

Project-Based Fellowships

What are project-based fellowships? Project-based fellowships are funded by foundations that support a recent law graduate to carry out a project in conjunction with an existing nonprofit organization. These applications require significant preparatory work in advance of the application deadlines.

Project-based fellowships are funded by foundations that support a recent law graduate to carry out a project in conjunction with an existing nonprofit organization ("host organization"). Fellows typically propose to expand the scope of the host organization's existing legal services, often by developing a new advocacy strategy or reaching a new target population. Each foundation that funds project-based fellowships has its criteria governing the types of projects it will support and the eligibility of applicants and host organizations. See the comparison chart below, which focuses on three of the major funders. Application deadlines for most project-based fellowships are in the fall preceding the year in which the fellowship will commence. Usually, this means that the application will be due in the fall of your 3L year or of the year during which you are clerking. These applications require significant preparatory work in advance of the application deadline. It is often helpful to work as an intern or extern with your host organization before applying for a fellowship. Doing so helps you learn about the organization's type of work, identify project ideas, and ensure that you and the organization are a good fit. It also demonstrates to funders that you and the organization are committed to one another.

Project-based fellowships might be a good fit for you if:

- You are interested in proposing a new way to address the unmet legal needs of an underserved population or constituency.
- You have developed the skills, experience, and relationships that would allow you to create and implement such a project.
- You know that you want to work on a specific issue and in a particular location where entry-level attorney openings are limited.

Overview of EJW and Skadden

Two of the major funders for project-based fellowships are Equal Justice Works and the Skadden Foundation. Rutgers students have earned these fellowships and are available to talk to you if you are interested in applying.

Equal Justice Works: <https://www.equaljusticeworks.org/> - September 17, 2020 at 8:00 PM

The Equal Justice Works Fellowship opportunity allows you to leverage your law degree in service of your chosen community or cause. Each year, Equal Justice Works aims to

launch around 70 new Fellows nationwide who have designed their own fellowship projects. Over two-year project terms, these Fellows build sustainable solutions for the communities they serve, addressing areas of law as diverse as veterans' benefits, access to education, immigration and asylum, community economic development, voting rights, and so much more. Equal Justice Works aims to break down the financial and structural barriers that prevent talented candidates from pursuing careers in the public interest sector.

Application: the EJW application requires a project proposal, personal statement, two letters of recommendation, and a résumé, as well as information from your host organization. Together, you and your host organization will submit the required components for your application. Note that EJW does not consider grades at all.

Skadden Fellowship Foundation - <https://www.skaddenfellowships.org/> - September 14, 2020
The Skadden Foundation will award two-year fellowships for 2021 law school graduates, outgoing judicial law clerks, and LL.M. candidates who want to work in the public interest. Skadden Fellowships address the civil legal needs of people living in poverty. Your project must serve indigent clients,

Application: The Skadden application consists of the following:

- Three essay questions, a commitment letter from your host organization, description of your project and its significance, and how it fits within the organization's work
- Two recommendations, including one faculty member, and one by a lawyer who has supervised your legal practice.
- Your law school transcript – note that Skadden deeply values exceptional academic achievement. It is not worthwhile to apply for a Skadden if you do not have outstanding grades.

4. **Basic Timeline for Project-Based Fellowships**

Conduct Self-Assessment and Research Potential Host Organizations: begin NOW.

Secure Host Organization: target Date: end of July, if possible. *Do not panic if you haven't done so. Many students have secured host organizations in August.*

Complete First Draft of Proposal: target date mid-August. This will provide you with much needed time to work with faculty advisors, host organizations, and others to refine your application.

Submission of Final Draft: EJW application should be submitted at least one day before the due date. Skadden Fellowship should be hand-delivered or Fed-Exed.

Now let's look at each step.

Self Assessment:

Before identifying potential host organizations and projects, you want to be sure to think through the following:

- What substantive area(s) and legal issue(s) interest you the most? Why?
- Have you worked in these areas before or during law school (including summers)? In what capacity? What population do you want to serve? Have you worked with this population previously to or during law school (including summers)? In what capacity?
- Which advocacy methods interest you – e.g., direct legal services, impact litigation, policy, community organizing, and legislative?
- What are your geographic preferences?

Identifying a Strong Host Organization:

- Start with those organizations with whom you have worked through an externship or summer internships.
- Identify organizations that have posted on their website or via PSJD. In the fellowship corner database, click on "Search Opportunities." and select "*Fellowship-Sponsor*" is for organizations seeking candidates for project-based fellowships.
- Network with current EJW and Skadden Fellows to find a host organization. This will enable you to become familiar with the work and staff and learn about potential interest in hosting a fellowship.
- Network with Rutgers Law faculty, supervisors for pro bono/internship/externship positions, about your interests and fellowship goals.

Unless you are committed to a geographic area, don't forget to think about organizations or practitioners in a range of geographic locations (keeping in mind the parameters of the fellowships you are considering)

Developing a Project Idea:

At this stage, you do not have to have a fully formed project idea. Even if you just have a general sense of the type of work you would like to do, you can find organizations and

people in that field and ask them about project ideas. But at this point, you should have at least a general sense of the work you would like to do – i.e., the community you will serve and the legal strategy you will use, e.g.:

- Work with disabled or incarcerated youth in state care
- Work to end the inappropriate restraint and seclusion of disabled students and to end disproportionate discipline of students of color
- Develop best practices for adults with developmental disabilities to gain access to health care
- Address predatory lending issues in low-income communities
- Tackle legal barriers that formerly incarcerated persons face re-entering society

Project Ideas Posted by Organizations

Among the many project ideas being circulated by organizations that want to host fellows are these:

- **Voting Rights:** Developing and implementing campaigns to prepare Black communities to vote and advocate for changes to election practices and procedures before Election Day. Developing and implementing public education campaigns regarding a variety of federal, state and local level voting-related issues like voter suppression, the decennial census and post-2020 redistricting, and the expansion of opportunities for pre-trial detained individuals and people with felony convictions to vote.
- **Workers' Rights:** Proposals designed to preserve employment for low-wage workers who, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, are unable to continue working or unable to return to their prior work, including circumstances in which the employer is preventing the worker from so returning. Address, among other topics, community education, assisting workers with accessing paid leave, unemployment insurance, or other forms of public benefits, advocacy surrounding reasonable accommodations, and advocacy to challenge discriminatory behavior by employers based on COVID-19.
- **Education:** Proposals designed to address barriers preventing marginalized student groups (LEP, LGBTQ, and students of color more broadly) from obtaining special education in a culturally sensitive manner (including representation in associated school disciplinary proceedings). The proposal may also address the unmet need for mental health services for students who have faced bullying due to COVID-19 exposure or perceived exposure.

- Health Care for Unemployed: Proposals to work with clients who lost jobs due to COVID-19 and need access to health care or pandemic-related mental health services. The proposal may also address discriminatory barriers to obtaining access to COVID-19-related care.

A SAMPLE POSTING:

The Texas Advocacy Project (the "Project") is a statewide nonprofit, legal organization based in Austin and recently posted that they seek a fellow who might work on one of two projects - e.g.

1.) Bexar County Access to Justice Project: Fellow will conduct limited appearances for *pro se* litigants facing roadblocks to justice, develop best practices related to limited appearances, develop training for bar associations re. Limited or virtual presentations, and will recruit pro bono attorneys for TAP to implement best practices.

2.) Hague Convention Attorney: We have started a comprehensive educational rubric on service of process. The fellow will partner with staff and outside organizations to finalize this rubric for distribution on sites such as [TexasLawHelp.org](https://www.texaslawhelp.org), develop best practices, and train staff and possibly present at Poverty Law Conference. Expand that referral network.

Both project ideas have enough specificity in terms of what they are trying to achieve and have the "hallmarks" of an EJW project. The first focuses on developing capacity by providing legal assistance to pro se clients through limited in-person appearances, and through recruiting and training pro bono attorneys. Projects that focus on ways to increase impact through the use of technology and remote presentations are now particularly timely, in light of COVID. Second, the organization's approach - which is to work with all stakeholders and the surrounding community - and not to recreate the wheel, is highly pragmatic, and collaborative, and arguably more efficient. The second is also very well-crafted and in the EJW genre - i.e., crafting rubrics, or evidence-based approaches, working across the state and forging alliances between the private and public bar partnership with Texas. Law Help, *and* through work that will work with the statewide bar, is also an approach that embodies the EJW mantra's essence:

- Promoting Access to Justice
- For low-income communities
- Through developing innovation and collaboration
- That is sustainable and viable

Setting Up a Meeting

Once you have a list of organizations to explore and individuals to contact, your next step is setting up meetings. Although it may feel awkward, it is quite straightforward: it requires merely contacting individuals at organizations or in fields you are interested in and asking to meet with them.

- Identify the contact: If you have a specific contact at an organization, then reach out directly to that individual. If you don't, look at the staff list and figure out who would be the best person to approach. It is fine to contact you don't know! That person may not be interested in meeting with you – but there is no harm in trying. Also, even if the person you contact doesn't want to meet with you, s/he may direct you to someone else – for example, there may be a more appropriate person at the organization to talk to about fellowships, or s/he may know someone at another organization who is interested in hosting a fellow.
- Draft an email: Once you have identified whom to contact, you should send an email to request a meeting. Look at the attached sample letter for guidance, but remember that you should frame your correspondence to reflect who you are. There is no one "right" way to draft your request; however, you should follow these simple guidelines:
 - Introduce yourself and clearly state the purpose of your email (i.e., that you are looking for a host organization for a fellowship)
 - Explain why the organization is aligned with your expertise and interests
 - Briefly convey your background/experience in the field. You can also consider any project ideas (if you have any) to show you have thought about it -- but be careful not to sound too wedded to them.
 - Provide a brief description of the kind of project you are interested in working on -- tailor this to any actual posting the organization has circulated
 - Explain that you would like to meet or speak with him/her to discuss fellowship opportunities. (Note that meeting in person, while not always possible, is generally preferable)

Preparing for the Meeting

Next, you should make to meet with your potential hosts. 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 session can be both formal and informal. You need to be prepared for both scenarios. In both situations, 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 with whom you are meeting, if possible). Be prepared to answer questions about your interest in their field and their organization correctly, 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 the organization is a good fit 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.

Additionally, you should come with questions to ask them, 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?
- 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/projects which could be addressed in a fellowship proposal?
- Who would supervise me here if I was a fellow?
- What kind of training do you offer to new attorneys or fellows?
- Are you anticipating any significant 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?

At the close of the meeting, ask when you can expect to hear from them. Make sure to send a short thank-you note (email is fine) within 24 hours after the interview to anyone you met with (see the sample here). Keep in contact without being imposing or invasive. Follow up on other potential leads until you hear back from them. If you receive another offer, contact the 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.



SAMPLE TEMPLATE FOR INTRODUCTORY LETTER TO HOST ORGANIZATION

N.B. for those organizations that have formal postings, be sure to include any requested materials including resume, writing sample, and a list of references to your letter.

Dear _____,

I just finished my second year at Rutgers Law School, and I plan to apply for post-graduate fellowships with EJW/Skadden.

I am particularly interested in [identify area of law/ particular legal issue/specific population you want to work with] 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 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/particular legal issue/specific population]. [Add a couple of sentences about your experience in this area of law, mentioning any relevant summer jobs, internships, pro bono work, externships, clinics, and so forth.]

OPTIONAL: I would be particularly interested in doing a fellowship focusing on [add details here – don't sound wedded to this but use this to demonstrate some of your potential project ideas and knowledge of the field/organization's work]. I would love to discuss any areas of need 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. I will call you next week to see if we can arrange a time. Thank you in advance.

Sincerely,

NAME