



Column: A New Generation in Librarianship

Getting There is the Journey: Obtaining International Grant Funding for a Professional Experience Abroad

Katy Webb, *Yale University*

ABSTRACT

This column gives practical advice to early-career librarians in search of an international travel grant to gain professional experience abroad. The author completed a Fulbright Specialist grant in 2019-2022 and offers information to disambiguate the process of obtaining one such grant, including information about identifying grants, applying, locating a host, and more.

KEYWORDS

international, international librarianship, professional travel, grant funding, travel grant

SUGGESTED CITATION

Webb, K. (2022). Getting there is the journey: Obtaining international grant funding for a professional experience abroad. *Journal of New Librarianship*, 7(2), 80–83.

<https://doi.org/10.33011/newlibs/12/14>

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.



Have you ever heard the phrase “international librarianship” and thought that it only applied to jet-setting people with two passports who could figure out a way to move abroad? In 2019, I applied for the Fulbright Specialist roster to test the theory that I could have an international experience without uprooting my life to live in another country. The Fulbright Specialist grant I obtained allows for up to six weeks of international travel to complete a project with a host institution in another country. Although the application process took work and persistence, the experience that I was afforded by this grant allowed me to grow my skill set, meet new people, and develop new topics to publish. Additionally, I was able to travel back to a country I had visited as a language learner and tourist and try out my skills in speaking Dutch. This article focuses on the process of getting an international grant for those interested in completing a project, research, or exchange abroad. Though this article focuses on my experience with a Fulbright grant, I have included broad advice that could apply to other types of grants. Lastly, I am an American, but it is important to note that grants, including Fulbright funding, are possible for academics and librarians to travel to the United States and other countries, as well.

Want to try something other than a Fulbright? Try [ALA’s list of International Opportunities and Funding Sources for Librarians](#), administered through the International Relations Round Table. Additional grant funding can be located through searching the InfoEd SPIN database, grant funding databases, or the websites of individual funders.

Application Process

Simply put, applying for an international travel grant is a bit like applying for a job or for college. You will need an updated CV, a few people to list as references, and you can expect to write some essays. The grant that I completed was a three step-process, which is specific to the shorter Fulbright Specialist grant. First, I had to be selected to be added to the roster, then I had to find a host, and then we submitted the project.

I went into the application process telling myself not to expect to be selected. I researched each of the different types of Fulbright grants. There are 1-year long grants, 6-month long grants, and the Specialist grants for 6 weeks or less. I have family caregiving obligations, so the Specialist grant was something that seemed do-able with my work and life demands. I read about the grant on their webpage. I read the prompts carefully and worked on the application process over the course of a few days. I had people read over my essays. And then I applied and waited.

If you are applying for a grant abroad, some of the same advice for general grant writing applies. Make sure to read every element of the grant application carefully. Ask for clarification on anything you need help with, and do not be shy. Attend a webinar, if it is offered. When applying, make sure to answer every question fully, as you are likely to be judged using a rubric by a committee unfamiliar with your work. Lastly, write in clear language that describes or

avoids jargon and specific cultural idioms, as it is possible that members of the panel speak languages that differ from yours.

Finding a Host or Project

I had been lucky to live in Germany for four years as a teenager and had done a summer-long study abroad in the Netherlands, meaning that I have skills in speaking both German and Dutch. That said, in most cases, you do not necessarily need to speak the language to complete an international grant. When deciding where to go, I had a strong desire to reconnect with the culture of one these two countries but remained open to where I might end up traveling. One thing to keep in mind is that countries that have been historically under resourced will receive more grantees for a Fulbright. In 2019, only three people received grants to go to the Netherlands, and only one of those grants was given to a librarian. Out of the 419 people awarded every kind of Fulbright grant in 2019, only 11 were awarded for Library Science. Twenty-five scholars went to India and two of those were library-related grants.

If you apply for a Fulbright Specialist grant, projects are posted frequently on a list that you gain access to after being placed on the roster, but they are for all types of projects—many that may not be a direct fit for librarians. You can also find a host and create a project, which was the route I took. To begin, I created an Excel spreadsheet of libraries in Germany and visited the websites of each of these libraries, looking for a creative space or services, such as a digital humanities lab or media center, since I anticipated my project being focused in this area. In the end, I contacted the host institution in the Netherlands through a friend, so I highly recommend activating your network. If you do not have a deep network, make one by reaching out to people on LinkedIn or Twitter. Have some language skills? Start the email with a greeting or short introduction of yourself in the language, even if it is basic. You may even consider hosting a scholar from another country to make connections and opportunities. Look at the proceedings of international conferences, such as IFLA or LIBER, to find people presenting on topics that interest you. Connect with others who have also been awarded the same grant if they are listed on a website. They may be able to read your materials before submission and give you advice.

Be clear about the types of things that you are good at or that you could offer to the host institution, as well as things you hope to be able to learn. Write up some goals for your project or grant experience, which might also come in handy during the application process. Do you want to publish on the topic? Let the prospective host know. Offer to present to their library staff on a topic, such as trends you are following in your library. Make sure the scope of the project seems realistic for the time you will be there.

One more thing that will come up as part of an exchange or grant is what to tell your supervisor and institution. You will likely need to have multiple conversations with your boss, such as at the point when you decide to apply, when you ask them for a reference, and when the

plans start to come into focus. Keeping an open dialogue about where you are in the process is important. Make sure to inform them of all that this grant will bring to you and your library, including new ideas, a possible knowledge exchange with a library in another country, news articles that can be shared with donors, and yes, even prestige. Because of the pandemic, I had to navigate this with not one, but two libraries, as I switched jobs. In both cases, the visits were short and considered to be research, so I was paid my salary during the grant period. The Fulbright grant comes with a \$200 per day honorarium, which can allay costs for grantees who must take time unpaid. Involving your campus' international office to find out what the norm has been for other grantees can help make a strong case for continuing to be paid. Advocate for yourself that this is work, not vacation, and that it is related to your job. Lastly, remember to close the loop with a presentation or share back sessions at your library. This makes further ties to it being work, making it clear that this is not a vacation.

One other thing to consider is how available you will be via email and for Zoom meetings. I made sure people at work knew I was checking email one time per day, that there may be a delay in my reply, and that I would only reply to emails that needed my response. I used the delay function to send emails during U.S. business hours. Since I am a manager, I set up a person to act as my designate for time off requests. There were a few meetings I could not miss that I took via Zoom. These had to be scheduled during the morning in the U.S. to allow me to attend, but I kept these meetings to a minimum to focus on grant activities.

I was able to split my Fulbright Specialist grant into two visits by writing this into the plan for the project. This helped with my family and allowed me to make a second connection with the library. My last piece of advice is to think broadly and if in doubt, ask if it is possible. Nothing on the website says that the grant can be split up, but I was able to make this possible through conversations with the host and through asking questions of the Fulbright commission. My time in the Netherlands as a Specialist can be summed up as one of wonderful connections: I met many new people, toured new places, saw a lot of great ideas implemented at libraries, presented on my past research, developed new topics for research, and experienced wonderful cultural experiences. The library that hosted me expressed gratitude for the methodology and fresh ideas that I brought to their project to create a digital scholarship lab in an existing library office space. I hope this column leaves you wondering if you can go abroad on a grant-based project or exchange and that you feel more prepared for the process. Good luck, activate your network, and enjoy the journey!