How to Secure a Letter of Affiliation

By Lauren Veronica Valdez

TIPS FOR THE LETTER OF AFFILIATION

For most research projects, you are going to need certain in-country resources to carry out your research. Your Letter of Affiliation should be from whatever person or organization you will need to be in contact with to conduct your research. For instance, my proposal focused on using urban planning as a tool for building healthy communities in low-income neighborhoods, so my affiliation is with a public health organization that works in low income communities. Affiliations vary for every project and country. One of my friends is doing a Fulbright in Brazil using photography, and has an affiliation with a museum, so that he can have an exhibition of his work. An affiliation may just be one person, professor, etc. who is knowledgeable in your field, that will be able to guide your research. The affiliation really depends on your project, but make sure that you check in the country summaries about the details of what a specific country may ask for in an affiliation. For instance, Brazil requires students who are not graduate students to have an affiliation with a university, so in addition to my affiliation with the public health org, I also had to get an affiliation from a university.

FINDING AN AFFILIATION

- Find the people or organizations you will need to carry out your research. If your project is on homelessness, find the people or orgs that work with homelessness. If you need access to certain materials, find the library or university that will be able to give you them. If there is some expert you are dying to research with, you better have a letter from them or someone on their team.

- If your project is still open-ended, find people, organizations, or projects that interest you and contact them to see if you can get involved with them. For me, I knew I had to have a university affiliation, and I knew I wanted to do something related to public health and urban planning in Brazil, so I spent hours and hours going through faculty lists of public health and urban planning professors. I would see if what they taught interested me, then I would look up their research, publications, and everything else I could find. If they still held my interest I would send them an email.

MAKING CONTACT

- If there are many people or organizations you can contact, start with just an introductory email (in the host language). I pretty much just cold emailed many distinguished professors or heads of organizations. My subject line just said "Potential Fulbright Research", then in a quick email, I would introduce myself, talk about my interest, mention what interested me about their work, then ask if they could give me info on how I could fit in with their work. I probably had around a 60% response rate (and this was me sending out emails everyday for a month). Once they responded we
would go back and forth sharing more details, until I narrowed my project down to the organization that fit my research needs and interests best.

- If your project is super specific to one person or organization, I would suggest sending a pretty detailed introductory email, letting them know what you want to research and why they are the best fit. Be careful that you don’t scare them away, make the details more about your interest in them, and how you can best learn from them and be a resource for them. If you don’t get a response, try calling, or look for contact info of other people in the organization or research group you can get to.

**Tips**

- If you aren’t getting the responses you want, take a look at your approach and try switching things up. Notice which people respond and which don’t. Maybe you need to be more aggressive, maybe you are too aggressive, maybe you aren’t contacting the right people.

- Look for personal connections who can put you in contact with someone. I had a professor, put me in contact with a former Brazilian student of hers, who put me in contact with people she had done research with in Brazil.

- Look for people or orgs that may have a relationship with your university. After I had secured my affiliation with the public health org, I still needed one from a university, so I googled the name of different Brazilian universities with my university, and I stumbled on a Brazilian professor who had done her PhD at Berkeley, and I very easily got an affiliation from her.

- Look up people from your host country who have received Fulbrights to the U.S. and shoot them and email. They will most likely be very helpful with contacts.

- Look up professors from your university who are in your field of interest, who may have contacts for you. I found a Berkeley professor who had done work with the founder of an organization I was interested in, and I randomly sent him an email so he could put me in contact with him. You are a lot more likely to get a response when you can name drop someone the host affiliation may know.

Note: This can all be painstakingly slow. Don’t get frustrated with slow response or no response. Keep sending out emails and looking for new people to contact until you have secured an affiliation, you never know when something might fall through.

**ASKING FOR A LETTER OF AFFILIATION**

- Asking for the letter can be quite difficult, because there are no instructions for how to write the letter, but a very specific timeframe and instructions for sending in the letter.

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After talking out many details about my proposal, and eventually sending drafts of my proposal (translated), I asked for what I translated to “A Letter of Support”, outlined what it needed to say, and told them that I could draft the letter. They also need to physically mail you the letter, so make sure they understand this and leave enough time for all of this.

THE AFFILIATION LETTER

- The letter should support your research proposal. Many of my friends drafted their own letters of affiliation, so ask your host if you can work on it together. My letter was broken down into paragraphs about the organization, about me, and about what we will do together. If you are working with someone or some group, then more details are better. The letter can outline how your goals fit their goals, and what resources they provide you (guidance? Laboratory space? Staff? Etc). Your proposal and letter of affiliation should reinforce each other. BASICALLY, YOUR LETTER OF AFFILIATION SHOULD BE ABLE TO BACK UP WHAT YOU CLAIM YOU ARE GOING TO DO IN YOUR PROPOSAL. See example letter of affiliation.

- Not everyone needs to follow this format. If you just need access to some materials, you may only need a short letter from your host saying that you will be granted access. I also was required to have a university affiliation, which I got very last minute from a professor that basically said, “I will be teaching this course that Lauren is interested in taking”.

A STRONG LETTER OF AFFILIATION WILL REALLY MAKE YOU STAND OUT FROM THE PACK!

So make sure you find a host who is willing to commit to you and give you everything you will need to carry out an awesome Fulbright.

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