Fellowship Application: The Program Director Viewpoint

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Modified from presentation by Rudy Rodriguez (Thanks Rudy!)

Outline

• Timeline
• Important elements
  – Application and CV
  – Personal Statement
  – Letters
  – Interview
  – Interview follow-up and match
• What you should know about fellowships and academics.
Deadlines from Fellowship Program Director Viewpoint

7/15/15
Program Can View Your Application

• Applications Reviewed In the first weeks and Interviews offered.
• Interviews are difficult to schedule in the summer

APPLY EARLY AND HAVE ALL YOUR MATERIALS SUBMITTED WELL IN ADVANCE OF July 15.

How do I screen applications?

• Institution
• Research publications and experience
• Additional considerations: chief resident, other areas of relevant experience or training
  – If proposing global health work, what experience?
• Program director letter
• Other letters
• USMLE
• Personal statement (coherence, career path)
Red Flags

• Letters of support waffle or offer faint praise
• Lack of clarity in career path
• Personal statement rambles
• Failure on USMLE without explanation
• Applicant is not communicative with program staff or non-responsive to requests

Planning for the application

• Ask for the letters (we request three)
  – Most important: Program Director Letter
  – Letters from people who know you well and preferably senior
  – Helpful to have a letter from the subspecialty program director if there is personal knowledge
  – Letter from a research mentor if you have done research in the past; lack of letter is a red flag for a substantial project.
What do I look for in letters?

• Program director letters:
  – Competency ratings: strengths and weaknesses
  – Comments from rotations
  – Tone of letter
  – Comparison to other trainees
• Research Mentor letters
  – Initiative, ability to start and finish projects (better to have started a project and published a paper than to be involved minimally in multiple projects)

What do I look for in letters?

• Letters from people I know and trust
  – Senior subspecialist at other institutions
• Familiarity with candidate
  – Comments about clinical skills
  – Discussion about candidate career goals
  – (Provide your CV, personal statement with letter writers or discuss your goals with letter writer)
Personal Statement

- Warning signs:
  - Poorly written (spellcheck!), crossing the line to arrogance, overplaying accomplishments, rambling, no career goal.

- What do I look for in the personal statement?
  - Writing ability, intellect, thoughtfulness
  - Organization and flow: how does this person think?
  - CAREER GOALS and areas of interest: This helps me match you with potential interviewers and determines if you are a good fit with the mission of the program
    - Research Track
    - Interest in Academic Career
    - Clinician Educator

Other Components of Application

- Research
  - Publications
  - Role in projects

- Life experiences and Volunteer Experience

- Gaps in training

- USMLE Scores
Interview Formats

• Speed dating format: interviews q X minutes
• Group interviews
• Meet with key faculty at more leisurely pace
• OK to request interview with specific faculty in your area of interest, or faculty who may be potential mentors

Interview

• Goal from program perspective
  – Is the candidate engaging?
  – Can the candidate articulate career goals?
  – Is the candidate knowledgeable about projects and research listed in CV?
  – Is the candidate familiar with the institution? (do your homework)
  – You will be asked, “Do you have any questions?”
  – How does the candidate interact with program staff?
Common themes in a weak interview

- Diffuse goals
- Poor understanding of the academic career path
- Personality issues (Rude behavior to staff)
- Interview is not able to overcome weaknesses in CV (Disconnect between paper and person)
- No engagement

Questions the program should NOT ask

- Spouse and Partners
  - You should raise this issue if important (couples match, finding a job for a partner)
- Other program applications
- Program preferences
- Pregnancy plans
Clinical and Basic Science  
Research Pathways

♦ enter lab, develop research agenda, learn methods results, publications
Clinical year ➞ 2nd year ======== ➞ 3rd & 4th year ======== ➞
♦ learn clinical research methods, MPH

Funding: training grant, F-32, other sources (NKF, AKF, AHA, etc)

Junior faculty: continue to develop ➞ Independent researcher
mentored research program
5 Year Award

Funding: NIH K08 or K23 NIH R01, others

Promotions

Clinical Instructor/Acting Instructor  ➞  Assistant Professor  ➞  Associate Professor  ➞  Professor

Research Publications Grants National Reputation
Teaching Clinical Skills

Clinician Educator Publications National Reputation
Teaching Clinical Skills

6-7 years
Research Pathway Questions

• After your clinical year, how many years of protected research time will the program provide?
  – You will likely need 2-4 years of support before you are ready to apply for a K-award
  – Most programs will guarantee at least 2 years and you will need to obtain additional grant support for the additional years.

• How much protected time will you be given during your research training?
  – Should be 75% (Maximum: continuity clinic and 6 weeks of coverage).

Research Pathway Questions

• How will you be paid during your research training?
  – Training grant (T-32)
  – Principal Investigator (PI) Grant
  – Department or Divisional Funds
  – Independent fellowships
Research Pathway Questions

• Training grant (T-32)
  – Will the program supply a salary supplement while on the training grant (clinical year salary usually higher than the training grant salary)
  – Success with F-32 or other grants
  – Track record (k awards and transition to R01), academic jobs for clinician educators, other jobs

• Success with Loan Repayment Program
• Who pays for training (MPH)?
• Moonlighting

Interview Questions and Process

• Mentoring: who and how?
• Meet with the program fellows
  – Commitment from faculty
  – Service vs. Education, Curriculum
  – Ability to attend national meetings (who pays)
  – Books
  – Electives

• Patient diversity
• Faculty diversity and expertise (clinical and research)
NIH Research Training Programs

Ruth L. Kirschstein National Research Service Awards (NRSA)

Two Types of Awards:

– Institutional Training Grants ("T" Awards)
  • The institution applies for the grant and then selects the fellows for the grant.
– Individual Fellowships ("F" Awards)
  • The fellow applies for the grant with the support of the institution, and the fellow is awarded the grant.

Citizenship Requirements for NIH training grant

• Must be Citizen, non-citizen national, or lawfully admitted for permanent residence

• Permanent Residents:
  – Fellowships: Must have been admitted as a Permanent Resident by the time of award
  – Training Grants: Must have been admitted as a Permanent Resident at time of appointment
NIH Research Training Programs

Duration of Support:
- Postdoc: As a fellow, you could be on a training grant for a maximum of 3 Years (combination of T-32 and F-32)

Exceptions:
- Interruptions (break in service)
- Waiver request requires IC prior approval

Payback Provision

- By accepting a T-32 spot or F-32 award, you are committing to two years of research training. If you decide to leave research after one year, then you must payback the award.

- Acceptable Payback Service
  - Health-related biomedical, behavioral, and/or clinical research
  - Health-related teaching
  - Direct administration or review of health-related research
  - Any combination of these activities
Financial Payback

- Can be voluntary or involuntary
- Amount owed is total stipend received (plus interest when applicable)
- Most people pay back with service
  - Less that 2 percent of all NRSA recipients with obligations (more than 110,000 individuals) have had waivers or have engaged in financial payback

Programs without NIH Training Grants

- Principal Investigator Grant (fellow funded by research grant of an investigator)
  - The program may request that you choose a mentor prior to the match
  - You are then required to work in the area of the funded grant
  - Less time restrictions, no payback provision
  - Less freedom to develop your research agenda
Programs without NIH Training Grants

• Divisional/Department Funds
  – Usually short-term guarantee (one year) and then you must apply for F-32 or other grant
• Some programs may request that you obtain your funding
  – Very risky in today’s environment

National Institutes of Health Loan Repayment Programs

• NIH offers to repay up to $35,000 annually of the qualified educational debt of health professionals
• To qualify,
  – a doctoral-level degree,
  – devote 50% or more of their time (20 hours per week based on a 40-hour work week) to research funded by a domestic non-profit organization or government entity (Federal, state, or local),
  – educational loan debt equal to or exceeding 20% of their institutional base salary.
  – Applicants must also be U.S. citizens, permanent residents, or U.S. nationals to be eligible.
• Deadline: December 1st of your clinical year (if successful the NIH will start repaying your loans the following July 1st).
National Institutes of Health Loan Repayment Programs

• 5 types
  – Clinical Research LRP
  – Clinical Research LRP for Individuals from Disadvantaged Backgrounds
  – Contraception and Infertility Research LRP
  – Health Disparities LRP
  – Pediatric Research LRP

Clinician educator track questions

• The program should offer more than a repeat of the first clinical year.
• Do they offer electives?
• Could you take classes (faculty teaching classes, quality, etc)?
• Will you be incorporated into the medical school and resident teaching?
• Ask for a list of the fellows who graduated from the track and their current positions.
Post-Interview

• Notes to interviewers
  – I view the notes as a signal that the applicant is interested in our program.

• Program contact
  – The program should not provide any pressure (they should not ask you about your rank list).

Summary

• Be honest with who you are
• Be thoughtful about how you present yourself
  – Have others review your personal statement
• Contact letter writers early: they will be late
• Provide letter writers with something to praise by your daily activities as a resident
• Do your homework prior to interview: learn about the program and ask questions
• Explore potential research or clinical mentors during interview
• Talk to fellows in the program to get the real scoop on how things run
• Consider the other factors that contribute to happiness, such as proximity to family, recreational opportunities, etc.