

Summer in South Asia Fellowship

Application Guide

Application Requirements

MCompass Online Application

All applicants must fill out the online Summer in South Asia Fellowship application through MCompass by following the link on the Center for South Asian Studies (CSAS) website (www.ii.umich.edu/csas). Only non-graduating undergraduate students from any academic discipline may apply.

Unofficial UM Transcript

All applicants must upload an unofficial UM transcript as part of the application. While there is no minimum required GPA, the admissions committee will take academic performance into account.

Recommendation Letters

Two (2) letters of recommendation are required; at least one must be from a faculty member or GSI at the University of Michigan. As with all recommendations, please request letters from someone who can speak to your ability to succeed in SiSA.

Frequently Asked Questions

How much financial support does the fellowship provide? Each fellow receives \$3,000.

How many students will receive a fellowship? Up to ten students may receive a fellowship each year.

How long do I need to be in India for? The minimum requirement is four weeks, but students have stayed up to four months.

What are the requirements of the fellowship? Along with the minimum four weeks stay in India, you must write a weekly blog post while you are there, write a final report based on your experiences, and present your work at the Summer in South Asia Symposium the following Fall semester.

Will I be going with other students? No, this fellowship is meant to be independent. No two fellows can volunteer with the same organization at the same time. However, during orientation, many fellows coordinate their schedules with one another to travel before, during, or after the fellowship period.

What kind of project will I be able to do? Every student chooses either to: 1) volunteer at an NGO, India based for-profit company, or Indian government organization; or 2) pursue an independent project based on their academic or personal interests. If you volunteer with an organization in India, you will need to obtain written confirmation from the organization prior to having funds released.

What are some past examples of volunteer experiences and projects?

- Evaluation of women's empowerment project in Kalol, India
- Following the production of a piece of clothing in India
- Working at a hospital/clinic
- Studying urban planning techniques in two different Indian cities

Do I need a project mentor before applying? A project mentor is necessary if you plan to carry out an independent project. Volunteer positions do not require a project mentor.

Will I have any support locally while I'm in India? Students volunteering with Indian organizations will have a local supervisor that will advise them during their time in India. Students doing independent projects are required to have an advisor who is knowledgeable in the subject area either in the US or in India.

When and how do I find an organization to work for if I wish to volunteer at an Indian NGO, for-profit company, or government organization? While a confirmed invitation from an Indian organization is not required prior to submitting your application, you should begin searching for a suitable organization as soon as possible. Staff at the CSAS can help advise students on their search process. Please also see the brief "Guide to Finding a Volunteer Opportunity in India" at the end of this document.

Where will I stay? Past fellows have stayed in guesthouses, homestays with someone that works within the organization, or on site.

Am I allowed to go anywhere in India? There are certain parts of India that students need special permission to travel to. Please consult the university's "Travel Restriction Destinations" information on the [Global Michigan](#) website for updated travel information.

Am I allowed to travel during my time in India? Yes, students may travel in allowed areas as long as they complete all requirements of the fellowship and any obligations to the organizations they are volunteering at.

Can I apply to multiple sources of funding? Yes. We encourage students to apply for other sources of funding, however students should not accept payment for volunteering at an Indian organization.

Guide to Finding a Volunteer Opportunity in India

Identify your interests

The first step in finding a volunteer opportunity is to identify topics or themes that you are interested in pursuing. These can be related to your personal or academic interests, e.g. public health, economic development, human rights, art, religion, etc.

Next, you should research whether and how your interests are related directly to India. For example, what public health and human rights problems are most prevalent in India? This will narrow your interests and give you a better idea of what type of organizations exist and where to start.

How to find organizations in India where you might volunteer

As a first step, you should conduct an internet search including your topic of interest and the location you would like to work. For example, you might search for “NGOs in Mumbai, India - Primary education; or “India NGO Art Therapy.” Several options should come up, and many cities or towns have databases/websites with a list of non-governmental organizations in the area along with their contact information.

Next, review the organizations in India that relate to the topic you are interested in pursuing. Check to be sure it is a legitimate organization and not simply a group seeking “interns” who pay for the opportunity. Once you have found an organization that interests you, explore programs the organization may offer, for instance on a “What we do?” or “Our Work” page. Identify programs or areas you would like to work in.

Create a list of several organizations you are interested in volunteering with, along with the specific programs or areas you are interested in working with within each organization. Try to identify the top three organizations you are most interested in working with. Once you have a list, begin reaching out.

Reaching out to Organizations once you locate them

If applicable, follow instructions listed on the website pertaining to volunteer work. If instructions are unavailable, send an email to the organization. When you send an email to the organization, think of your message as a condensed cover letter. Introduce yourself (major, University of Michigan student, relevant past experience, etc.), state that you would like to volunteer with them in summer 2019, and what makes you interested in the organization (see sample below).

In your initial communications, avoid talking about housing. Some NGOs misunderstand and think they must play a role in the planning process for your fellowship. In all of your communication with Indian organizations, be sure to spell out “University of Michigan,” and use the word **volunteer** instead of intern. Be sure to attach a polished resume to your communication.

Sample email message

Hello,

My name is _____. I am third year student at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA and am studying Public Policy and Sustainable Food Systems. I am writing to inquire about a volunteer

position with _____ during the summer of 2019. My time in India would be funded by a fellowship program at the University of Michigan Center for South Asian Studies, and I would not need any funding from your organization.

I plan to pursue a career in _____, and I believe I could learn so much from the innovative initiatives _____ is undertaking. Furthermore, as someone interested in _____, I admire your holistic approach in the way that you consider education, health and community empowerment as integral to providing sustainable food systems.

I am a passionate, hard-working and motivated person, and I would be honored to work with your organization, assisting in _____. I have attached my resume to this message.

If you have any questions, I can be reached by email at _____, and I would also be more than willing to set up a time to speak on the phone or Skype. My Skype ID is _____.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you!

Best,

XYZ

Dealing with unresponsiveness

Many times organizations in India will not respond to emails. If you email organizations and they do not respond, do not be discouraged. Here is what you can do if you face this problem:

- First, send a follow-up email about a week after not hearing from them.
- If you still do not get a response, call the phone numbers listed on their website or Facebook pages. A cheap way to call is via Skype. If you add Skype credit to your account, you can call any number in the world. Viber is another app that allows you to make a limited number of free, international calls.
- Think outside the box. Find contact information of specific staff at the organization and reach out in that way. CSAS can also help you by sending an email to the organization.

Accepting a volunteer position

You may be able to get an organization to accept you as a volunteer prior to your finding out whether you received the fellowship or not. If this is the case, then please be careful to say that your ability to volunteer with them is contingent on receiving the fellowship. You may also secure an agreement to volunteer at an organization after you have been selected to receive a fellowship. Funding is contingent on your receiving written confirmation from the organization that they agree to have you as a volunteer. A written confirmation can be as simple as, “We would love to have you as a volunteer next summer.”

Once you have received confirmation, you can discuss your role within the organization in more detail, including where you will be based, and housing options in the area. It is important to stay in touch with the organization regularly prior to your arrival.