

# Rural Support Partners

## Advice for Potential Fellowship Applicants

We recognize that applying for jobs can be a challenging and stressful process, especially for young leaders who are in the beginning stages of their careers. While many organizations may have different priorities and standards, these are some of the things we would recommend to potential Fellowship applicants.

### In Your Cover Letter

#### **Connect to us as an organization.**

- Tailor your letter specifically to our organization.
- Make it obvious that you've read the materials we've put out and our website/background info.
- Highlight your connections to the regions and communities where we work.

#### **Tell us about you, and why you're excited about this job/our organization.**

- Tell us about who you are, what you have to offer, and what you want to learn.
- Make sure your passion and energy come across clearly.
- Give us a sense of some of your personal characteristics, your personality, and your background.
- Tell us why our work matters to you personally – connect your experiences to what you know about us and the work you'll be doing.
- Bring significant experiences to life, and tell us what you've learned from past challenges.

#### **Display good writing skills.**

- Think carefully about how you open and close the letter. Try to “hook” the reader in the first sentence.
- Use traditional letter formatting, stick to one page, and maintain an appropriate level of formality.
- Respond to core themes of the descriptions of the job and organization, without parroting.
- Ask for an interview – let us know you are looking forward to the next steps in the process.
- List enclosed documents – and only enclose what was requested in the position announcement.
- Proofread your document thoroughly.

### In Your Resume

#### **Display good organizational and formatting skills.**

- Organize your document carefully and logically – we read left to right and top to bottom, so make sure the most important information is presented first.
- Keep it simple and straightforward.
- Use formatting to make the document's organization clear - keep it consistent and easy to read, use visual cues, break document into clear categories, use consistent headings and bullet points.
- Match the format and style of your resume with that of your cover letter.

#### **Tweak your content to make your experiences and skills shine.**

- Include an objective, summary statement, or leadership profile that tells us who you are as a leader and the core skills you would bring to the organization.
- Describe previous experiences in ways that highlight their relevance to the position for which you are applying.
- List your core skills in a standalone section, including software skills, multimedia skills, etc.
- List your presentations and publications – and note those that were collaborative/team projects.
- Use “references available on request” instead of listing references on resume itself.
- Include email, mailing address, and phone number – but not social media accounts, unless they are relevant to the job description or your experience.

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### At Your Interview

#### **Be someone you would want to hire, and work alongside every day.**

- Strive for comfortable, natural interactions. Bring passion, energy, and a sense of humor.
- Make eye contact and engage with everyone you meet, not just the person in charge or the person interviewing you – assume they are all part of the decision-making process.
- Take notes and use active listening skills.
- If you don't know the answer to a question, admit you don't know...then explain the logic and processes you'd use to make a decision or find out what you need to know.
- Connect back to what you know about the organization.
- Use information from staff bios to make personal connections.
- The interview is not the time to negotiate start dates, salary, or benefits. These conversations can wait until you've been offered the position.
- Recognize that you are also interviewing us. The purpose of the interview is to see if there is a good fit between you and the organization, so the questions should go both ways.

#### **Prepare well in advance.**

- Have three good questions prepared that show your initiative.
- Anticipate the questions interviewers are likely to ask, and practice your responses. Think about questions that are more reflective in nature (about your strengths, challenges, personal characteristics) as well as questions about your professional experience.
- Read up on the organization thoroughly, and be sure you won't be asking for any information that we've already sent to you in advance.
- Practice your interview – by yourself, and with a friend or two. Consider preparing a “cheat sheet” with notes on particular experiences or themes you want to highlight or connect back to.
- Bring the job description with you, along with a notebook, pen, and water.
- Wear professional but comfortable clothing.
- Have a strong closing statement prepared. Most interviewers will end with “what else would you like to share?” or “what else would you like us to know about you?”

#### **Follow up – quickly.**

- Send thank-you notes, preferably by mail, or at the very least by email.
- Tell us you're excited about the job.

### Other Notes

- Monitor your online presence – social media background checks are common (We don't do them at RSP unless you specifically list your social media account on your resume or cover letter.)
- Name your documents appropriately (e.g. “J. Doe Resume 3.15.13” and “J. Doe Cover Letter 3.15.13”) and save them as PDFs to make sure your formatting comes through correctly.
- Follow up if you don't get a confirmation or call-back, but be conscious of the timeline we've outlined. Reviewing applications and making hiring decisions takes time!
- Follow the process laid out in the job posting, without asking for special treatment. It's important to us to treat everyone fairly, and if the position announcement says no phone calls, it's because we don't have time to speak with everyone individually.