

Making the Case for Funding Recent Grad Fellowships

Step 1: Market Research

- Contact local public service agencies (e.g., district attorney, public defender, city attorney, superior courts, etc.) to determine whether they have an interest in “hiring” recent graduates for volunteer assignments.
 - Verify with the agencies whether they require their volunteers to provide their own funding. (Most of the agencies in the San Francisco bay area would only take on a graduate volunteer if the volunteer had independent funding.)
 - Identify the agencies’ timing and hiring requirements.
- Contact schools in your region to understand local practices. It is a much more compelling to a dean or other decision-maker to know that every other school in your region or employment market is providing this type of support to its graduates.
- Review your own records to identify graduates in prior years who ultimately were hired by agencies as direct result of volunteering in their offices. Showing your dean the direct value of these positions on ultimate employment is very persuasive.
- As you begin to survey your graduates regarding their employment status, track the number of graduates who are either volunteering or have expressed interest in volunteering for a public service agency.

Step 2: Identify Funding

- Work with your dean and budget director to develop creative strategies for locating financial resources. Consider the availability of funding through:
 - Salary savings: if you have staff or faculty positions that were budgeted but for some reason not filled, you might be able to capture those resources for a graduate fellow program.
 - Pre-existing gifts: perhaps a donor has ear-marked a gift for a particular cause or type of program that would encompass the fellowships. If it is a close call, suggest contacting the donor to explore the possibility.
 - New financial gifts: work with your dean and development office to determine if there might be donors who would want to fund a post-graduate fellowship program. The notion of “job creation” and/or public service support might be very appealing to some donors.

Step 3: Determine the Scope of the Program

- Once you have a sense of the market of positions, the pool of talent interested in the program, and a budget, determine the scope of your program. (*Note: you may want to answer some of these questions at the stage when you are exploring the budget issues—particularly relating to the number and size of awards that you would like to offer.*) Consider:
 - What types of positions will you fund (Government? Non-profits? Courts? Private firms and corporations?)

- How much do you want to award each graduates? Understanding the other programs in your area will help understand the “market rate.”
- How many people do you want to serve?
- Will you require a minimum number of hours of legal work to be eligible?
- When do you want the program to run?
 - Offering the program in the fall while grads wait for bar results may assist them in lining up valuable experience, but there is likely to be a greater demand for the program.
 - Offering the program after bar results are published might reduce the number of graduates who are interested in the program (since many will have found jobs already) and enable them to perform attorney-level work.
- Determine eligibility priorities
 - Will you prioritize those graduates who are reporting unemployment for ERSS?
 - Will you prioritize public service over other positions?
 - Will you prioritize off-campus positions to on-campus positions?

Step 4: Design an Application Process and Promote the Program

- Develop an application form and process.
- If you are funding off-campus positions, include a verification from the host agency that they have “hired” your graduate to perform legal work for their organization on a volunteer basis for the number of hours your program requires.

Step 5: Select Participants

- To the extent your funding will not accommodate all applicants, develop a committee to review applications and make selections.
- Require the fellows to submit regular documentation throughout the program to verify that they are still volunteering.

Step 6: Support to Participants

- Once your graduate fellows are in place, continue to reach out to them to ensure that they are utilizing the law school’s services, resources and networks.
- Plan a few meetings (lunch or after work) to create a sense of community among the fellows and offer support on their ongoing job searches.

Step 7: Follow-up

- Reach out to the recipients after the completion of the placement to determine whether the placement was valuable in assisting the grad in obtaining a permanent position. This information will be useful in making the case again in the future.