Fellowship Guide

Start Early
Check program websites for vacancies and requirements for application process. Make contact with programs toward the end of your PGY2 year, and no later than October/November of your PGY3 year. Look on the AAN Fellowships Page, individual program websites, such as FREIDA and other websites. Remember, since fellowship positions and availability are constantly changing, do not rely on information on these sites alone. Always contact the program you are interested in.

Think About Your Career Goals
Why a fellowship? What specialty? Is this the right area and/or lifestyle for me? Compare Specialties. Speak to people across multiple specialties. Keep your options open. Make time to reflect and decide your priorities.

Get Informed
Consider the job market of your specialty, check out geographical areas, talk to other applicants or previous fellows, speak to your mentors (very important!), obtain input from professors. Where is the field going and where will it be when you are done training? In general, the application process varies widely based on the fellowship to which you're applying (e.g., Neuro Critical Care now follows a Match system).

Draft a Timeline
Create a timeline of when to submit applications and prepare for interviews. Budget for travel. If you are going to need to arrange for time off work or clinical coverage while you are at interviews, do this early.

Relax
Don't panic. The vast majority of program graduates have found fellowships that have suited their needs well.

Organize
Prepare a list of questions, organize your certificates with all dates, be prepared for the application process in advance, have a portfolio available, use one email address for all applications. (Tip: Use your University address rather than personal email.)

Draft your Personal Statement
Personal statements should be one page or less. Be enthusiastic, communicate through your words. Get help with proofreading (by at least two people) -- especially if English is not your first language.

Recommendation Letters
Obtain strong letters that are well-written. You need to sell yourself and be competitive.
Research Experience
Whether publications or presentations, be able to demonstrate the significance of your work, be knowledgeable on your research topic, how your research will make an impact. Get excited about your research and think about how you want to continue research through Fellowship and beyond.

Application
List community service projects, write clearly, and demonstrate the spectrum of your academic record. List all pertinent accomplishments.

Interview/Selection Process
Clinical performance, rotation evaluations and interpersonal skills are important, as well as the reputation of your program, involvement in research, and medical knowledge (e.g., USMLE and RITE Exam scores). Be prepared for questions (why are you different, why this field, this particular program, your weaknesses, where do you see yourself in 5-10 years?). Be confident. Ask your own questions. Eye contact and professionalism are important. Plan to arrive at least 15 minutes early, plan your route the day before and allow time for travel delays and mishaps.

Keep in Contact
Send thank you notes, maintain follow-up, listen for vacancies or announcements, consistently check and re-check websites.

Maintain Perspective
Stressful situations can blur your goals and/or perspective. Strategize early - you may have to make difficult decisions to make when the offers start rolling in!

Some Helpful Tips for Fellowship Applications
Submitted by U. Miami PGY 4, J. Gutierrez
(Pursuing Fellowship training in Vascular Neurology at Columbia University, 2011)

1. Having clarity about what you want to do it is of paramount importance. If you have some interest before even starting your PGY2, then get involved in the field early. This will help strengthen your conviction about the type of fellowship that you want to pursue. Try to get involved in the field by contacting attendings at your program that have published in the field and try to work with them on a project. This will help demonstrate your longstanding interest in the field and also help to enhance your research accomplishments.

2. By the beginning of the PGY3, you should have more clarity about what fellowship you want so you should start looking for programs. Try to find prerequisites and profiles of current/past fellows to see if your CV and personality would match to that program.
3. Deciding on different Fellowships may depend on your career goals (private practice vs. academic vs. research). For example, heavy clinical volume and a wide array of exposure to common neurological diseases may be more important for private practice. Research opportunities, mentors, and sound infrastructure are essential for a career in clinical or basic science research.

4. Plan your interview schedule carefully. Residency is quite a busy time so you need to plan interviews and travel in advance, in a balanced fashion, and assure coverage for your clinical duties.

5. When attending interviews, be conscious about under or overselling yourself. While your CV, recommendation letters, and personal statement should speak for you, be sure to be enthusiastic (but don’t go overboard!).

6. Stay calm, relaxed, and be friendly with the Faculty/Fellows who interview you. It is a good idea to learn more about the Faculty and Chair of the Department that you will be visiting. Try to review their educational background and recent publications.

7. Ask for letters of recommendations of Faculty who are well-known in their field. Try to work with respected personalities in your area, based on their expertise and publications. If any Faculty at your program knows Fellowship directors or Faculty at other institutions, ask them for advice on who to contact (or better yet, ask for a personal reference!).

8. Be patient throughout the process. Try to wait until the end of your interviews to see which programs may offer you a position. Be honest and upfront with Fellowship Directors, but if your #1 choice offers you something, it may be best to accept it right away.