How to Write a Competitive Fellowship Application

Your application will be read by a committee of faculty and staff and if appropriate, someone with expertise in the field. As each committee member is charged with reading a number of proposals you should focus on three central points:

1. What it is you want to do
2. How you are going to do it
3. Why you are qualified to do the work

Fellowship applications tend to be divided into a project narrative, “what it is you want to do” and a personal narrative, “why you would be a compelling Fellow.” The application is an exercise in both expository writing and persuasive writing. You will never meet the committee or have an opportunity to defend your ideas; you must convince the committee in 5 pages to invest in your proposal and ultimately, in you. Don’t get caught up in writing to impress, focus on making a clear, compelling case for your work. One way to do that is to stay small in scope, setting realistic goals and expectations for the research.

TIPS:

• Read and adhere to the guidelines and deadlines.
• Make sure your faculty sponsor is the appropriate scholar to counsel you on the research proposal. Please be respectful and give the faculty sponsor at least 3 weeks notice to write you a letter of recommendation.
• Be concise and clear in your writing – don’t make the reader search for your research question.
• Make a compelling case for the research methodology.
• Discuss potential outcomes of the work.
• Use language that is enthusiastic, passionate and accessible.
• Convey to the committee “why you want to be a Royce Fellow.”
• Be prepared to write multiple drafts and seek feedback throughout the writing process.
**Project Description**
I will examine the cultural assimilation of Russians in Harbin, China via the medium of poetry.

**Project Summary**
I will organize, translate and interpret the corpus of poetry produce by Russians living in northern China at the beginning of the 20th century. My knowledge of Chinese and Russian, along with my childhood experiences as a foreigner in China, will inform the particular perspective of my interpretation.

**Project narrative/background**
When construction of the Trans-Siberian from Moscow to Harbin, China was completed before the end of the 19th century, a wave of Russians migrated to northeastern China looking for employment in the booming industrialization of the region. Most of the 120,000 Russians in the region were Jewish or other religious exiles or political exiles. The Russian population that thrived in Harbin until the Communist Revolution in 1949 largely assimilated into the Chinese population, and developed a large body of literature and poetry that reflects their combination of both the Chinese and Russian cultures that characterized their Harbin community. Growing up in China as a foreigner and as a Jew, I became familiar with the history of this group, and my interest grew as I began to study Russian at Brown. Professor Alexander Levitsky peaked my interest with his introduction of a selection of poetry from the Russian population in China when I was just beginning to learn Russian, and his continued guidance has helped me grapple with the poetry as I progressed into advanced language studies.

> These 2 paragraphs should underscore the purpose, goals, and methodology. You should demonstrate an awareness of previous scholarship; a limited number of citations are encouraged and describe how your work contributes to a body of knowledge.

From my first formal introduction to Chinese poetry in Chinese schools to this later introduction of Russian poetry, I have come to understand the
similar cultural priority that Chinese and Russians put on their poetry. It is
their cultural inheritance, and memorization of poetry is how both Chinese
and Russians become literate both in the technical and the cultural sense.
I plan to travel to Beijing and Harbin this summer to begin the process of
organizing the body of poetry that these transcontinental Russians produced,
something that only a few Chinese scholars have begun, and hopefully make
these documents more accessible to western students. My perspective as a
foreigner growing up in China as well as my Chinese and Russian knowledge
will help me begin the process of interpreting these texts within their historical
and cultural contexts. Growing up in China as a foreigner, I have a similar
perspective from what Russians a hundred years ago may have experienced.
The process of assimilation into a country where you look different from all
your neighbors is a difficult and perhaps impossible ambition.

> Underscore your qualifications and offer evidence that you are likely to be
successful navigating the culture or material.

Negotiating the line between being an outsider and having cultural
knowledge and language skills is an equally difficult position. I spent last
summer in Russia studying language and culture, and culminated my trip
with the same trip that every Russian in Harbin took: a journey on local trains
across the Trans-Siberian railroad. I believe that my perspective, informed by
both Chinese experience and Russian language and literature knowledge, will
provide me with the skills necessary to organize and understand this poetry.

My basic goal is two fold: I hope to organize the collection of poetry that
is currently in at least three archives in Beijing and Harbin, and I want to
begin interpreting this body of poetry in a cultural paradigm that is shaped
by my own experiences as a foreigner in China. Because of the two difficult
languages, Russian literature professors such as Professor Levitsky have
been very hard-pressed to gain access to these materials, and even further
to understand the full context in which they were written. Because of my
personal experiences in China, my background in Slavic languages and
my study of Russian literature and history, I will have a different frame to
view this literature through, and I hope that both through my own research
and collaborating with Professor Levitsky, I will be able to provide a very
different and personal perspective for this poetry. Additionally, because of
my background in Chinese poetry that informed how I learned Chinese as a
child, I understand the Chinese cultural references and poetic patterns that
are often used in many of the poems that I have read so far. While in China,
I hope to organize and begin interpretation - partially through translating
the Russian texts into English and partially through mapping similarities in
Chinese cultural references and structures - while I conduct archive research.
I would focus on the former while in China, and during the 2010-2011 school
year, I would continue with Professor Levitsky to study these texts through my
cultural lens. I will also be able to conduct interviews with older faculty who
began studying at the end of the period Russians were living in China.
You do not have to offer a definitive ‘product’ such as a thesis or journal article but it's wise to have in mind some outcome that is tangible.

While this project will most likely turn into a paper and translation collection of some sort, that is not the final product that I would like to produce. Most of all, I want to increase access to these texts so that other researchers and students who do not have the Chinese background can have access to this interesting facet of modern Russian literature. This body of poetry represents the cross between two of the most important aspects of my life: my bringing-up in China and my strong academic interests in Russian literature. I think that exposure to this body of literature for others interested in this history of cross-cultural exchanges will be the most satisfying result of this project.

Take care to sufficiently detail the access you have that will allow you to complete the research within the fellowship's time frame.

I believe that the regional differences within China and the necessity for having both a Russian and a Chinese language background have prevented many researches from delving far into this field before. I have experience working with scholars in China, and I have already made contacts with a Jewish Studies scholar in Harbin and Russian Studies scholars in Beijing at Qinghua University and Beijing Normal University. I am also working with several research fellows at Harbin State University. Because of these contacts I have already been granted archive access to two of three major archives that are most useful. Because my family is still based in China, my ability to conduct research in Chinese and develop Chinese-speaking contacts, I have been able to personally establish a variety of contacts that are not typical of a Russian Studies student. I have been lucky to get great access to get the resources - archives and Chinese professors - necessary to thoroughly conduct research into this poetry.

Professor Levitsky has already begun to play a very important role in my research. Not only is he helping with acclimating me to the analysis of Russian texts, he is helping to secure several volumes of the poetry from Harbin that should be arriving at Brown from China next month. He will help me with my foundational skills in literary interpretation and has pioneered some of the contacts in Harbin, which are proving to be invaluable. On my return to Brown he will again assist me in solidifying my translations and interpretations. I am grateful to have a sponsor so enthusiastic about my project.

My hope is that I will be able to retrieve at least some poetry that has never been published in America or Europe, and that with a greater access to this unique cultural blending of Russian and Chinese culture, more attention will be paid to the way in which one group of foreigners adapted to life in China. I have a great interest in multicultural literature, and it seems that there is a comparison between the structures, styles and content of Chinese and Russian poetry emerges by looking at how one group negotiated the
limitations of these two languages and sought to fuse them to create a more dynamic genre. Because of the comparative difficulty of the two languages, and the necessity in knowing both and the histories associated with both in order to understand the full range of expression in the poetry, it is not surprising that few scholars have looked into this field. However, I believe that the notable nature of both of these cultural canons of poetry and the important place both countries have in 20th century history justifies an intense study of how the two cultures can come together literarily.

> Briefly discuss potential challenges you may face in the research and resources you can draw upon to address those challenges.

For this project in general, the greatest hurdle can be getting access to the various university archives that store all relevant texts written by Russians from this period. However, because I have already personally made many contacts, and because of my command of Chinese, I believe that the oftentimes elusive and incomprehensible Chinese bureaucratic structure will not be a significant obstacle to me. I've personally networked with many of the scholars, and have been friends for some years with one of the Russian professors in Beijing. Additionally, when I lived in Beijing for my last five years of grade school, I was very active in the Jewish community in Beijing, and through that I developed relationships with Jewish scholars and the caretakers for the Jewish-Russian sites in Harbin. This will allow me access to some pieces that are currently stored at Jewish heritage facilities in Harbin, so that I can look at the Russians both as a national group but also look at the differentiations within the group. Professor Levitsky has also managed to procure some very rare texts – the only published volumes of Harbin Russian's poetry – from scholar friends in Harbin. This will help me begin my reading, studying and interpretation when the texts arrive next month, and prepare me academically before I depart for Harbin.

Research will take place primarily in Beijing and Harbin, as the majority of the texts are only available in archives at three universities, two in Beijing and one in Harbin. Additionally, there is a center for Jewish studies in Harbin that has a smaller archive that I have already gained access to that has relevant works. There are no locations aside from Beijing and Harbin that possess a comparable collection of these journals, books and pamphlets.

As I grew up almost entirely in China and am highly proficient in Mandarin, and as I have traveled extensively on my own in China including three times to Harbin from my family's home in Beijing in the last two years, I will be able to arrange my own transportation and accommodation for both locations. I have contacts both in Beijing and Harbin who I have been friends with for several years and will be able to help provide institutional support on the ground. The main challenge of working in China is negotiating the bureaucratic hurdles, and often sifting through layers of paperwork to gain access. I am lucky in my
contacts at Beijing universities, but much of what is needed is a great deal of persistence and multiple applications through several channels to gain access, but I have also been working hard to maintain these contacts and develop further contacts over the last months.

The personal narrative is an opportunity to connect with the reader to make them like you and to demonstrate the passion you have for the topic and/or the unique skills sets you bring to the work. It is very important that you clearly answer, “Why you want to be a Royce Fellow” and articulate your understanding of the values of the Royce community.

**Personal Narrative**
Since I first learned of the Royce two years ago, I have met and become friends with many of the fellows. Every one has sought to investigate a problem or work in a specific sub-field that very few people know about. The great opportunity that the Royce provides is to give the ability for students to devote themselves to projects we are most passionate about, and also to bring the fellows together to learn from others with equally strong passions. The Royce also places a strong priority on student researchers developing their own personal stake in their research. My proposed project is one that combines the cultural and academic passions of my life, and is deeply important my self-understanding of foreigner living in China, and of literary representations of that life. As a 2008 Starr fellow, I saw the opportunity of the Royce as giving me the ability to help develop my project and passions in a group of people who are equally self-motivated and academically diverse. I grew up in New Zealand, China, Taiwan and Nepal, and my mixed cultural upbringing informs how I interact in my academic endeavors and could make me a different addition to the Royce community and informs my research perspective.

I feel that my Jewish heritage and my Chinese cultural immersion are the two crucial elements that informed how I interacted with the world as a child. Both Jewish and Chinese cultures share a passion for food and communal eating, and this was a passion I absorbed whole-heartedly. When we first moved to China when I was two, I began to associate all Chinese names with food names that were homophones, so that my two best friends were named Xiaobing (homophone for sesame bun), Nunai (homophone for milk). As we grew older, I still associated all my earliest friends with their food, including myself: Suzhen is a homophone for great vegetables. When I attended a wedding at age eight, I was most interested in counting the thirty-two dishes, learning all the names and then following the bride's mother outside into the streets of the village to see dozens of women over giant woks and griddles in the village streets cooking for the three hundred people at the wedding. The
bride's name was Fengliang, which I thought was wonderfully appropriate as it means beautiful phoenix. At age eight I thought would be a dish fit for a bride. When I entered high school and became one of the service leaders for the liberal Jewish community in Beijing, my family and I began to teach the Chinese cooks at the building we prayed at to prepare some of the traditional foods for various holidays. Mr. Zhuang had been with our community since we began meeting regularly when I was a toddler, and together we made matzo balls and flourless desserts for Passover, honey cakes for Rosh Hashanah and latkes during Chanukah. He laughed about when he first started cooking for the Jewish community, and had to write down all the food restrictions, as he understood them then. Mr. Zhuang showed me the heavily edited list with funny comments about how we must be undernourished if we couldn't eat meat and milk together, or how Jews must have gotten rich by selling all the seafood that we aren't allowed to eat. Over the years, Mr. Zhuang concocted Chinese versions of some of our Jewish dishes, one week substituting taro for potatoes in latkes, another adding bokchoy to the date and fig salad we ate on Tu b'Shevat. Even when the results weren't perfect, Mr. Zhuang's effort to create a Chinese-Jewish cuisine represents my own efforts to combine two seemingly antithetical cultures and use that as my cultural basis rather than having to pick between the two.  

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The budget should be realistic, thorough but not overly detailed

Budget

TRAVEL
Chinese Visa $120.
Roundtrip airfare, Boston to Beijing $1,800.
Roundtrip train/air fare, Beijing to Harbin in June/July $300.
Roundtrip train/air fare, Beijing to Harbin in July $300.
Roundtrip train/air fare, Beijing to Harbin in August $300.
Subtotal: $2,820.

ACCOMMODATION
One week in hostel in Harbin $134.
Four weeks in rented room in Harbin $250.
Two weeks in Beijing (family’s house) $0.
One week in rented room in Harbin $65.
One week in Beijing (family’s house) $0.
Two weeks in rented room in Harbin $125.
Subtotal: $574.

FEES
Two month library pass for foreigner, Tsinghua University $180.
Two month library pass for foreigner, Beijing Normal University $188.
Three month library pass for foreigner, Harbin State University $58.
One month visitor pass for foreigner, Jewish Museum, Harbin $36.
Subtotal: $462.

Total $3,856.
The timeline below is appropriately detailed given the number of cities and archives visited. If you are traveling to one site the timeline will be much shorter as it’s not necessary to detail your daily activities.

**Timeline/Action Plan**

- **June 5**  
  Arrive in Beijing

- **June 6**  
  Depart for Harbin

- **June 7-16**  
  Archive work at center for Jewish studies/museum. In this time, confirm access to Harbin State University archives and connect with contacts there.

- **June 17-July 10**  
  Archive work at Harbin State University. Last week work with Russian Studies contacts to conduct interviews of emeriti faculty on Harbin Russian and Chinese life in the 1920s-1940s.

- **July 11**  
  Depart for Beijing

- **July 12-13**  
  Connect with Russian Studies faculty at Tsinghua and Beijing Normal Universities.

- **July 14-23**  
  Spend at least 4 days at each archive (depending on days of access and whether access to both has been fully provided).

- **July 25**  
  Depart for Harbin

- **July 26-30**  
  Continue archive work at Harbin State University given additional advice from Russian faculty in Beijing.

- **July 31**  
  Depart for Beijing

- **August 2-7**  
  Meet with Russian faculty at Tsinghua University to help with historical research, and do historical archive research to clarify any content questions found in research.

- **August 8**  
  Depart for Harbin

- **August 9-20**  
  Continue archive research with help of Russian linguistics faculty at Harbin State University.

- **August 21**  
  Depart for Beijing

- **August 23**  
  Return to United States