



Office of Graduate Fellowships

Advice for:

Fulbright ETA Applicants

The Fulbright ETA Program: What it is?

The Fulbright ETA (English Teaching Assistantship) Program funds U.S. students to spend an academic year serving as a teaching assistant in English language classrooms overseas. The program, which currently operates in more than 60 countries worldwide, pays for travel and other benefits and provides a monetary stipend to meet cost of living expenses in the field. English teaching assistants spend the bulk of their time overseas assisting primary instructors in EFL classrooms, but in most countries they are also expected to propose a modest “side project” that will contribute to the Fulbright program’s goal of furthering mutual cultural understanding.

One of the most important things applicants need to know about the Fulbright ETA program is that the program is configured differently in different countries, and expectations of candidates vary accordingly. For example, some countries require proficiency in the local language, whereas for others this is neither required nor expected. For some countries the side project is very important, whereas others do not want students to undertake such projects at all. The level at which ETAs will teach (e.g. elementary school, high school, university) varies from country to country as well. In deciding what country to apply to, prospective applicants should carefully review the requirements and preferences of the countries that interest them at: http://us.fulbrightonline.org/thinking_teaching.html .

Fulbright ETA: Are you a good candidate?

As stated above, the kind of candidate Fulbright seeks for ETA awards can vary from country to country. However, the following factors are important:

- **Early Career Focus:** The Fulbright ETA is designed as a program for new university graduates or early-career Master’s students with a professional interest in education, and/or teaching, and in the country or region to which they are applying. Doctoral students are usually not preferred, and students who already have significant professional experience may be at a disadvantage. Some countries have age limits.
- **Teaching/Mentoring Experience:** Your experience need not include formal classroom teaching. Community service, tutoring, mentoring / counseling, public speaking, or work with children / youth / educational organizations all potentially “count.” Fulbright is not necessarily looking for highly experienced teachers, but they do want to see that you have a genuine interest in teaching and have sought out opportunities to engage in such work in the past. Academic training in pedagogy, ESL, or other relevant topics in the field of education can also help demonstrate interest and commitment.

Are you a good candidate? Continued...

- **Relevant Long-Term Goals:** Though not everyone who applies for a Fulbright ETA is expected to go on to become an educator, the ideal candidate will be able to make a case for the relevance of this experience to their longer-term goals and aspirations.
- **A Compelling Side Project:** Most countries expect you to propose a side project. The project need not be very ambitious, but it should be creative, feasible, and contribute the goals of cultural exchange and understanding. An ideal project is one that arises from talents or interests that you bring to the table: music, sports, art, gardening, literature, clubs, and community service projects are examples of areas in which creative and realistic opportunities for exchange can arise. Academic research is also a possibility, but be certain it is something you can do wherever you may be posted, and that it has relevance to your longer-term goals. Also, make sure you will have the language skills (and time!) realistically execute whatever project you propose.
- **Choice of Country:** One of the most common pitfalls of Fulbright ETA applications is the failure to adequately justify the choice of country. Think carefully about what country is the best match for you and be sure to carefully articulate your reasons for this choice in your application essays.
- **Adaptability / Flexibility:** Being a Fulbright ETA brings all the usual challenges of travel to a foreign country, plus more: A work situation in which you may not have a lot of control or many resources; language barriers; a new educational system; lack of creature comforts; and finding a place for yourself in a new community. ETAs are often placed outside large cities in areas with few other foreigners. Particularly in less developed countries, selection committees look for candidates that are up to this challenge. Think about how to convey this in your application.

The Application: What are they looking for?

In crafting your Fulbright ETA application, keep the following questions in mind. All the various elements of your application should reinforce one another in terms of the answers to these questions, and if at any stage of the process you are interviewed you should be prepared to answer them articulately in person.

1. Why have you chosen to apply for the Fulbright English Teaching Assistantship?
2. Why have you chosen the particular country you chose? What knowledge do you have of the host country?
3. What do you hope to contribute in the classroom and what qualifications, training, or experience do you possess that will make you an effective teaching assistant?
4. What interest do you have in teaching?
5. How will the opportunity contribute to your future professional or personal goals?
6. What use will you make of time outside the classroom?

What are they looking for in the application? Continued...

Other factors that will be evaluated include:

- Clear, correct, articulate self-expression in English. Casual / dialectical speech or weak writing skills will reflect negatively on your qualifications as an ETA. Exchange partners overseas require standard, educated, native U.S. English in teaching environments.
- Language ability: Is your language ability commensurate with (a) the requirements of the Fulbright program in your country; (b) the demands of your proposed project outside the classroom. If your country requires language proficiency (you can find this information on the Fulbright web site), you should be prepared to speak about the topics listed above in the target language as part of an interview.
- Maturity, professionalism, and ability to adapt to life overseas.
- New opportunities to go abroad. While genuine interest and realistic expectations of the host country are important, preference is given to candidates who have not had *extensive* prior experience in the country. In particular, those who have lived in the country, and/or who have long-standing personal and family connections to the country are at a disadvantage. Study abroad experiences do not count against an applicant, and can even offer evidence of your preparedness and adaptability.
- Where are you now, where are you headed... and how will the Fulbright ETA help get you there?