

ADVICE FOR HOST ORGANIZATION LETTER FOR YLS FELLOWSHIPS

There is no model sponsorship letter for fellowship applications. Every situation is unique, and letters of this nature need to be written to reflect the strengths of the particular fellowship proposal. All sponsors should attempt to write a robust letter that will give the fellowship committee a good sense of the work that the fellow will do and the support they will receive while in the office. The committee's deliberations and award decisions reflect a determination by the committee that the proposed fellowship has a good chance of success, such that the fellow will have an opportunity to contribute significantly to important matters and also to build valuable skills and connections for a career in public interest. While the fellowship applicant is limited to 1500 words, there is no word or page limit to the sponsor's letter and many sponsors write multiple page single spaced letters.

Below are some of the subjects frequently covered in strong sponsorship letters.

1. Sponsor – The sponsor letter frequently describe the office along with the nature of the work and the scope of the issues that the office is charged with handling. The signing the letter usually indicates their role in this structure. Some letters also describe the chain of authority within the organization.
2. Supervision – Such letters usually identify the fellow's direct supervisor and sometimes some of the other people with whom the fellow is likely to work. This description usually includes the role that the supervisor plays in the office and any experience with prior fellows (or interns). Hopefully, the letter will reflect a commitment to supervision and mentoring and a sense that one of the goals of the fellowship is the fellow's professional development. It is worth mentioning if the supervisor or any of these other people in the office are graduates of Yale Law School. It is also helpful to mention any other support that the fellow will receive, including office support like computers and workspace.
3. Problem/Issue– These letter often discuss the problem that the fellow's project will address, giving the relevant history of the issue, its current status, and whether there is anything critical about the issue at this moment. Describing the community served by the project and the harm they suffer is very important. The extent of the problem should be addressed and any data that is available to support an understanding of the dimensions of the issue would be good to include. It can be helpful to include a summary of the relevant law or reference to a relevant article to give the fellowship committee both an understanding of the importance and a sense of confidence in the proposal.
4. Proposal – The letter should confirm the project or work that has been agreed upon for the fellowship and the ways that the fellow will be expected to assist the office. This can include descriptions of the key functions that the fellow will perform. It can also include a description of the specific areas of law that the fellow will be handling. It is helpful if the letter can point to why the sponsor thinks this work is important to the office and to the public. It could also mention any specific policies or projects that are likely to come up while the fellow will be there. Any opportunities to work across departments, work with leadership, attend critical meetings, or interface with outside stakeholders might be worth mentioning as well.

5. Candidate – Sponsors often explain why they have chosen to support a particular applicant. This can entail mentioning those elements in the applicant’s background that make a good fit for the office and its work as well as the applicant’s particular skill sets, especially if the applicant has worked there in the past. It sometimes includes a brief description of the value they think the fellow will add and how they believe the fellowship will further the fellow’s career. It is also good to address what the fellow will leave behind when the fellowship ends and the extent to which the organization will be able to continue any of the work the fellow started.

6. Partnerships - Many public interest organizations work in partnerships with other nonprofit organizations and community grassroots organizations. Connections of this kind that relate to the work of the project should be noted and described.

This is not a list of the areas that the letter must cover, and it is not an exhaustive list of the topics that it could include. The selection committees is interested in the sponsor’s assessment of the particular candidate and proposal under consideration. The fellowship is intended to help graduates get a start in public interest law and assist an organization meet the pressing needs of its clients. Letters that acknowledge these goals and make a persuasive case that these goals will be served by the proposed fellowship have a higher chance of success.