



Fulbright U.S. Student Program Application Guide

This application guide is provided by [FWD: Scholars \(FWD:S\)](#). FWD:S is a volunteer-led organization that seeks to pay forward our knowledge about competitive scholarship experiences. We aim to empower our peers through resources and support to pursue their academic and professional goals. Our ultimate aim is to better reflect the underrepresented identities among us.

To meet these goals, we work to increase the availability of scholarship application resources and match applicants to recent scholarship recipients for mentorship. We recognize that privilege of all kinds must be acknowledged and used to create a more equal and just world.

The FWD:S team is made up of students and alumni recipients of competitive scholarships—many of whom come from underrepresented backgrounds themselves—who are all eager to provide resources and support to prospective applicants. We want to use our privilege and insight to help students to chase their dreams at the undergraduate and graduate levels, both domestically and internationally.

Interested in mentorship? If you'd like to be paired with an alum of this scholarship to support your application process, fill out our [mentorship matching survey](#).

Interested in volunteering with us? If you'd like to help us support prospective applicants, take our [volunteer survey](#).

Partnerships: FWD:S is eager to form mutually beneficial relationships with organizations and individuals who share our commitment to diversifying higher education. If you're interested in partnering with FWD:S, please contact us at fwdscholars@gmail.com.

Have questions about FWD:S and its services? Send us an email at fwdscholars@gmail.com. You can also follow FWD:S on social media for updates on our program and more scholarship tips, tricks, and guides:

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Prepared by: Morgan King (ETA, 2018), Eryn Sale (Research, 2020), and Taylor Pigram (ETA, 2017). Please note that all of us participated in the Fulbright U.S. Student program.

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MESSAGE FROM THE GUIDE CREATORS

Hello! We created this Fulbright guidance document to assist underrepresented applicants in applying for the Fulbright program. In addition to application logistics and links to various Fulbright webpages, this document also contains our personal perspectives and insights into the application process as well as insights from other Fulbright alumni. Please note that some of the information contained in this document is neither representative of the Fulbright Commission, nor the U.S. Department of State, nor each country's commission/embassy, but instead it is a compilation of our individual experiences that we found helpful to share with prospective and current applicants.

DISCLAIMER

We think the perspectives of students who have actually been through the application process are far too often left out of resources offered to scholarship applicants. However, because this guide is from the perspective of current scholars and alumni, it provides only a partial view of the application process. It's important to keep in mind that these were our experiences and the suggestions that we found helpful, but they are not universal truths about how the program selects scholars. Also, while we do our best to keep this guide current, we can't guarantee that everything remains 100% accurate, since many countries have their own unique specifications.

Note: This document remains a work in progress - it will be updated as we track down more information and incorporate the perspectives of more Fulbrighters. If you have a specific question that isn't addressed yet, reach out and we can connect you to a current grantee or alum!

ABOUT THE SCHOLARSHIP

Description of Scholarship

Fulbright is one of the oldest and most prestigious fellowship programs in the United States. The Fulbright selection process consists of three stages: Campus Committee, National Screening Committee and the country-specific Fulbright Commission. The Fulbright U.S. Student grant funds graduating seniors, recent bachelorette degree recipients, master's and doctoral candidates to perform research, study, or teach English for an academic year in a participating country. Some countries may require research grantees to be enrolled in a master's degree program during their stay. The grant was developed by Senator J. William Fulbright in 1945, designed to use excess war funds to fund the 'promotion of international good will through the exchange of students in the fields of education, culture, and science'. Grants provide an allowance for room and board and round-trip transportation based on host country cost of living. Some countries provide financing for a research allowance, full or partial tuition, language studies, or pre-departure and in-country orientations.

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Scholarship Benefits

Funding:

- Round-trip transportation
- Room and board
- Incidental costs
- Accident and sickness health benefits

Country-dependent funding:

- Research allowances
- Enrichment activities
- Full or partial tuition
- Language programs
- Pre-departure and in-country orientations

Further Information

Fulbright website: <https://us.fulbrightonline.org/>

Foundation contact email: FBstudent@iie.org

Foundation contact phone: 1-800-272-6994

Fulbright regional contacts: <https://us.fulbrightonline.org/contact-us>

Fulbright directory: <https://us.fulbrightonline.org/component/filter/?view=filter>

Fulbright grantee and application statistics: <https://us.fulbrightonline.org/statistics>

Types of Awards

There are four types of Fulbright U.S. Student Programs. Open study/research awards and English Teaching Assistant programs are the most common. Two additional special programs, also, are available: the Fulbright-National Geographic Storytelling Fellowship and the Fulbright-Fogarty Fellowship in Public Health.

- Study/Research
- English Teaching Assistant (ETA)
- Fulbright-National Geographic Storytelling Fellowship
- Fulbright-Fogarty Fellowships in Public Health

Note: the [Fulbright Scholar Program](#) is different from the Fulbright U.S. Student Programs offering teaching, research, or combination awards in over 125 countries. These are available for professionals: higher-education faculty and administrators, artists, journalists, scientists, lawyers, and independent scholars. You can't apply for the scholar program concurrently with the student program.

Eligibility

The U.S. Fulbright Student Program Website lists all requirements on eligibility [here](#). Notable requirements for all awards are:

1. Applicants must be born or naturalized citizens.
2. You cannot apply for more than one grant in a cycle.
3. You cannot hold a doctoral degree when applying, but may hold a JD.
4. At the start of the grant, you must have a bachelor's degree or equivalent (four years professional experience in the creative or performing arts counts).
5. Applicants must meet language requirements of the host country.

Some notable preferred qualifications include:

1. Applications previously have not been a Fulbright recipient
2. Undergraduate education was primarily performed in the United States
3. Limited in country experience
4. Preference given to United States Armed Forces

Unique requirements for each type of award are as follows:

Study/Research:

- Fulbright often groups Study and Research awards together. It is important to note that while these two awards have similar applications, they are not exactly the same. On the general Application Components page on the Fulbright website, it states that there is an affiliation letter requirement. However, the necessity of this is actually specific to the research program. Some study awards do not require any sort of affiliation at the time of application. Please check on your specific country's list of requirements prior to applying as some Study awards require you to apply to the specific university/institution at the same time as your Fulbright application while some countries prefer you wait until after Fulbright acceptance. For Research awards (and for Study awards that DO require such affiliations), you need to get into contact with the host university/institution that you plan to work with in your host country. Additionally, any projects using human/animal research may need to get their project vetted by the institutional review board. Please work with your Fulbright Advisor to determine the scope of your project.

English Teaching Assistant (ETA):

- There are specific requirements and criteria that vary for the ETA grants across the 80+ available countries. You can only apply to one country. It is important to note that you apply to a country, not a city, for the ETA. While some awards allow you to list your preference of location/region/city within a country, you are not guaranteed placement in a particular place within the country to which you apply.

Fulbright-National Geographic Storytelling Fellowship:

- First, you must be selected for a Fulbright Study/Research Grant and meet the criteria of the Study/Research requirements of the host country you choose. All countries eligible

for a Study/Research grant are eligible for the Storytelling Fellowship. Candidates of any field are encouraged to apply, though those with experience in storytelling are preferred.

Fulbright-Fogarty Fellowships in Public Health:

- You must be a U.S. citizen, be enrolled in graduate or medical school, and have sufficient proficiency to carry out the project in the host language.

THE APPLICATION PROCESS

Applicant Type

There are two ways to submit an application - through a U.S. institution or At-Large. Students currently enrolled in an undergraduate or graduate program at a U.S. college or university are encouraged to apply through the institution. If you're not enrolled, you can still apply via your alma mater, if the institution will accept alumni applications. Other candidates apply as At-Large applicants.

Note: Although this isn't official, going through your undergraduate/graduate institution may give you access to more resources and support during this process.

Each institution has a different internal deadline to obtain the institutional endorsement which can be confirmed with your Fulbright Program Adviser. You can look up your Fulbright Program Adviser on the Getting Started page [here](#).

Short Answer Questions

Your short answer questions are your opportunity to give the readers a summation of your plans. For research applicants, you will provide an overview of your research proposal. Please note that it is fine if research details change slightly upon starting the Fulbright program. For Study applicants, you will summarize your plans and relevance to your career. For ETA and Research/Study applicants, you will discuss your unique qualifications, how you plan to engage the community outside of the classroom or lab and what your career/academic plans are for the future after Fulbright. For the third question, try to connect your Fulbright experiences to your career/academic plans to show the committee why Fulbright is necessary to your future plans. Try to specify what academic programs or career opportunities you want to access but please note that these plans are not set in stone and you can change them upon your return to the U.S.

Host Country Engagement (HCE): Be creative. Develop an idea of how you could engage with your community which could range from practicing a hobby, volunteering with a local organization, to starting a new club. Also, understand that you are not locked into the activity you state in your short answer response. You can change your HCE once in-country.

Advice from Fulbrighter on the HCE section:

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- “When I contacted Fulbright to see exactly what they were looking for in this HCE section, I was told ‘tell me what will keep you sane there [in my host country]. Which of your hobbies will you transfer there? What new hobbies will you pick up? And how will you be an active part of the community?’ With this advice, I proposed in addition to joining a local soccer team (which is a hobby of mine), to start a free beginners watercolours class and paint landscapes of the United States; each class would focus on a different US region.”

Recommendation Letters

These three recommendations give the committee the opportunity to see who you are in the eyes of others. You want to find three different people that may know you from different aspects of your life. This could be a professor, a community leader, or a supervisor of research or a club. There is no standard combination, but try to choose individuals that can speak to the skill sets and experiences that will make you successful during your time as a Fulbright grantee. They should be able to articulate your ability to adapt and live abroad and teach students/research on a multicultural team effectively. Be sure to send them pointers and anecdotes that they should incorporate into the letters. The best letters are very specific. You can even ask to have a meeting in person or digitally to go over the scholarship and your expectations of their letter. Prior to selecting your recommenders, make sure you communicate your expectations in regards to deadlines and see if they can meet those deadlines beforehand. It is also okay to check in. Be sure to send them pointers and anecdotes that they should incorporate into the letters.

Personal Statement

Your personal statement is the essay where the committee gets to learn about who you are as a person and how you arrived at the point of applying to your particular program. Something you can think about is trying to convey three adjectives about yourself that you want the reader to understand about you after reading your personal statement. Your narrative should clearly demonstrate how you will be a great cultural ambassador for the United States and how you will contribute to your host country.

It is great to show your experience. Think of it as a short, tailored biography. Keep it relevant to Fulbright and focus on how your background influences your potential to be a great Fulbrighter. **You should weave your resume/activities/personal experiences into this essay, but be sure to not to list them.** The experiences you write about should tie into and support the narrative you are crafting about yourself. If you do include experiences or anecdotes with important people/influences in your life, make sure you bring it back to yourself. This is a personal narrative so make sure you are always speaking about your specific experiences and not the experiences of others.

The personal statement often answers the “why?” questions.

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Some questions to think about answering in your personal statement:

- Why me? (What makes you uniquely qualified?)
- Why this country? (Why must you teach/study/research in this country specifically?)
 - Some may have personal or family ties to a region, while others may select a country based on academic interest or previous research experience.
- Why now? (How will this experience help you onto your next step and why do you need to apply now?)
- Why Fulbright? (What have you done that set you up for this opportunity and why the Fulbright program over any other program?)

Statement of Grant Purpose

Again, you need to clearly articulate why a particular country, why Fulbright as opposed to other grant programs, and why you're applying now. If you have language experience relevant to your country selection, it is important to discuss this in the statement.

For all applicant types:

This essay touches on the Who, What, When, Where and some of the Why:

- With whom will you work? (especially for Research/Study)
- Outside of the classroom, with whom will you interact? (for ETA)
- What will you do as a researcher/student/ETA? What will you do in your free time? How will you do these things?
- When will this be done / is there a certain timeline? (less important for ETA)
- Where will you be and why does your project have to be done there?
- Why is this work important?
- Prior experience in the host country is not required.

ETA:

- How will your past experiences shape your classroom? This previous experience does not have to be teaching in a traditional sense, but it can be a setting where you developed skills that would aid you in the ETA. Explain what you will do inside and outside the classroom and how this fits into overarching career goals.
- What specific class activities do you have planned to help your students learn English?
- How will you adapt to any cultural differences in the classroom and larger community?
 - Make sure any specific lesson plans and pedagogy are easily transferable to any type of living environment as you may not know where you will be living and teaching (unless specified for your host country).
- How do you plan to resolve potential conflict?
- What experiences/skillsets/characteristics do you possess that will help you be an ambassador? How will you be more than just a linguistic ambassador?

Research:

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- **Why did you choose this country/university/institute for your project?**
- How relevant is this work? How will this research affect the scientific community and the broader community? What is the problem you are trying to tackle through your project? What methods will you use?
- How did you determine your timeline? How will you know you/your project is successful?
- How does your work relate or impact your future career goals?
- How does your community involvement tie into your research or future career? How will you be a cultural ambassador while in research?
- For research, keep in mind you have to explain the project, but the readers will likely not be in your field and may not be scientists. Make sure to explain background knowledge readers might need.

Study:

- How will this degree further you on your career path?
- How will your community involvement tie into your studies or career?
- Why is it important that you do this degree in this specific country over a similar program in the US?

Foreign Language Evaluation

Please make sure you use a foreign language instructor who is very familiar with your language abilities and can speak to your feasibility to use that language in your country of choice.

Affiliation Statement

Many Study/Research grants are expected to have a letter of affiliation, either from a professor of the lab you want to work with or the institution you will attend. You may have to draft one for the lab or school. The deadline for the affiliation letter is country-dependent. You can use current mentors or professors to help with contacts or contact a potential host directly. The letter must indicate a willingness to work with you and discuss the feasibility of the project.

Check specific grant information to be sure if your application requires this!

Interviews

Interviews vary depending on your specific grant and/or country application. Make sure you complete a couple of practice interviews (both in English and in the language of the country, if required). Please check the language level requirements for your specific country.

Note: Not all countries have an interview process. If your country of choice has an interview process, it will not take place until after you become a semi-finalist.

Experiences from past grantees:

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- “My interview was a video call with two people from the commission, one Bulgarian and one American. They just wanted to get to know me as an individual and to see if I was adaptable, so it was an informal conversation. They wanted to see if I had a suitable personality to be able to manage a sometimes difficult classroom and to adapt to ever-changing teaching challenges.” - Savannah Lusk, 2018 ETA, Bulgaria

Application Checklists

[Study/Research: Academic](#)

[Study/Research: Creative and Performing Arts](#)

[ETA](#)

Timeline

The national deadline is typically in October. The timeline for finding out if you are a semi-finalist occurs around the same time for each country. The timeline for each country's committee to select their finalists is much more varied, but pre-pandemic, this usually occurred between February and May.

POST-ACCEPTANCE

Stipend and Living Situation

In 2017-2018, ETAs received four lump sum payments every 3 months or so with the largest sum being dispersed prior to your start, the second largest sum at the end of month 3, the next sum at the end of month 6 and the smallest sum in the last month of your grant. However, some host countries elect for month-to-month payments.

The stipend included:

- Base amount which covers settling-in expenses and flight allowance (roundtrip)
- Monthly living stipend
- Possible research allowance depending on program

You would need to pay for your flight with your stipend. Depending on the program/commission, you may need to be in your country prior to receiving your first stipend however two years ago, you were able to request the amount early if there were any timeline issues.

Travel Logistics

Each country has their own way of preparing for your arrival. Your main steps prior to arriving will be to 1) book your flight, 2) figure out where you will stay prior to getting an apartment and 3) figure out your full time living arrangements. Some countries may put you up in a specific living area while others will leave you to figure this out on your own.

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Experiences from past grantees:

- “My country’s embassy had an embassy real estate agent that I worked with prior to arriving in the country. The embassy also arranged pick-up for my arrival which drove me to the hotel I stayed at prior to finalizing my apartment. I chose three apartments to tour and once I arrived, I toured the places with the agent and chose my apartment on my second day.” - Taylor, ETA, Armenia

Rural vs. Urban: What’s the Difference?

Where you will be living varies widely depending on your country placement. For ETAs, some countries allow you to indicate a location preference (as they may have particular teaching needs in particular regions) but many countries may not give you an option on where you get to live. Once accepted, you will find out what city you will be placed in and what school/institution you will teach in. Note for Study/Research Awards, you pick your own affiliate and have control over location preference.

Relationship with the Country’s Commission or Embassy

Once accepted, your point of contact for the duration of your stay is either the Fulbright commission (usually for programs with a high number of grantees) or the U.S. embassy in your country (usually for smaller programs). Having a commission vs. having an embassy can make a difference in the number of points of contact you may have, any resources/support provided, and how autonomous your stay will be.

ADVICE AND PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

- “Fulbright is difficult to provide specific advice for. Some countries and programs will require you to have prior knowledge and experience, whereas others will not. It is important for you to properly and thoroughly research the program on Fulbright’s website so you are familiar with the requirements and guidelines before deciding whether you should apply. Regardless of the program and country though, you should enter the program with an open mind and a willingness to be challenged in a new country and environment. The more adaptable you are, the more rewarding your experience will be.” - *Patrick Liu, 2018 ETA, Korea*
- “I would try to demonstrate your resiliency in some way in your essays, whether it’s talking about living abroad and having to meet all new people and thrive in a place where you didn’t know the language, or starting a new job where everything was unfamiliar and you had to adapt. It can be tough to live alone as a Fulbright with others in your cohort an hour or more away, and often you’re placed in a small town where you won’t be able to have a super active social life the way you would if you were on a normal study abroad to a big city like Paris or Barcelona. You have to show that you have

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a history of adapting well to circumstances that are outside of your comfort zone.” -
Karen Laska, 2019 ETA, Slovakia

- “The Fulbright application is challenging because it requires you to define your narrative clearly. It can be difficult to find central themes in your work, studies and activities, but if you give yourself time to think on this, common values and themes will emerge in your resume and in your life. If you can manage to pull together a meaningful narrative about yourself, your next job is to convince the Commission WHY Fulbright is the right next step for you. In the end, if you have doubts that this program is a great fit, it will likely show in your writing. So, take the time to reflect and consider your purpose in tackling Fulbright. If you can convince yourself it is the perfect next step (considering your background and narrative) it will be easier to convince others. Know thyself!” - *Mia Coutinho, 2020 ETA, Spain*
- “Each individual has a unique set of challenges and journeys. Lean on it. Let your experiences up until this point guide you. My personal experiences drove my reasoning for my application and my field of study. Honor where you come from and be persistent. Explore your individual reasoning for applying to that country. Ask yourself why this country at this moment in your career. Include this information in your essays, it will be important for the Fulbright Commission.” - *Eryn Sale, 2020 Research, Norway*
- “Look for as many resources as possible. Get your materials looked over by anyone and everyone prior to your institution’s deadline. Don’t be afraid to reach out to Fulbright alumni.” - *Taylor, Armenia*
- “When applying for research grants, location can play a role both personally and professionally. Be as intentional as you can with your choice and in your explanation. For me, I learned that physicists in my subfield worked in numerous labs all around Paris. Moreover, many other France Fulbrighters were nearby. This made research pursuits more fruitful, downtime more enjoyable, and adjusting to a new life more natural. I lived at the intersection of students, natives, and a larger international community. The language barrier fell in time, the cultural barrier began to do the same until I was left with undeniable understanding and eventual acceptance of the nuance.” - *Andrew Santos, 2020 Research, France*

CONNECT WITH FORMER SCHOLARS

Have questions about the Fulbright U.S. Student Program in general? Fill out the survey on [this page](#) of the FWD:S website, and we can try to connect you with a current scholar or alum who can answer them!

Have questions about the specific contents of this document? Reach out to us at fwdscholars@gmail.com.



Have questions about FWD:S and its services? Send us an email at fwdscholars@gmail.com. You can also follow FWD:S on social media for updates on our program and for more scholarship tips, tricks, and guides:

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