



# 2016 Equal Justice Works Fellowship Application Guide

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## FELLOWSHIP APPLICATION TIMELINE

<b>July 6, 2015</b>	The 201 application is available
<b>Sept. 18, 2015</b>	The application and supporting paperwork are due to Equal Justice Works by 5 p.m. EDT
<b>Nov. 2015</b>	Interviews begin for selected candidates
<b>Dec. 2015 through April 2016</b>	Interviews continue; Fellowships are offered on a rolling basis
<b>Sept. 2016</b>	Class of 2016 Fellows begin service

## APPLICATION OVERVIEW

The Equal Justice Works Fellow selection process is highly competitive. The application and selection process for an Equal Justice Works Fellowship involves four steps:

1. You must be a third-year law student, a recent law school graduate, or an experienced private sector attorney who demonstrates a commitment to public interest law. Your law school must be an Equal Justice Works member law school.
2. You must identify a qualifying nonprofit host organization that will provide you with a full-time position upon receiving a Fellowship. Candidates and organizations can partner in any number of ways – a candidate may approach an organization with a proposed project idea or an organization may recruit an applicant. Candidates may have interned with a host organization, but cannot be a current full-time employee with the same organization. Work-study positions and other part-time, contract-based positions do not fall under this restriction.
3. The host organization must be willing to be your employer during the term of the two-year Fellowship as well as provide you with supervision, a work space, employee health and fringe benefits, and the materials (computer, internet access, phone, etc.) that you will need to successfully complete your project.
4. Together with your host organization, you must design a **new project** that focuses on legal advocacy on behalf of disenfranchised individuals, groups or issues not adequately represented in our legal system. Legal advocacy includes direct legal representation, legal education, legal training, community organizing, transactional work, policy work, and administrative representation. Visit our [Fellow profiles](#) to learn more about current projects. Your project proposal should clearly state how the project will address a specific legal matter, how it will positively impact the targeted population, and how the host organization will support your efforts. For more information, visit our tips on developing a Fellowship application and view examples of successful applications. You may also sign up for one of our application overview webinars [here](#).

Equal Justice Works reviews the applications and selects projects that can be matched with potential sponsors. Fellowships are sponsored by private law firms, foundations, individual donors, corporations, and bar associations. Almost all sponsors have specific issues and geographic focuses that they prefer. Click here to learn more about sponsor preferences. [Sponsors](#) determine whom they would like to interview. Interviews are scheduled on a rolling basis during the fall and winter. Likewise, offers are made **by the sponsors** on a rolling basis from November through April. Sponsors make the final decisions, again on a rolling basis.

## TERMS OF A FELLOWSHIP

All Equal Justice Works Fellowships require a two-year commitment from the Fellow, the host organization and the sponsor(s) to complete the Fellowship term, which runs from September 2016 through August 2018.

**Equal Justice Works Fellowships do not have a set salary level.** Equal Justice Works requires each host organization to set the Fellow's salary commensurate to what an attorney with similar experience and/or responsibility would receive at that organization. Equal Justice Works will provide up to \$41,000 toward that salary level. The candidate and host organization must agree upon the salary and include the agreed-upon salary amount on the Certification Form of the application. In addition, each Fellow is eligible to apply for the Equal Justice Works loan repayment assistance program (LRAP).

## COMPONENTS OF A FELLOWSHIP

There are four components of an Equal Justice Works Fellowship: a project, a candidate, a host organization, and a sponsor.

*A **project*** is a carefully designed initiative that involves innovative, effective legal advocacy on behalf of individuals, groups or issues that are not adequately represented within the legal system. Because the goal is to create new public interest positions, Equal Justice Works Fellowships are not used to fund general staff attorney positions within existing organizations. Instead, they should provide Fellows with the opportunity to exercise leadership on a discrete project. Individuals and host organizations work together to generate project proposals.

*A **candidate*** is a third-year law student, recent law graduate or experienced private sector attorney who has demonstrated commitment to public interest law and has the relevant skills and initiative to carry out the goals of the project. The law school from which the applicant is graduating or has graduated must be a member of Equal Justice Works. A list of the member schools is posted on our website [here](#). A third-year law student must be able to graduate and begin the Fellowship by September 2016.

*A **host organization*** is a nonprofit organization. The host organization is the Fellow's employer. Its role is to provide training, supervision, benefits (health insurance required) and other support that enables the Fellow to successfully carry out the goals of the project.

*A **sponsor*** is a law firm, corporation, foundation or individual that contributes to partially or fully funding one or more Fellowships. Equal Justice Works recruits sponsors on a rolling basis. These sponsors sometimes have restrictions or preferences as to the projects they will fund. We provide this information for applicants' consideration on a rolling basis on our website [here](#). Please note that the list is not exhaustive, as sponsors commit to Equal Justice Works on an ongoing basis, and some do not express any project preferences.

## KEY STEPS IN THE SELECTION PROCESS

1. **Equal Justice Works obtains sponsors to fund Fellowships. Applicants are not permitted to solicit law firms, corporations, or other organizations on their own behalf. Applicants who solicit sponsors or potential sponsors will be disqualified from the competition.**
2. **Applications are evaluated by Equal Justice Works and sponsors, and semifinalists are invited to interview.**
3. A completed application includes a project proposal, a Fellowship candidate to carry out the project, and a nonprofit public interest organization identified to host the project. To be considered, applications must be submitted online through the Equal Justice Works website no later than **5 p.m.**

**EDT on September 18, 2015.** The Certification Form and two letters of recommendation are also due online by that date.

4. Applications will be judged according to the selection criteria described herein. Semifinalists will be interviewed from November through April and at locations chosen by the sponsors. **Equal Justice Works will make an effort to conduct the interviews in a location convenient to the candidate but does not cover travel expenses if incurred. Candidates who cannot travel to the interview location participate by phone or videoconference.**
5. Offers are extended on a rolling basis from November to April. We notify candidates of their status on a monthly basis and the majority will have final determination by March.

## **INTERVIEWS AND OFFERS**

### ***Equal Justice Works Fellowships Interviews***

Equal Justice Works encourages sponsors to establish relationships with the Fellows from the inception of the process throughout the Fellowship term. Most sponsors participate in the interviews, and Equal Justice Works representatives are typically present as well. Although there is no set interview format, we recommend that each semifinalist prepare and practice in a mock interview.

### ***Equal Justice Works Fellowships Offers***

Equal Justice Works recognizes that there is the potential for Fellowships candidates to receive overlapping offers for other employment opportunities. We also recognize that there are multiple stakeholders. In an effort to accommodate as many of those interests as possible, Equal Justice Works will do the following:

Require that candidates notify Equal Justice Works immediately if they have accepted another position. This is a longstanding Equal Justice Works policy. Candidates should also notify their prospective Fellowship host organizations if they accept another opportunity.

Due to the Fellowships program funding structure, Equal Justice Works cannot defer a Fellowship offer. There will be no exceptions to this rule.

Similarly, Equal Justice Works will not defer a 2016 application to the 2017 selection cycle, but candidates may reapply the following year.

Require that candidates accept or reject offers within 48 hours of receipt. Those accepting offers must sign an offer letter, and immediately withdraw any outstanding applications for clerkships or other opportunities.

## **ELIGIBILITY AND CRITERIA**

All applications for an Equal Justice Works Fellowship will be judged according to the quality of the proposed project, the individual Fellowship candidate, and the host organization, taking into consideration other factors such as issue area, geographic diversity and sponsor preferences. [Sponsors](#) typically select projects based in cities in which they have offices. In some cases, however, sponsors will simply indicate an interest in funding an innovative project anywhere in the country. If a sponsor expresses a particular geographic or issue area preference, Equal Justice Works will post that information [here](#).

### ***Project Evaluation Criteria***

- The project must involve legal advocacy on behalf of disenfranchised individuals or groups, or issues that are not adequately represented by some aspect of our legal system. Advocacy may entail a wide range of approaches that include, but are not limited to, community legal education and training, organizing, direct services, litigation, transactional work and administrative efforts.
- Because a goal of the program is to create new public interest positions and give Fellows the opportunity to exercise leadership on discrete projects, Equal Justice Works will not fund a general staff attorney position within an existing organization. The project must introduce new services or expand in some meaningful way upon services already provided by the organization.
- The project must address the legal needs of individuals or communities in the United States and its territories.
- Preference will be given to projects that are designed to impact a large number of people, create programs that can be replicated in other communities, and create lasting institutions or programs.
- Projects in the area of indigent criminal defense should focus on innovative services, and support or delivery mechanisms that are not adequately funded by the government or that are designed to impact broad criminal justice issues. For example, Equal Justice Works has funded projects involving death penalty issues, including preventive strategies and systemic issues such as sentencing, alternatives to incarceration and concerns of special populations, such as juveniles and the mentally ill.

### ***Fellowship Candidate Evaluation Criteria***

- The candidate's demonstrated or stated commitment to public interest law generally, and specifically to the community in which s/he is planning to work.
- The candidate's professional, volunteer and/or subject matter expertise indicating that s/he possesses the relevant skills and initiative to make the proposed project a success. Traditional measures of academic achievement, such as grades, law review, and law school ranking, are not relevant to the Equal Justice Works selection process.
- The candidate's commitment and ability to fulfill the two-year term required by the program.
- The candidate's ability to bring a diverse perspective to his or her project and the legal profession. Equal Justice Works strongly encourages applications from candidates reflecting diverse cultural and experiential backgrounds; people with disabilities; people of diverse ethnic, racial, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds; work experiences; national origins; sexual orientations; and ages.
- Equal Justice Works Fellowships are designed to create new public interest legal positions and launch new public interest careers. An individual who has worked as a full-time, permanent employee with the host organization for any length of time within one year of the application date may not be hired as an Equal Justice Works Fellow at that organization. For the same reasons, Equal Justice Works will not fund an applicant who has had a previous postgraduate legal Fellowship through Equal Justice Works or any other major fellowship program (e.g. Skadden, Soros, Echoing Green). However, Equal Justice Works AmeriCorps Legal Fellows are eligible to apply as well as those candidates who were awarded a law school or law school clinical fellowship.
- Equal Justice Works does not require a candidate to have taken or passed a bar exam by the beginning of the Fellowship term. However, the prospective host organization may require bar passage, agreement to take the bar exam in the summer or license to practice in the Fellowship state. Applicants are therefore advised to discuss the matter with their prospective host organizations.

## ***Host Organization Evaluation Criteria***

- The nonprofit organization's commitment and ability to provide training, support and supervision throughout the Fellowship project.
- The role of the project fits in the scheme of the larger organizational priorities.
- The organization's commitment and ability to provide health insurance and other standard employee benefits to the Fellow during the Fellowship.

## **SUPPORT FOR FELLOWS**

### ***Development Training***

The Equal Justice Works Fellowships program sponsors training over the course of the two-year Fellowship. The goal of this training is to provide Fellows with practical leadership and management skills that will help them be successful in their Fellowships. Additionally, the training offers a great opportunity to build long-term peer networks that will last throughout the Fellow's public interest career.

### ***Resources and Services Provided to the Fellows***

Equal Justice Works provides Fellows with program support and assistance by offering informative webinars, check-ins, and dedicated staff members who are ready and willing to help you navigate your Fellowship. Equal Justice Works also facilitates and manages the relationship between a Fellow and his/her sponsor.

### ***Salary***

Equal Justice Works will provide each host organization with up to \$41,000 annually toward a Fellow's salary. Each host organization is instructed to set its Fellow's salary commensurate with what a standard entry-level attorney with similar experience would receive at that organization. The organization must provide the difference if the salary level exceeds \$41,000. Salary must be agreed upon prior to submitting an application.

### ***Fellowships Loan Repayment Assistance Program (LRAP)***

Equal Justice Works provides loan repayment assistance to Fellows who qualify through its Loan Repayment Assistance Program (LRAP). The amount of assistance a Fellow will receive is based upon the monthly Income Based Repayment (IBR) set forth by the Federal Direct Loan Program. All new Fellow LRAP participants must consolidate their federal loans with the Federal Direct Loan Program ([www.loanconsolidation.ed.gov](http://www.loanconsolidation.ed.gov)) and select IBR as the repayment option on the Federal application. Equal Justice Works will cover the entire IBR payment for the term of the Fellowship. The LRAP includes both graduate and undergraduate educational debt, but must be consolidated with Federal Direct in order to qualify. A Fellow's eligibility amount will be reduced dollar-for-dollar by any assistance from another program, and Fellows are required to maximize their participation in other LRAPs for which they are eligible. Assistance to incoming 2016 Fellows will commence at the time the first payment on the loan is due after September 1, 2015. 2015 graduates are required to maximize their lenders' grace periods.

For more information on managing your student debt and how to take advantage of the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program, click [here](#).

## **SPONSOR PREFERENCES**

Law firms, corporations, bar associations, foundations and individuals provide funding to partially or fully cover the cost of each Equal Justice Works Fellowship. These funding partners are referred to as sponsors. Sponsors are encouraged to establish relationships with their Fellows from the beginning of the process (e.g. participating in the candidate interviews) and throughout the Fellowship term.

Many sponsors find it easier to establish and maintain relationships with their Fellows if the Fellowship project is based in a city where the sponsor has an office and/or involves an issue of particular interest to the sponsor. If a sponsor has indicated to Equal Justice Works that it is interested in funding a Fellowship in a particular geographic area or around a particular issue/substantive area, we [publicize this information on our website](#).

Equal Justice Works accepts applications for projects located throughout the United States. However, as many sponsors are located in major metropolitan areas, a significant majority of our Fellows are located in the largest cities. Please view our [Fellow Profiles](#) to see geographic and substantive areas that have received significant sponsorship in recent years.

You will find some of the locations and issues where we anticipate funding interest based on initial conversations with 2016 sponsors on our website in our [Sponsor Preferences List](#). Please note that this list is not exhaustive (i.e. the absence of a location or issue from the list does not indicate that it will not be considered for funding) and is intended only to give prospective candidates an idea as to where we will likely have sponsor interest. **As we recruit additional sponsors, we will post their geographic and/or issue/substantive area preferences online, so be sure to check our website periodically for updates.**

## **TIPS ON DEVELOPING A SUCCESSFUL FELLOWSHIP APPLICATION**

### ***Envision your dream job.***

A Fellowship provides you with the unique opportunity to create your ideal job, so begin this process by envisioning your dream position. What would you like to do for the next two years? Where would you like to work? With questions like these in mind, you are in a better position to design a discrete project to fit your interests, experience, and personal and professional goals. You and your host organization should carefully assess what you can accomplish in two years and whether your proposed project makes sense for the community that you hope to serve. One of the key factors that Equal Justice Works considers in reviewing applications is the fit among the proposed project, the applicant's experience and interests, the needs of the community to be served, and the priorities of the proposed host organization.

### ***Research prospective host organizations.***

Research organizations before approaching one to host you. Have you interned with an organization at which you felt very comfortable and supported? If you have not worked with an organization that you're considering, do you know anyone who has that can offer insight? What work has the organization done on your project issue? What is its staff size? What is its mission? How is it funded? Does it have experience hosting law graduates with your level of experience? How and when does it decide whether to sponsor a particular Fellowship applicant? Does it offer training opportunities to Fellows? Consider reviewing the organization's annual report, searching for relevant media clips on Lexis or Westlaw and meeting with a staff attorney to learn more about the organization and to promote your project. Before approaching an organization about hosting your project, you should have some ideas about what you want to do, but also demonstrate that you expect to work closely with the organization to develop the specifics of the project in order to ensure your mutual expectations are clear.

### ***Approach the organization.***

In discussions with an organization about hosting your project, consider its commitment to providing solid legal supervision and training, either in-house or by readily accessible attorneys elsewhere. Is the organization well-suited and committed to support the candidate and project? Is there a thoughtful plan for providing the candidate with adequate orientation, training, supervision and support? If it does not have in-house expertise on your issue, where will you get that support? Also bear in mind that the host organization is responsible for providing your fringe benefits (e.g., health insurance, FICA), as well as salary exceeding \$41,000 annually. PSLawNet (<http://www.pslawnet.org>) offers a host of resources for researching organizations nationwide.



### ***Work with the host organization to develop a project proposal.***

Once the organization has agreed to host the project, work closely with it to develop the details of the proposal and identify specific strategies. Keep in mind that the proposed project must fit with the organization's mission and work. Parts of the proposal will be written by the host organization and should reflect its full support of the project and their willingness to work as your partner in implementing it. Whether or not you have previous work experience with the organization, your application must show that you have built a relationship, established a mutual understanding about the goals and parameters of the proposed project, and collaborated closely to develop the specifics.

### ***Demonstrate a pressing need in a specific community.***

The application asks you to describe the need and community to be served. A community, geographic area, particular population or cause can be "needy" by virtue of the number of people affected, the size and nature of the geographic area, the dearth of legal assistance for the population, the timeliness or potential impact of the issue. The key is to paint a picture of the particular problem in the specific community you wish to serve. For example, general statistics stating that foster youth neglect is a nationwide problem are compelling, but may not be enough to sell the merits of a youth advocacy project based in San Francisco. A stronger proposal would describe the particular crisis facing foster youth in San Francisco.

### ***Know your community – obtain stakeholder "buy-in."***

A strong application shows that the candidate has a good understanding of the target community. Equal Justice Works places high value on personal ties to the community the proposed project will serve; for example, a domestic violence survivor who wants to launch a domestic violence project. A personal connection is not essential, however. What is imperative is that you demonstrate that you have thought through the challenges that may arise in developing a relationship with the proposed target community and explain your plans for addressing those issues. You can strengthen a proposal by showing that you have used innovative ways to lay the groundwork for the project in the community. For instance, consider obtaining a commitment from local community groups to collaborate in a coalition, getting input from local leaders representing the target community, or drawing on a recent needs assessment to identify specific needs and particular strategies that the community wants employed.

### ***Propose realistic and targeted strategies.***

The project proposal should strike a balance between being discrete and realistic without being too narrow or unremarkable. Consider whether the project will make a real difference in the issue area. Do the proposed strategies make sense? Do the goals and timetable reflect good judgment and realistic assessment of how the project will be accomplished? In addition, your strategies must make sense in light of your chosen host organization. For instance, if you propose to file a class action lawsuit on behalf of migrant farmworkers, the proposal should demonstrate that your host organization has the resources to litigate class actions, the experience to provide adequate supervision, and a history of or interest in working on farmworker rights. Finally, your strategies must make sense for the community you propose to serve. Research what strategies already have been tried and whether successful models have been used elsewhere.

### ***Propose a project, not a staff position.***

Virtually all legal nonprofit organizations need more staff to meet current demand for services; funding general staff attorney positions, however, is not the purpose of this program. Equal Justice Works funds projects that offer Fellows leadership opportunities and ownership of a discrete project, with specific goals that can be measured and tracked over time that complement or expand the mission of the host organization.

### ***Demonstrate long-term impact and sustainability.***

Equal Justice Works seeks projects designed to impact a large number of people through the implementation of an innovative program or replication of a model that has been used successfully in another community. For instance, a candidate might propose to expand the work of a social services program by adding a legal component or implement a program model that has worked in another state. “Impact” can be measured in a variety of ways, such as the numbers of clients represented, residents educated, volunteer attorneys recruited or resources leveraged. It is also very important to show that the proposed project will have a lasting impact and that you and your host organization are committed to sustaining the work beyond the two-year Fellowship term.

### ***Show commitment to the work.***

The application asks for detailed candidate information. In developing this section, you should show how you have developed the experience that makes you the right person to carry out the project you propose. Do you have the substantive knowledge necessary to pursue the project goals or explain how it will be obtained? Do you have experience with the target community, whether by working on the specific issue or in the geographic or cultural community? Do you have a personal relationship with the community to be served? Equal Justice Works also seeks candidates with a demonstrated commitment to public service, whether before, during or after law school, or an explanation of the factors that prevented the candidate from pursuing public service activities (e.g., the candidate supported a family throughout school), as well as an indication that the candidate now has a long-term commitment.

### ***Get extensive feedback.***

You should not develop your application in a vacuum or be afraid to ask for help. In addition to working closely with your host organization, consider asking for feedback from law school or undergraduate professors, public interest career counselors, practitioners, employers, organizations, and past and current Fellows. Ask them to pose tough questions to help you identify potential ways to strengthen your proposal.

### ***Maximize your options.***

Apply to Equal Justice Works and any other Fellowship program for which you are eligible. To find out about other Fellowship opportunities, visit your law school’s career services office and PSLawNet. Many Fellowship candidates develop such a strong relationship with the host organization that even if a Fellowship is not awarded, the organization hires them as a regular staff attorney. Moreover, the process of developing a Fellowship application, from researching nonprofit organizations to analyzing legal strategies, is a fantastic critical thinking and fundraising exercise for any public interest lawyer.