What is a fellowship?

A fellowship is a short-term (generally several month to two year) paid opportunity that focuses on the professional development of the fellow. It includes a monetary reward offered by an institution, foundation or other organization to support academic work, research or specialized training in areas of particular interest to the granting organization. They are unique opportunities to gain specialized experience or entry into a field -- giving you the opportunity to do engaging and challenging work, exposing you to invaluable professional networks and sometimes leading to full-time work. Fellowships are usually highly competitive and selective.

Graduate fellowships may be university-awarded, federally-funded, or offered independently by organizations and are often designated to specific student groups or fields of study. Organizational fellowships offer short-term experiential, often administrative, opportunities lasting from a few months to a few years, focus on professional development, and are designed to develop leadership in the field. “External fellowships” or “portable fellowships” are like scholarships and follow the recipient to an institution of their choice to support research or studies. Portable fellowships require students to take on a significant level of responsibility in addition to that which is expected of them by their chosen program. Some fellowships require students to repay the stipend over time, often through the completion of a mandatory term of service in the industry, so students are strongly encouraged to make themselves aware of all requirements, deadlines and stipulations. A portable graduate fellowship can end up being a beneficial, win-win situation for the student, the fellowship provider and the university alike. Often, fellows are provided unique experiences that are not generally in an entry-level position. Of course, this experiential learning component varies depending upon the fellowship program.

Finding the right fellowship

In addition to providing invaluable experience and opening up new networks, being a fellow is a commitment of time and possibly relocation. Finding the right fellowship is important so begin by researching fellowships that interest you, and for which you are eligible. Eligibility standards vary from program to program, but some of the most common requirements include:

- Strong academic performance, including research experience for some
- A record of leadership in extracurricular and volunteer activities
- United States citizenship, unless otherwise noted
- Excellent written and oral communication skills
- Enthusiasm for learning, discovery, and achievement

Compensation

Although most fellowship programs do provide a living allowance or stipend, it is typically not comparable to the salary of a full-time job. This financial compensation varies greatly - stipends can range from $10,000 to up to the $50,000 – 75,000 range annually. Other incentives are often provided to fellows such as healthcare coverage, student loan repayment assistance, and housing support. Stipend amounts are generally set and there may not be room to negotiate, so know your budget for living expenses and be realistic about which fellowships you can afford to apply to.
Application Deadlines/Process
Applying for fellowships requires advance planning. The application deadlines for fellowships are typically **six months to one year in advance of the fellowship**. The typical application materials include a personal statement, letters of recommendation, a transcript and a resume. Fellowships that fund self-designed projects require a project proposal. Some fellowships have unique requirements which may include on-line assessments or screening video interviews.

Advice - Start the application early! An early start will give you the time to prepare written materials, to **collect any required documentation** (transcripts, letters of recommendation, sponsorships, etc.), and meet with a Career Coach if necessary. If you application requires a proposal of work, make sure that the content and style are easy to understand, avoiding specialized language, as someone outside of your field of study may review your proposal. Some applications may ask for a **personal statement**. This statement is more than a cover letter and different from an autobiography. A personal statement, or a statement of purpose, is where you tell your story in a way that demonstrates how your personal and academic journey has led you to that particular fellowship. Link your accomplishments and strengths to the core values and mission statement of the fellowship or organization. If an application requires both a cover letter and personal statement, make the cover letter short and to the point and use the personal statement to expand on your background, qualifications and interests.

Identify professors, mentors, and/or past employers who know you best and ask them to write **letters of recommendation** early in the application process. Ask for a meeting in person to discuss your interest in the fellowship and provide your resume/CV and other application materials for their reference. Make sure they have all the instructions for how to submit the letter, be it a sealed envelope back to you or directly into the online application. Don’t forget to remind them about the letter as the deadline approaches, a two week and final week gentle reminder will be appreciated! Once your application has been submitted, take a moment to write thank-you notes to the people who supported your application. (Also, make a note in your calendar to keep them informed of whatever you hear from the program to which you have applied.)

Being **invited to interview** is a great achievement! Interviews allow selection committees to better gauge if and how your personality fits with the organization. Fellowship interview panels might consist of 5–7 individuals from the organization and external stakeholders. Prepare and show up as you would for any interview (See our interview tip sheet.) You will be expected to elaborate on your proposal and personal statement, demonstrate critical thinking, and present yourself and your application authentically. Make sure that you also have a thorough understanding of the fellowship’s core mission before the interview and do your own critical assessment of your proposed project so you can address challenges they may identify. Follow up your interview with a thank you note, of course!

### Finding a fellowship

Students should actively seek out fellowship opportunities early in their graduate program. Many fellowship applications are due as early as the fall (a year before you may graduate) but others have later deadlines and applications may be due much closer to when you are available to do the fellowship. There is no exhaustive list of fellowships and due to industry and government desiring a more diverse, educated and skilled workforce, more and more portable graduate fellowships are established as time passes.

Visit [https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/career-services/students/fellowships/](https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/career-services/students/fellowships/) for links to search engines, some public health-related fellowships as well as resources to support your search. Additionally, use job search engines like Idealist.org to search for fellowships, and expand your search by using words like “funding”, “grants”, and “internships.”

### Need more help?

Use the Alumni database and online networks such as LinkedIn to connect with alumni or others who have been in the fellowship program(s) you are interested in. Career Coaches can help review your application materials in an individual career coaching appointments. To schedule an appointment, please login to CareerConnect at [https://hsph-harvard-csm.symplicity.com](https://hsph-harvard-csm.symplicity.com).