BEST WAYS TO STRENGTHEN YOUR FELLOWSHIP APPLICATION (NSF 2011)

Most Common Tips and Advice from Faculty, Selection Committee Members and Successful Fellowship Applicants

Preparing for the Application

⇒ Decide to make Fellowships your hobby!
⇒ Get to know your academic self
⇒ Conceptualize your application

★ Read and Understand the NSF application!! (Program Announcement and Applicant User Guide)
  o Many applicants get denied because they did not read the application thoroughly and missed important aspects of the selection criteria.
  o Many applications submitted are incomplete or ineligible.
  o Look for the required materials: references, personal statements, previous research experience, proposed plan of research.

Look for what’s the most important.
  ▪ Intellectual Merit
  ▪ Broader Impacts Criteria
  o Find the essence of what NSF is looking for

From the Program Description:

The Graduate Research Fellowship Program supports a comprehensive holistic plan for graduate education and takes into account the individual interests and competencies of the Fellows. Thus, an applicant must provide a detailed profile of his or her relevant educational and research experiences and plans for graduate education in such a way as to demonstrate the potential to become an emerging knowledge expert in STEM disciplines.

⇒ Choose your recommenders
⇒ Discuss your plans with your recommenders

Completing and Submitting the Application

⇒ Find a partner or a group of people to compare notes with
⇒ Find precedents (past successful applications and applicants)
Most successful applicants do the essays first.

- Essays are a major part of the application. If you can have them prepared and finalized before the rest of the application, you will be more efficient with your time and energy.
- Many times the reviewers are not experts in your field, so make sure that you are able to put your goals in more common terms. At the same time, show your command of the subject’s language.
- Be direct and capture their attention from the get go. Fellowship Selection Committee members usually do not have that much time to review the application, 10-15 minutes.
- Answer every question in every essay question, and almost in the basic essay format. Answering every question helps you convince them that you are the type of scholar that they want to fund.

⇒ Give your recommenders a lot of time to prepare your letters.
⇒ Have a printout of the Announcement and User Guide next to you while you fill out the application.

Things to Keep in Mind

- Always keep in mind what the essence of the program is.
- Always keep in mind that you want to make them feel like they can be proud of you.
- Show them that you have the potential to be an academic star!