



## Office of Graduate Fellowships

### **Applying to Graduate Fellowships: Timelines**

#### Understanding Fellowship Application Cycles

For graduate students seeking external fellowships for research or professional development, understanding the timing of application cycles is critical to success. Graduate fellowship programs tend to have long application cycles that play out over the course of several months and require long-term planning – on the order of years. Graduate students who are highly successful in securing external support are those who learn early on to think long-term about their educational trajectory and their research and career goals, both in graduate school and beyond.

There are three broad categories of fellowship – with some overlap between these categories:

- Traditional academic fellowships provide a stipend intended to support a student over the course of one (or occasionally more than one) academic year. The goal of such awards is to allow students of great promise to maximize their potential in graduate school by freeing them from the obligation to work or teach, thus enabling them to devote their full energy to study, research, and writing. Such awards may also provide other forms of support beyond the stipend – such as tuition support, a research/travel allowance, or access to special professional development opportunities. This type of fellowship is most commonly offered to PhD students seeking an academic or research career.
- Fellowships for international research / training cover travel costs and living expenses for a student (or in some cases a recent graduate) to conduct overseas research, language training, or professional development. These awards may also include funding for research costs and/or language tuition. These are offered to graduate students at various stages (Master’s and PhD) and are typically awarded for programs lasting 6-12 months.
- Professional development fellowships offer high-level professional development experiences in the form of a year-long (or occasionally multi-year) work experience. These programs pay a stipend/salary for the duration of the award and are typically designed as a career “launch pad” for students who have recently completed a graduate degree (Master’s or PhD.)

Regardless of type, fellowship programs are almost always timed to align with the traditional academic calendar – that is, they provide funding 9-12 months of support starting in September and running through the following May (or in some cases through the summer.)

Application cycles for fellowship programs are likewise tied to the academic calendar, and will play out in the academic year PRIOR to the one in which funding is offered.

## What This Means for You

**This means you must apply to fellowship programs in the year prior to the year in which you hope to receive funding – and start working on the applications even before that. Here is how it works:**

- Application cycles open (meaning the application becomes available) in the summer or fall, usually some time between August-November. This is when you can actually begin working on the application.
- The deadline to submit the application will come in fall or winter, usually some time between October-February.
- Results will be announced in the spring, usually between March-May.
- Funding will begin in the fall, usually September.

Here are some examples of well-known graduate fellowship programs:

<u>Program</u>	<u>Application Available</u>	<u>Deadline</u>	<u>Awards Offered</u>	<u>Funding Begins</u>
ACLS Diss	Aug/Sept	November	Mar/Apr	September
SSRC IDRF	September	November	Mar/Apr	September
Ford Found	Aug/Sept	November	Mar/Apr	September
NSF GRFP	August	October	Early April	June or Sept
Bosch	Aug/Sept	November	Mar/Apr	Aug/Sept

There are some exceptions. As you will notice above, NSF GRFP allows you to choose whether you will start in June or September. Some other variations include:

SREB State	January	March	May/June	September
Fulbright	March	Sept/Oct	Mar/Apr/May	September

Notice the Fulbright program, one of the most sought-after graduate level fellowship programs: The application opens in March each year, and serious applicants usually work on it all summer before the submission deadline in Sept/Oct each year. Notification of awards takes place in the spring, and funding starts (at the earliest) the following fall – a year after the application was submitted, and 1.5 years after the applicant began working on it.

There are also a few Federal grant programs for graduate students (such as NIH F31 Fellowships or NSF Doctoral Dissertation Improvement Grants) that run competitions on alternative timelines or run multiple cycles per year.

It is important to realize that these timelines are NOT usually flexible. In most cases, deadlines come once a year – miss it, and you will have to wait a full year for another chance to apply. Funding start-dates are also usually set by the program; you must make your schedule conform to theirs.

## Tips and Advice

- It is to your advantage to synchronize your progress through your program to the academic calendar. Start a PhD program in the fall, not in January, and aim to synchronize your milestones in the program (completion of coursework, advancement to candidacy, dissertation writing and defense) to the fall-spring funding cycle. This will help ensure that you are “in the right place at the right time” to be more competitive for funding.
- Plan far ahead. As noted above, fellowship applications will be due 6-12 months before funding begins. The time required to put together a competitive application package is significant, ranging from weeks to months. For fellowships involving research, the applicant normally needs to have a well-developed research plan before they even START working on the application. (Since the essence of the application is to make a pitch for your research plan, you can’t effectively start until you have a plan and the necessary skills to carry it out.) Early in your graduate career, map out your pathway and begin thinking about what fellowships you may want to apply to at what stage. Talk with your advisor about your plan.
- Research fellowship opportunities: There are many fellowships out there, but at any given moment only a small number are likely to be relevant to you. Some awards are very narrowly targeted at specific fields or topics of research. Others target specific demographic groups, or require that the student be at a very specific juncture in their study. Your window of opportunity to apply may be narrow, so it pays to familiarize yourself with the opportunities and learn to use databases and search tools well in advance of the time you will need funding.
- Don’t wait until you need funding to start looking for it / applying for it. It will be too late! Anticipate what you will need and when FAR in advance, and plan accordingly. Even if you’re not ready at the time of application, you will be by the time a fellowship would be offered. This means that some of the ideas and plans you include in your proposal may be “educated guesses” based on your incomplete knowledge at the time of application. This happens to everybody and is normal! Funders realize that projects change over time, and that what you ultimately do may look a little different from what you wrote in your application. The important thing is not that your plan turns out exactly like what you proposed in the application, but rather that you are able to put forward a compelling plan. While it’s true that you need to have a clear idea of what you are after going into the application process, don’t let uncertainty about the specifics derail you.