**Advice on Making a Strong Application**

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**National Screening Committee Readers**

**Fulbright is a very competitive award**

* These NCS readers have been blown away at the caliber and quantity of good work the applicants have done and are proposing to do
* Competition is against students from many other schools of all kinds
* There is no gpa requirement; however, applicants with less than a 3.2 for ETA or 3.4 for research awards will find it more challenging because of the level of competition; if gpa is lower, applicants should clearly articulate what other experiences and strengths the applicant has that can offset the gpa
* All candidates have lots of experience, so NCS committees will ultimately look for things that make applicants stand out beyond others

**Know why the Fulbright program was started:**

* Fulbright is the country’s flagship study abroad program
* Senator Fulbright thought the way to end cold war was to have US students abroad so people could know US citizens personally
* Diplomacy remains at the heart of the program; applicants don’t have to live and breathe US policy, but they must demonstrate they will represent the US well

**Successful applications have the following things in common**

1. They demonstrate how the Fulbright grant is the next obvious, logical step in the applicant’s trajectory;
	1. For research proposals in particular, there should be coursework that clearly aligns with the proposed research and/or location. Applicants should indicate the intent to take courses or pursue independent research on the topic prior to going, especially if they have not done so already.
2. They demonstrate a reason for why they must go to the proposed country.
3. They demonstrate a familiarity with or connection to the country in a way that suggests the applicant can execute on the proposed work once there; in other words, the applicant could hit the ground running because they know the environment and culture they are entering.
4. They demonstrate a balance between what the applicant can learn and what the applicant can bring to the work and the location.
5. Strong recommendations are included. Applicants should work early and closely with faculty members for references, sharing drafts of application proposals with them. The goal is to have references speak specifically to the applicant’s proposed project and to the applicant’s skills and abilities relevant to being successful in carrying out the project.

**Be wary of:**

* Proposing politically sensitive topics
* Using language that is colonial or missionary in nature, particularly when proposing to countries that have a strong history of this
* Using language that conveys a “fix-it” or “savior mentality”
* Using clichés
* Exotification of the people and culture of the proposed location
* Problem solving – if there’s a problematic issue in the proposed country, demonstrate a willingness/desire to learn about the problem from local perspectives and with locally derived solutions

**Understand the Process**

The National Screening Committee reviews applications from undergraduate and graduate students at the same time. For research applications, they do review them with different criteria, however, recognizing undergraduate students have less training and experience.

One NSC committee consists of 3 faculty members from across the US along with a Department of State representative, who observes and takes notes. NSC committees are assigned applications for a particular region of the world (e.g., southern Africa). When possible, 1 of the 3 is an individual from the country that has been proposed.

While the committee readers are generally familiar with the area through their own work, they may not have familiarity with proposed grant topics. It is important to pitch proposals at a level that anyone can understand, regardless of discipline familiarity, but still convey that the applicant is familiar with the discipline and methodology, and can carry out the proposed work. For ETAs, it’s important to demonstrate an understanding of the education context of the proposed country and transferable skills from previous experiences that will make the applicant successful.

The committee reviews 60-70 applications and is asked to decide on which 20-25 applications will move on to in-country reviews.

The comments on the school’s Campus Committee Evaluation that are derived from the on-campus interview are *very* important. These help the NSC members know the candidate’s success regarding serving as a cultural diplomat, but also to the overall feasibility of the candidate’s proposed grant.

**Letters of Affiliation for Research Awards**

Be sure to network, starting early and spreading widely, in order to secure an affiliation letter.

*The OK letter*: “We’ve been asked and are willing to write a letter in support of Jane Doe.”

*The PREFERRED letter*: “We are excited by Jane Doe’s proposed research and believe her work is both feasible and valuable. We strongly support her proposal and look forward to supporting her during her project.”

*Last edited: May 1, 2015*