

# Carleton-funded Fellowships: Tips for Writing a Successful Proposal

## Getting started:

Begin by looking at sample proposals, so you get an idea of what projects have been funded in the past. Hard copies are available in the Office of Student Fellowships.

Clarify your personal and intellectual goals. Is this a research project preliminary to comps or a chance for you to experience something? *Research and Artistic Projects* fellowships support (usually independent) academic study of a subject, while *Fellowships for Experiential Learning* awards emphasize activities that are not research, such as working on an organic farm cooperative in Germany or retracing the footsteps of a figure in history. It is important that your proposal make clear which type of project you envision, as the fellowship committee will be evaluating your proposal based on the different criteria for experiential and research fellowships.

So...if you want to do an experiential fellowship on the uses of public spaces in Paris and produce a blog documenting these uses, don't say you will be studying the demographics and economic implications of public uses of Parisian space. If you make such statements and they are not supported by thoughtful research questions and a description of your intended methods, the proposal will be read more as an incomplete research proposal than as an experiential one and might get denied as a result.

Once you know what you want to do, there are some basic guidelines about what makes a strong proposal.

- It should lay out a clear plan, with details about what you will do and how it connects to your interests;
- It should be feasible and something you can complete (e.g., it doesn't require knowledge of a language you don't speak);
- It should show initiative and dedication;
- It should demonstrate that you have thought through safety issues; and
- It should explain *why the project is worth doing*.

## Writing a strong proposal:

Seek faculty feedback on drafts. Some proposals are rejected by the committee because they have not been thought through carefully enough and show a lack of attention to detail; faculty can provide vital feedback on these issues before your final draft reaches the committee. If you are going to an area of the world where safety may be an issue, speak to a faculty member who works in that area to find out whether the project you propose is safe to do. Asking opinion questions about government projects in China, for example, may be deemed too risky. Likewise, asking very personal questions (about sexuality, for instance) through a translator will likely be viewed by the committee as inappropriate. A faculty member might recommend you adjust your proposal to do different work or similar work in a different place.

Please note that faculty members tend to comment on these proposals as if you were a junior colleague rather than a student, and their comments might be more straightforwardly critical than you are accustomed to. Take this as a sign of respect, and don't be offended by comments that direct you to change or rethink your proposal.

Ask appropriate people to write your recommendation(s). The committee may ask why, if you are proposing a sociology project, your recommendations are from an English professor and a hall director. You need advising and recommendations from people experienced with the type of project you are proposing or the part of the world you plan to visit, and the committee needs to know that experts on your subject think your project is feasible and worthwhile.

Write to convince a general audience that your project is worth funding. Your readers may have backgrounds in history, music, economics, literature, or biology. Write to explain the thinking behind your project, pertinent background in the field of study, and the methodological and practical issues you might encounter to an audience composed of people in diverse disciplines. Geologists and anthropologists will use very different conceptual frameworks as they read your project, and you want to make sure you're clarifying things that someone outside your discipline might not otherwise understand.

Do your homework on your budget. Committee members know how much travel expenses cost. If your request is not grounded in reality, it suggests you were not committed enough to do the necessary research. Be sure to consult with the Office of Student Fellowships as you prepare your budget!

Provide a rationale for why you want to do the work where you propose to do it. Why exactly is your project on fast-food restaurants focusing on Sweden? Committee members want to know why you need pricey plane tickets do go do work halfway around the world that could also be accomplished in Minnesota.

Explain the importance of the project to you and your development as both a student and a person. If this project is vital to your comps research, for instance, mention that. If your work involves investigating ancestral history important to your understanding of your identity, say so. If your project helps link your two majors, say biology and anthropology, explain how it does this.

If you're proposing complex travels, include maps so committee members can see you've thought through geographical issues. An itinerary that skips around without a clear rationale shows lack of planning and is not an efficient use of limited financial resources.

Make clear that you possess necessary language skills to do the work you propose. If you are competent in a language, say so. If your fluency in one language can serve you in other, closely-related languages, explain this, as readers might not otherwise know. If you plan to hire translators, mention this in your description and include it in your budget.

Let readers know about contacts you've made in the places you propose to visit. This shows you've begun taking steps to make your trip possible and helps convince readers that you will have the support you need to complete your project.

## **Additional notes:**

You may propose to do projects that do not require travel. A research project on a historical subject using the Carleton library or scientific inquiry at labs on campus, or research you will conduct in your own community may all be funded by Carleton fellowships. You may also choose to attend a school or a work as an apprentice to study a subject not offered at Carleton, as long as the fellowship eligibility allows it and you make a case for why your topic is worth studying and why it is important to you.

You may propose to do projects that require you to work in a group setting. An independent geology project, for example, will usually be carried out as part of a team investigation. Work in a foreign newspaper office or medical organization will also be considered as long as you can demonstrate that the work is not better understood (and funded) as an internship.

If you demonstrate financial need, you may also apply to get compensation for wages you will not be earning while you are doing the proposed project. For most fellowships, you may include up to \$1000 toward the summer savings goal of the 'family contribution' portion of Carleton's tuition and fees.

Get Institutional Review Board approval when you will be working with human subjects. If you plan to do interviews, even informal ones, you need to go through the process of getting IRB approval (see <http://go.carleton.edu/irb> for more information on whether you need IRB approval to do your research).

In answer to any questions asked about experience abroad, be truthful; don't downplay or overstate your travel experiences. In some cases, experience abroad will help persuade committee members of your capacity to complete the project. Other fellowships favor students with very little travel experience.