V. Finding the Right Fellowship

Your 2L Spring and Summer is the time to begin your focus on fellowship applications! Take stock of your professional goals, learn about public interest organizations and fellowship programs in areas that interest you, and target a list of organizations and recommenders. Once you’ve done this, then, if applicable, it is time to develop your fellowship project and review it with potential sponsoring organizations. Typically, your sponsoring organization will be a public interest organization where you have worked. If you are interested in being sponsored by an organization where you have not worked, then you must contact and meet with them immediately.

A. Consider your Personal Goals

Think very carefully about the kind of fellowship experience you want to have. This will aid you not only in the application process, but also in interviews. To that end, it is critical to develop a framework of your objectives based on these questions:

Who: is your intended client base? Battered women, farmworkers, immigrant prisoners? will be your supervisor(s)? Law firm lawyers, a public interest firm, a government agency?

What: kind of work do you intend to do? Advocacy, direct services, policy work? substantive area interests you? Environmental, childrens’ rights, international is the end goal of your project? do you intend to accomplish?

When: will you start? Right after graduation? After clerking? will you finish? One year? Two years?

Where: geographically do you want to work? do you want to spend each day? Courtroom? Village? Office?

How: can a fellowship aid you going forward? do you like to work? In a group or alone? will you contribute?

Why: do fellowships interest you? are you drawn to public interest work?
B. Effective Research

Creating a postgraduate public interest fellowship that will attract the attention of a fellowship provider and that will provide you with a satisfying start to your career can be a time-consuming process that requires you to be self-aware, organized, and able to plan ahead. Once you have set your fellowship goals, start gathering information to identify fellowships and organizations which are aligned with your criteria. Fellowship funders select fellows who closely connect with the mission and culture of their chosen organization. To that end, if you can research and implement an application strategy based on your goals, you will be able to effectively articulate your fit and value in a particular organization with a particular fellowship. Appendix A of this handbook lists online resources and books which aid in the fellowship search and offer application assistance. Appendix B provides a list of Penn Law Alumni who have held various Post graduate Public Interest Fellowships. Appendix C provides a list of Fellowships with deadlines and website information.

C. Fellowships and Clerkships

Serving as a judicial law clerk before applying for a public interest fellowship will in many instances aid your fellowship candidacy. If you are planning to apply for fellowships and clerkships simultaneously, your approach will depend on which fellowships you are applying for. For example, the Skadden Fellowship Foundation will openly consider you even though you are also applying for clerkships. Moreover, they may favor your fellowship application and/or allow you to defer your fellowship project until after a secured judicial clerkship. Please note that you would have to first have such an arrangement authorized by your sponsor organization.

By contrast, Equal Justice Works (EJW) will consider clerkship applicants, but if you accept a clerkship, you will be ineligible for an EJW fellowship. EJW requires that their fellowship be your first job out of law school. Please be sure to find out how each funder and public interest organization structures its requirements with regard to clerkships.