



Application Tips

Page 7: Focus Questions



This page of the online application consists of *focus questions*, your responses to which help provide Ignited Hosts with a better sense of who you are as an individual and why they should consider hosting you in an Ignited Summer Fellowship.

Potential Mentors view multiple resumes for each position and this page of the application, along with your Current Employment and Employment History, provides you with the opportunity to distinguish yourself as an applicant. Well-written responses can have a powerful effect on a mentor's impression of you...as can a poorly written one. Don't underestimate the power of a clear and thoughtful response!

Below are some things to consider when providing answers to each of these questions along with some general "best practices" to keep in mind.

General Best Practices:

Please carefully review your responses to ensure that they are an accurate representation of you and your writing abilities.

- **Spelling and grammar check:** If your internet browser does not have a spell check feature, please consider first typing your responses in a word processing program, such as Microsoft Word, to use the spelling and grammar check features. Then copy and paste your responses into the online application. Use the "Paste from Word" or "Paste as Plain Text" options from the formatting tool bar above the textbox within the application (3rd and 4th from the right respectively) to prevent the introduction of formatting inconsistencies. Focus question boxes also have a built in spell check that you may want to use (the ABC icon on the far right).
- **Complete sentences:** As a general rule of thumb, please respond to each of the focus questions using complete sentences and proper punctuation to demonstrate your writing and communication skills to Hosts.
- **Acronyms and education specific terminology:** Be careful about using acronyms and terminology such as IEP, Title I, FOSS, TOP, WASC etc. with which a person outside the education field might not be familiar. Please spell out all acronyms followed by the acronym in parentheses the first time they are used in your application and briefly explain any education specific terminology or programs.
- **View your Ignited Resume:** Please review how your application is formatted into your Ignited resume (how it will be viewed by Ignited Hosts), by selecting "Save Draft" at the bottom of the page on which you're working; then select the "Resume" tab on the top right.
- **You can edit your application at any time:** You can make changes to this (or any) page of the application at any time by logging into <http://www.ignitededucation.org/> unless your application is under review by Ignited staff. Once you have made the desired updates, be sure to hit the "**Save Draft**" button at the bottom of the page to **save** your changes.

Focus/Personal Statement Questions Suggestions:

1. What strengths do you believe you will bring to an industry or science research Fellowship? (These can be skills gained in teaching, in other careers, etc.) Please give examples of how you have used these strengths in the past.

- Your response to this question gives you the opportunity to summarize and highlight your strengths! Please do not undersell yourself. Please do summarize your skills that you feel would best transfer to an industry/research project.
- Visit Sample Projects (<http://www.ignitededucation.org/the-experience/projects/>) to get a sense of the types of projects that have been offered in the past. Be sure to highlight your skills/experience that would be relevant to these and other types of projects.
- As a teacher you have MANY strengths that transfer to a Fellowship environment! Listed below are just a few to help you start brainstorming:
 - Multi-tasking
 - Planning
 - Organizing
 - Communication/Writing
 - Technology
 - Ability to learn quickly
 - Working with a diverse group of people
 - Flexibility/Ability to adapt your plans on the go
 - Fluent in another language
- You may want to ask other teachers what your strengths are as they may be able to recognize them sooner than you do.
- How have administrators recognized your abilities in evaluations?
- Maybe ask your students why they enjoy your class or your teaching style.
- What kinds of projects are you hoping to work on? What skills do you have for those projects? Be sure to highlight these!
- What do you most want Hosts to remember about you?
- All of your strengths and abilities in the classroom will apply to a Fellowship position. Describe yourself using action-oriented words (i.e. Create, Lead, Manage, Encourage, Intensify, Author, Bridge, Analyze, etc).

SAMPLE RESPONSE

NOTE: Sample responses are from a successful applicant who graciously agreed to share them with new applicants. Specific names have been removed. **These are for informational purposes only and should NOT be quoted in the application.**

I have extensive classroom and research experiences that would enable me to successfully complete an industry or research Fellowship. My academic background is quite varied and distinctive. I have taken courses at the graduate and undergraduate levels in the physical, life, and social sciences as well as mathematics. I worked for a number of years in a university-based research facility as a laboratory biologist. In this position, I conducted public and privately sponsored biomedical technology studies in the scientific areas of toxicology and carcinogenesis using a variety of laboratory animals. The strengths gained from this position help me teach students the real world skills that are necessary for being a scientist. I have used my past academic training and personal interests to create and adapt an entirely new curriculum for a high school, senior-level capstone science course in forensic science. As a high school biology teacher who was unsatisfied with the traditional science fair model for students, I modified and modernized the science fair experimentation guidelines for high school students into an alternative science fair semester project focusing entirely on informal education in Chicago. As part of my professional development plan, I created two original, comprehensive high school science modules that were implemented in both formal and informal education settings for the Museum of Natural History. I am a dependable, hard-working self-starter with great attention to detail. I am also proficient in Microsoft Word, Microsoft PowerPoint, WordPerfect, Microsoft Excel, and many Internet-based applications. I have brought these strengths as well as my knowledge of the subject matter to the high school science classroom for the sole purpose of maximizing my students' learning potential.

2. What do you hope to gain from an Ignited Fellowship? How does a Fellowship fit into your professional development plan? *Please note that this question has been modified slightly from previous years and use to say: "Why do you want an Ignited Fellowship? How does a Fellowship fit into your professional development plan?"*

- What are you hoping to gain professionally?
- What skills and talents would you hope to use, learn or enhance?
- What are you hoping to bring back to your students?
- What kinds of Fellowships would you like to participate in?
- How will this type of learning enrich your teaching ability?
- How will the Fellowship support what you are already working on at your school?

SAMPLE RESPONSE

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I would very much like an Ignited Fellowship because I have participated in a similar program in the past and found it personally rewarding and professionally fulfilling. Early on in my teaching career, I had the opportunity to participate in a project funded by the National Science Foundation. I was one of six teachers selected to be part of the Research Experience for Teachers (RET) program which promotes the active involvement of K-12 school teachers in engineering research in order to bring knowledge of engineering and technological innovation into their classrooms. For this program, I worked closely with a chemical engineering professor to help adapt and make his research regarding Type I Diabetes and Internet-based glucose monitoring program suitable for high school study. My original curriculum entitled, "Got Insulin? Understanding and Managing Type I Diabetes," was implemented in and well-received by my ninth grade honors biology classes the following fall. Now that I have taught for nearly five years, I would like to duplicate and even expand upon the experiences and knowledge gained during the RET. The overall goal of my professional development plan is to continue growing as an educator by adding real world experiences in the areas of science and technology so that I may better prepare my students for life after high school. With my past experiences and future professional goals, the Ignited Fellowship program fits perfectly into the natural progression of my professional development plan.

3. What characteristics would an ideal summer Fellowship have for you?

Think back to your response to question two regarding why you are seeking an Ignited Fellowship and what you are hoping to gain. In your response to this question, describe what you envision the particular characteristics would be of Fellowship positions (the 90% time where you are working on a project at a Host organization) that would afford you those opportunities. For example:

- What would the Fellowship you seek look like?
 - Working independently on a project and/or collaboratively with a group as part of a team
 - Exposure to the whole organization/understanding of how different groups fit together
 - Provide opportunities to take/demonstrate initiative
 - Are you flexible/open to change and adapting to the changing needs of the organization and/or project?
 - Do you desire a project with clear, well defined expectations and/or one that is open and gives you the ability to provide input into expectations and goals?
- What aspects of industry or research labs would appeal to you in a position for the summer?
 - Getting hands-on lab or testing experience
 - Gaining insight into project management
 - Exposure to cutting edge technology/techniques/best practices

Applicants typically answer this question in one of two ways. The first is to express openness to a variety of Fellowship opportunities that will expand your experience base and provide relevant experiences to bring back to the classroom. The second is to express an interest in a more specific type or field of Fellowship including research experiences, technology rich Fellowships, environmental focused Fellowships, etc.

The second option potentially narrows the number of Mentors that will have projects fitting your preferences, but may increase your chances of having a Fellowship that fits your specific needs. There is a small sampling

of Fellowships from previous years on the Ignited website that will give you an idea of what types of Fellowships have been offered; you can access them by going to: <http://www.ignitededucation.org/the-experience/projects/>. The specific positions available for this year will be viewable on the Ignited website beginning in early March, once your application has been approved.

SAMPLE RESPONSE

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I tend to favor working relationships that are open, communicative, collaborative, and constructive in nature. One of the reasons why I find education to be such a rewarding profession is the countless opportunities for peer collaboration, discussion, and self-reflection. I would like my summer Fellowship to be nurturing, but not overly controlling so that creative ideas are welcomed and encouraged. I am interested in learning as much as I can, however I am confident that I have information, skills, and experiences to disseminate as well. Therefore, an ideal summer Fellowship would offer an inviting learning environment for all parties involved. In short, it would be great if the Hosts of the Fellowship are as interested in the materials I will be developing for my classroom as the project they are conducting.

4. (Optional) Describe any special projects, reform initiatives, partnerships, or clubs in which you are involved. These can be in your classroom, department, school, district, or community.

- Think back over your teaching career and describe any projects that you have participated in.
- Is there anything that you've helped to develop?
- Have you written/earned any grants?
- Anything special you are currently working on?
- Do you have leadership experience outside of the classroom?
- Anything that you've done that is cross-curricular?
- Has your administration asked you to lead any projects?
- Have your colleagues called on you for special services?
- Are you involved with community initiatives?
- Is there a unique student activity that you have developed/implemented?
- Clubs/or student groups for which you are the faculty advisor.
- Courses or activities you have spearheaded.

Seize the opportunity highlight your strengths as you respond to this question by referencing your responsibilities and accomplishments in the roles/initiatives you include.

SAMPLE RESPONSE

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I have always been an innovative problem solver--finding ways to meet the needs I see in any organization I've had the pleasure of serving. When I saw that our after-school program lacked science and technology activities, I introduced a robotics open-ended design program that has been so popular that the after-school program is now duplicating the program at five other school sites. When I noticed that my middle school did not offer music to our students, I began an after-school choir. When I realized that my passion was to develop quality curriculum that would reach a large number of students and teachers, I pursued a Master's in Instructional Technology, while still teaching. In these and in many other leadership roles, I bring clear/detailed planning, collaboration with others and follow-through on all my commitments.

5. (Optional) To be considered for a science research Fellowship, list up to 10 of the most relevant undergraduate and graduate science and math courses you have completed. For each, provide the course name, year and institution, and indicate whether it was a laboratory course.

- If you decide you are interested in pursuing a science research Fellowship (which includes Fellowship opportunities at Stanford University, UC Berkeley, etc.), please take time to think through and include the most relevant courses you've taken.
- You can update your responses to this question once you see some of the science research positions and find those that you might be interested in to better reflect your studies in a particular scientific area.
- Even if you are not interested in a science research Fellowship, you may respond to this question to highlight courses that you have taken that may be attractive to potential Mentors. For example, you might include business or computer technology courses you've taken.

6. (Optional) Is there any additional information you would like to share about yourself, your background, or experience that you would like Mentors to consider when reviewing your Ignited resume?

Hosts may be interested in learning more about you and your background. This optional question allows you to provide information such as:

- Any courses you are taking or have taken to strengthen your professional skills/knowledge
- Degrees that are in progress
- Skills you've used or experience you may have gained outside of employment (i.e. through volunteerism, hobbies, etc).

In general, if there is any information about your background, skills or interests that didn't fit elsewhere in the application, you should include it here! Remember, your application is your chance to make a stellar first impression, which could lead to an interview invitation!