organization. The project is presented to a fellowship provider for funding through an application process that typically includes a proposal, essay, and interview describing the project and the goals to be accomplished.

This handbook is meant to be a guide to choosing a project and preparing a fellowship proposal. Additional information about some of the more common national and local fellowship programs and a list of resources, including publications and web sites, is included in the appendices.

III. Why be a fellow?

Postgraduate public interest fellowships are often a pipeline to public interest staff attorney positions. While many organizations—public defender and prosecutor offices, government agencies, and legal services offices—do higher entry level attorneys straight from law school, a fellowship is often the only path for new attorneys into other well regarded public interest organizations. Additionally, national fellowship providers give smaller public interest organizations the opportunity to hire talented new lawyers, and provide those lawyers with training and exposure to their practice without recruitment or payroll costs.