

# Fellowship Applications 101: Project Budgets

(prepared by the OCS Fellowships Office, February 2004)

**M**any fellowship competitions—at Harvard and beyond—require applicants to submit a **budget** with their application materials. The main purpose of a budget is to answer an important selection committee question: **what will it cost** for you to complete the project you outline in your grant proposal?

**Your application—as a whole—must demonstrate the significance and feasibility of your project.**

- You demonstrate its **significance** by addressing basic questions: How does the project benefit a community? Contribute to a body of knowledge? Enrich you as a person? Some combination of these or other factors?
- You demonstrate its **feasibility** by outlining its basic mechanics in your essay: Where will you need to go and what will you need to do to complete it? Are there special concerns (e.g., research clearances or visa requirements) to consider? How long will it take? Other factors?

**To many reviewers, your budget will be as important as your essay in demonstrating your project’s feasibility.** With that in mind, take the time to submit a carefully researched request for funding. **Be consistent, conservative, and careful** in your request.

## Basic Guidelines

**T**he following guidelines are intended primarily for students who will be returning to Harvard and who are proposing summer (or other short-term) projects for public service, research, study, or travel. Examples in each category include the Public Service Grants, Herchel Smith Harvard Undergraduate Research Scholarships, Radcliffe Fellowships, and John Patterson Traveling Fellowship. That said, basic principles extend to fellowship budget requests generally.

**For every budget you submit, you will be expected to address three basic questions:**

1. What are the legitimate **expenses** required for you to complete your project?
2. What **assets** do you have to commit to the project?
3. Subtracting assets from expenses, **what do you need** to support the project?

❶ **Expenses include any legitimate costs required for the successful completion of your project.** For most returning undergraduates, major expenses will include **travel** (to and from the site as well as site-specific travel associated with the project), **room** (housing expenses throughout the project), **board** (expenses for food throughout the project), and **major incidentals** (such as vaccinations).

Service projects might also include materials or supplies; research or study projects might also include archival access fees or photocopying; travel projects might also include a first aid kit or passport fees. If you’ll be living at home, or if your organization provides housing, you won’t need to list these expenses.

**In any event, let your project determine what you ask for.**

OCS Fellowships Office budget forms—and many others—also give you room to explain **other circumstances that might constitute need.** These might include a summer savings expectation if you receive financial aid, a sudden change in your family’s financial status, or some other circumstance. Not every committee will be able to meet such needs, but you should feel free to share them.

② **Assets include any sources of income you know you can dedicate to the project.** These might include a family contribution, another grant, or a loan—but they should **only** include assets specifically for the project. For example, if you're willing to allocate \$1,000 from your savings to the project, let the selection committee know. But if that \$1,000 is earmarked for books next year, or if it's a grandparent's gift to your educational expenses, don't feel obligated to include it as an asset. Don't worry if you really have no assets to contribute—committees only look for honest assessments of circumstances.

③ **What do you need to support your project?** Essentially, this is a simple equation of subtracting assets from expenses. If there are complicating factors in the equation, be sure to tell committees about them somehow. If a selection committee thinks your project has competitive merit, it will typically want to help meet your need if it can.

#### **Be consistent, conservative, and careful in your request:**

- Be **consistent**—Nothing in your budget statement should be at odds with the requirements you describe for your project in your essay, or vice versa.
- Be **conservative**—Know that selection committees have limited funds to disburse, and they usually want to award as many grants as possible. Consider your request accordingly. Look for ways to economize on expenses whenever you can.
- Be **careful**—That said, be sure to provide adequately for basic needs such as food and shelter. If living in your destination requires inoculations, or if there are other special needs for your health or safety, be sure to factor these in with your expenses.

## Resources

If preparing a project budget is a fairly new experience for you, rest assured that it is a straightforward process requiring **common sense** and some **research**. Imagine yourself in the midst of your project—what will you need to get there, and what will you need to carry out your daily routine? To answer those questions, you'll need to do some research.

**Travel agencies** specializing in student travel can help you identify cost-saving airfare and other travel expenses. On-line services such as Expedia ([www.expedia.com](http://www.expedia.com)) and Orbitz ([www.orbitz.com](http://www.orbitz.com)) can provide similar information—but be persistent in comparison shopping for economical fares. **Travel guides**—such as the *Let's Go* series—can help you get a rough idea of per diem expenses such as food and lodging, as well as travel costs within countries if you're going abroad.

You can also look at **on-line classified ads** in newspapers from your destination to get a sense of what rents may be like, or whether there are roommate or sublet situations available. You can also contact **universities** there to see what housing assistance they might provide. Similarly, web sites such as Craig's List ([www.craigslist.org](http://www.craigslist.org)) can give you an idea of living costs in various cities through on-line classified advertising.

Another resource is **people on location**. If you've been in contact with people to explore internship, research, or travel opportunities, ask them about costs associated with living there and doing your project. They will usually be able to provide you with the information you need or point you to local resources that can be helpful.

Let your imagination—and the research skills you use in class work—guide you as you explore what it will cost to do your project. Your budget is important not only in showing a committee that your project is feasible—it's also important in assuring *you* that you can make it work.