Ken Garcia's Essentials of a Fellowship Application

1. Read the funding agency's guidelines, and follow them. They are usually very precise about what they want (e.g., 3 page narrative, 1 page bibliography, 2 page CV). One inch margins, font no smaller than 11 point, etc. If the agency requests you to answer specific questions or items, follow that format.

2. Write clearly and avoid jargon. Overuse of specialized academic jargon is the bane of many recently-minted PhDs and you should avoid it when preparing your grant or fellowship applications. Specialized jargon might be appropriate for a given audience when writing for some journals or conference presentations, but not for grant and fellowship applications. The review committees will almost always be composed of scholars from a variety of disciplines, some of whom won't be familiar with the specialized jargon of your sub-discipline. Moreover, they might hate jargon.

3. Apply for only one project in your application; even if you're working on two simultaneously, say, completing one and beginning another, *don't say that*. Just focus on one of them.

How should a fellowship application be structured? What should you include in it? If the agency does not specify a specific format for the proposal narrative, I recommend that you follow the following structure:

The narrative portion of the proposal will usually be from **3-5 pages,** so you have to say a lot and say it concisely and clearly in a few pages.

1. First, begin with an <u>introductory overview</u> of your project, explaining its significance, how it builds on existing literature in your field, and takes knowledge in your field in new directions, or fills major gaps in the literature.   **One page.**

2. <u>Chapter outline</u>. Provide a one-paragraph summary of each chapter. This will demonstrate to the readers that you have thought about the project enough to know what the final product (the book) will look like. And it enables them to conceptualize the book and the relation of its parts.

   If you are not far enough along in the project that you can provide a chapter by chapter outline, try to divide the study into broad divisions or topics. **1 ½ pages**.

3. <u>Provide a work plan</u> (1 or 2 paragraphs) that presents a timeframe for the project—from start to finish. Tell the readers what's been done so far, what will be done by the time you begin your fellowship, and then what you'll do during the fellowship period. A rule of thumb is that you don't want to be so close to the beginning of a project that you don't yet know where you are going with it; and not so close to the end that the readers will say there's no need for a fellowship.

An ideal scenario is that you will have completed most of the research by the time the fellowship period begins (with perhaps a bit more research to do), and you will have drafted 2 or 3 of the chapters, and even published them as journal articles or presented them as papers at conferences. These articles/papers will then become the basis for chapters a, b, and c. Then during the fellowship period, you will write chapters x, y, and z, plus the Introduction. This kind of work plan tells the readers that you have done a lot of the work already—enough to know what the final product will look like—while showing there is still plenty to do during the fellowship period. You don't need to complete the manuscript during the grant period, you only need to show that you have a realistic plan to make good progress towards completion.

4. Residential fellowships. The work you're doing must be tied closely to the strength of their collections. And say how you will benefit from, and contribute to, a community of scholars at the research library.

5. Bibliography. A good bibliography shows your command of the field. The most likely problem that will arise as you compile it is that you will have to reduce the bibliography to one or two pages, so give careful thought to which works are most important to your project and field. It is not uncommon for proposals to be downgraded because some essential work was left off the bibliography, which seems petty if you're only allowed one or two pages, but that's the reality, so give your bibliography careful consideration.

6. Reference letter writers. Chose them carefully. Senior are scholars best, but associate professors are alright, too. You want someone who will write a strong, detailed letter attesting to both your qualifications and to the importance of your particular project within the field. The letter must address the significance of the project for which you are applying. If you are an assistant professor, it's alright to use one referee from your dissertation committee; once you're tenured, it isn't—reviewers will want to see that you're active in your field and have, therefore, made connections with scholars beyond your dissertation committee. As a general rule, don't use referees from your own institution.

Other Advice:

1. Ask colleagues read and critique a draft of your proposal, both colleagues in your field who can tell you whether you are covering all the bases, and colleagues outside your field, who can tell you whether or not it is persuasive from the perspective of a non-specialist.

2. Read samples of successful proposals to the agencies to which you plan to apply (contact Ken Garcia [kgarcia@nd.edu].

3. Read all the Proposal Writing Guides on the ISLA website (https://isla.nd.edu/fellowships-grants/proposal-writing/). They are written by people who have both received fellowships and have served on review committees for funding agencies, so they offer tips based on their experience.

4. Start early, well in advance of the deadlines, so that you can work through multiple drafts, send them to colleagues and ISLA, get feedback, and revise.

5. Develop a timeline for proposal submission—when do you need to apply for a leave in academic year XYZ? Contact ISLA for advice on when you need to apply. Generally, it is a minimum of one year in advance of the leave.

6. Develop a timeline for submitting both internal grants to ISLA and ND Research, for pilot funding, and then for external grant and fellowship applications. Meet with your department mentors, and with someone in ISLA, for advice.