

Tips for Knauss Applications

PREPARING FOR YOUR APPLICATION

Consider Timing

While any enrolled Virginia graduate student is eligible, the Knauss Marine Policy Fellowship is intended for fellows who will have graduated, or are very close to graduation, by the time the fellowship begins. If you are far from completing your degree, you may want to consider applying in the future.

Understand the Process

The application process takes a year to complete, with reviews at both the state and national level.

February 16, 2023 – All applications are due to VASG by the Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) specified state deadline at 5:00 PM Eastern Time.

March 2023 – All students who submit a complete application will be interviewed by members of VASG's leadership team.

March 30, 2023– Based on the interview and application package, VASG will select up to six applicants from Virginia to move forward to the national competition.

April/May 2023 – The National Sea Grant College Program (NSGCP) runs the national competition; they typically receive 100-120 applications from around the US. A review panel comprised of people familiar with the Knauss Fellowship review and discuss all applications against the evaluation criteria and select the 50-60 finalists (~17 will be assigned to the Legislative branch).

June 2023 – State Sea Grant programs and Finalists notified. NSGCP hosts finalists in a welcome workshop.

October 2023 – Executive placement week. The week-long series of interviews with potential host offices ends with hosts selecting finalists for their office.

January 2024 – Legislative placement week. .

February 1, 2024 – Knauss Fellows begin their year-long fellowship in the Washington, D.C., area.

Talk to Former Knauss Fellows

Candidates are encouraged to speak to current and former Knauss Fellows to better understand the fellowship, and make sure it is a good fit for their professional development, career goals, and interests. Speaking to fellows also helps develop your personal education and career development response and CV, and reflect on the important considerations and opportunities available to fellows working in Executive or Legislative host offices.

Review the Evaluation Criteria Carefully

Reviewers are asked to read a large number of applications. For each, they will be asked to evaluate against the criteria detailed in the NOFO. *Make it easy for them to find the information they need!*

PERSONAL EDUCATION AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT RESPONSE

Why Knauss?

Responses to the Personal Education and Career Development section should emphasize your abilities and expectations of the fellowship experience in terms of your career development. We encourage you

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to review and reflect on this application element to ensure that collectively those responses address the following broader, overarching questions: What do you bring to the Knauss fellowship? What do you hope to learn/gain from your fellowship year? What are your professional development and career/life goals, and how will Knauss help you achieve those goals? Think about what makes YOU, and YOUR life experiences unique, and how you can explain this in a clear and concise way.

You are discouraged from stating that you hope to be accepted as a Knauss Finalist in order to get a job in the future. Rather, focus on how you will grow professionally from a year in the Knauss Fellowship program.

Tell Stories

Reviewers are often looking for specific examples and details that highlight your diverse personal and professional experiences, explain who you are, why you are unique, and what you hope to learn from the fellowship. Don't be general or vague. Tell detailed stories that validate skills (communication, critical thinking, and analytical skills), highlight examples of personal resilience and grit when faced with past challenges, illuminate your capacity and interest in making connections between science and broader economic, social, and political issues, and demonstrate your ability to convey scientific knowledge in broader, non-scientific contexts. Your personal education and career development response should include clear objectives that align with the broader mission of the Sea Grant program and NOAA. Stories that highlight what inspires and motivates you *today*, including what drives you to learn about and work in the science-policy domain, are preferable to stories that explain your original motivation to work on coastal and marine issues.

Don't Be Repetitive

Fifteen hundred words is not a lot to tell your story. Avoid wasting precious space by repeating what is in your CV. Your response to the personal education and career development prompts should complement your CV, and further expand on things in your CV or expand on your specific path. For instance, maybe provide clarity as to why the experiences on paper seem disjointed, use this as a time to connect them and/or fill in gaps.

Keep Your Knauss Interests General

The fellowship is an educational opportunity; therefore, while it is appropriate to indicate general areas of interest, it is not appropriate to be too specific in the types of work or offices you hope to be placed in. Reviewers want to see that you are open minded and interested in the learning opportunities presented by the Knauss Fellowship, not that you are seeking a specific job. *For example, it might be appropriate to say that you are interested in the international aspects of marine policy, but it might be too specific to say you are interested in working for the State Department on international marine mammal conservation issues.*

Placement Preference

Applicants should **not** specify a preference for a Legislative or Executive placement in their statement, and are discouraged from specifically referencing host offices. Rather, reflect on the type of professional growth and experiences you want to gain from a year in the Knauss Fellowship, and clearly articulate those within your statement.

Follow Format Guidance

Keep your statement under the word limit. Do not include personal contact information or web links to external resources (e.g., LinkedIn, articles, blogs, etc.).

CV/RESUME

Demonstrate Diversity

VIRGINIA SEA GRANT PARTNER UNIVERSITIES



The fellowship program is looking for students with diverse interests and experiences. Note that *“relevant experience related to diversity of education; extra-curricular activities; and interpersonal, written and oral communication skills and other applicable competencies”* is 75 points of your overall evaluation score. The CV (10 points) should include *“employment, volunteer, or extracurricular activities in academic, applied, research, administration, outreach, or policy positions; education and experience (personal and professional) in your area of expertise; demonstrated academic, professional or personal experiences that are relevant and applicable to serving the American people; and prior leadership roles.”* Address as many of these criteria as possible in your CV.

Use Headers

Unlike a typical CV, you are showing breadth of work and life expertise and interests, as opposed to depth in a particular area. You will likely include more headers, with comparatively less information under each, than a typical CV. If you have a lot of experience, highlight only the most relevant or recent. *Definitely consider using words from the evaluation criteria (i.e., extracurricular activities, employment and volunteer experience, honors and awards, etc.) as headers. List publications, reports, presentations, and outreach products, because these demonstrate written and oral communication skills.*

Think Outside the Box

You may end up putting things in this CV that you would not typically highlight for a job application. Think about volunteer and outreach activities, leadership roles (e.g., student government, faculty committees, advisory committees, community initiatives), work experience (not necessarily/solely in coastal and marine fields), stakeholder engagement with diverse audiences, professional service, hobbies, and similar activities that may help demonstrate diversity, a commitment to serve society, and other *“additional relevant experience.”* You may even refer to your undergraduate years to broaden your choices of activities, experiences, and interests. Look for keywords in the fellowship description and review criteria. Use these words in your CV and tailor it to highlight those specific attributes the reviewers will be looking for.

Follow Format Guidance

Keep your CV under two pages. Do not include personal contact information or web links to external resources (e.g., LinkedIn, articles, blogs, etc.).

Make It Easy for Reviewers

Use 12pt font and consider how formatting (e.g., headers, white space, bold/italics) can help guide reviewers and make your statement and CV easier to read. Adding white space between paragraphs/sections can make the document more readable; when in doubt, smaller paragraphs are easier to read.

For your personal education and career development statement we encourage you to use include your name and *“Personal Education and Career Development”* at the top of the document. Also, be engaging; remember that reviewers are reading many statements. They will all start to sound alike, so think of ways to stand out.

Carefully review all of your written materials (grammar, typos!); your personal education and career development statement is the primary way that reviewers judge your written communication skills. Have multiple people (and from multiple fields - i.e., your parents, your advisor, your labmate) proofread your statement to make sure it is clear to your audience.

RECOMMENDATION LETTERS

VIRGINIA SEA GRANT PARTNER UNIVERSITIES



Coach Your Letter Writers

Tell your letter writers what the Knauss Fellowship is about, what the evaluation criteria are, and what you want them to highlight in their letters. It is very important that they write a strong letter that demonstrates their knowledge of your experience and abilities, and how they translate to the Knauss Fellowship. Additionally, the letters should speak to anything else the review panel should know about the strengths that you will bring to the fellowship.

Remember: *this is not for an academic or research job. Make sure they are highlighting the right skills and strengths— self-motivation, response to setbacks, skills and involvement in teamwork, collaborative leadership skills, willingness to learn a new skill or topic, academic performance and potential.*

Get a Diverse Second Letter

At least one letter must come from a faculty member with knowledge of your academic and research performance (when applicable). For your second letter, consider someone who might know you from a different perspective (e.g., former employer, mentor from a previous relevant internship, someone you have worked with on an outreach or policy project). It is most important to select someone who will write a strong letter for you, but an “outside” perspective helps demonstrate your breadth and diversity, and will likely highlight different strengths and experiences.

Send Reminders

Remind your letter writers to submit their letters to VASG on time. If a recommendation letter is submitted after the deadline, we cannot accept it and you will be at a significant disadvantage.

OTHER TIPS

Transcripts

Applicants must submit all undergraduate and graduate transcripts (unofficial are acceptable). If you have copies of your official transcript, you may submit those. Official transcripts do not have to be sent from the universities in sealed envelopes or via secure email. Please ensure all transcripts are *clear* digital or scanned copies. Reviewers may print these scanned copies, so ensure they are readable even when printed in grayscale.

Relevant Coursework and Future Year Plans

In this section you will share any relevant coursework and your future year activities. Discuss completed or in progress classes that you think are relevant to success in the Knauss Fellowship Program. Try not to be duplicative of the CV. Describe your plans over the next year to clearly show that you will be close to graduating or already graduated by the time the fellowship begins. Your plans should indicate this with your graduation date, defense date, etc. If you are graduating well before the start of the fellowship, indicate temporary employment opportunities (e.g., internships, part-time work in your major professor’s lab) that demonstrate you will not be seeking permanent employment before the start of the fellowship, but are remaining engaged in your field.

Leverage this application element to highlight professional activities, forthcoming publications, conference presentations, any reports or products resulting from your degree program, professional development trainings, and other relevant experiences you will gain prior to the start of the fellowship.

OVERALL APPLICATION COHESION

Avoid duplication and make sure your individual elements complement one another. Your application should not read as if each element was written in a vacuum. If time allows, we suggest having someone read your application in its entirety with an eye toward cohesion.

VIRGINIA SEA GRANT PARTNER UNIVERSITIES



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

This guidance document, the 2024 Knauss Marine Policy Fellowship NOFO, NSGCP Knauss Fellowship Student Guide, Knauss Fellowship Fact Sheet, eSeaGrant Instructions, and additional resources can be found at: <http://vaseagrant.org/knauss-fellowship>

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