



2012 Public Defender Corps Fellowship Answers to Frequently Asked Questions

Thank you for your interest in the Public Defender Corps. Below are answers to frequently asked questions about the program. If you need further assistance concerning the Public Defender Corps program, please contact us at publicdefendercorps@equaljusticeworks.org.

If you have questions regarding the Southern Public Defender Training Center, specifically, please contact Ilham Askia, Program Director for the Southern Public Defender Training Center at ilham@thespdtc.org.

1) When will the application be available for 2012?

The online application will be available from August 15, 2011 to September 30, 2011 closing at 5 p.m. EDT. Late or incomplete applications will not be accepted. Please check the [Equal Justice Works](#) and the [Southern Public Defender Training Center's](#) websites frequently for more information.

2) Who can apply to the Public Defender Corps?

We will accept applications from 3rd year law students, recent law school graduates and attorneys with legal experience in indigent defense of less than 3 years.

3) How do I submit an application?

A link to the online application portal is available on the [Equal Justice Works Public Defender Corps website](#) and on [The Southern Public Defender Training Center's Public Defender Corps website](#). All parts of the application must be submitted using the online application portal.

If your recommender insists on mailing a sealed letter of recommendation, please have them send it to The Public Defender Corps, Equal Justice Works, at 1730 M Street NW, Suite 1010, Washington, D.C. 20036.

4) How long does it take to complete the application?

The answer varies with each applicant, but it does require a significant time commitment. Although the application period is open for approximately one month, the online application requires that you create a profile, upload your resume, upload/submit two



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letters of recommendation, and submit answers to five (5) essay questions describing your dedication to public interest law and/or public defense work.

5) What if I miss the application deadline?

Late and/or incomplete applications will not be accepted. You should start your application as early as possible in order to avoid being locked-out of the application system on the deadline of September 30, 2011 at 5 p.m. EDT.

6) How many fellowship positions are available?

If funding permits, we plan on hiring fellows for approximately 14 fellowship positions. If you apply this year and are not accepted, please apply again next year as the goal is to continue to develop the Public Defender Corps fellowship opportunities.

7) How many people apply for Public Defender Corps?

Over 476 people submitted applications to join the 2011 inaugural class of 18 Public Defender Corps Fellows. We expect to receive almost twice as many applications for the 2012 class, which currently may offer 14 Public Defender Corps Fellowship positions.

8) Are these paid positions?

Yes, Public Defender Corps Fellows will be hired through the Host Site public defender offices and will be paid a salary equivalent to that of a first year public defender in their respective host site offices.

9) How is the Public Defender Corps funded?

The Public Defender Corps is funded through a grant from the Bureau of Justice Assistance of the Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. Funding is also provided by partner defender organizations, private foundations, individual contributions and additional support from Equal Justice Works and the Southern Public Defender Training Center.



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10) Will Fellows be given a stipend or living allowance?

The Public Defender Corps does not provide a living allowance or stipend. All Public Defender Corps Fellows are full-time employees of their Host Sites. Benefits packages are established with each individual Host Site according to each host site office policies, which may vary county to county inside a single state.

11) Will Fellows work in the Host Site office for all three years?

Yes, Fellows will work as a public defender in their Host Site office for the duration of their Fellowship term of three years. After their fellowships, Fellows are encouraged to stay as full staff members within their public defender host site.

12) Will Fellows have to sit for the State Bar in the Host Site location?

Public Defender Corps Fellows are required to take the state Bar of their Public Defender office. Each applicant is encouraged to look at the different state Bar application rules, procedures and timelines for sitting for the Bar examination.

13) What happens if Fellows fail the Bar?

A Fellow that fails the Bar exam will follow the procedure of their given Public Defender's office in regards to new attorneys that have not passed the Bar.

14) Are the Host Sites only on the East Coast?

The Host Site locations are located in the northeast and southeast sections of the United States. Depending on funding, the goal is to expand fellowships and host sites in the future.

15) Is there a new class of Fellows selected each year?

Depending on funding, the Public Defender Corps hopes to accept Public Defender Fellows every year starting in 2011 for three-year commitments.



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16) What Host Sites are available for the 2012 Public Defender Corps program?

The selection process for the 2012 Public Defender Corps Fellowship host sites is currently underway and host sites will be selected by this Fall. As decisions are made, the exact host site locations will be posted on the [Equal Justice Works website](#) and on [The Southern Public Defender Training Center website](#).

Potential host sites for 2012 Public Defender Corps Fellows are located in Alabama, South Carolina, Georgia, Texas, Kentucky, Ohio, West Virginia, Pennsylvania and New York. The Equal Justice Works and SPDTC websites contain a list of [current host sites](#).

Applicants who advance to the semi-finals will be able to rank their host site preferences.

17) How do I rank my host site preferences and what happens if I do not want to be considered for a particular host site?

Only applicants who advance to the semi-finals will be able to rank their host site preferences. Host site selection will take place between the Fall of 2011 and Spring 2012 and we will post host site information as it becomes available.

18) How and when will I find out if I am a semi-finalist?

Depending on the volume of applications received, semi-finalists will be notified of their status via email during the late Fall to early Winter of 2011. Those who have not been selected as semi-finalists will receive notice of their status via email around the same time.

19) Is the training mandatory?

Yes, the SPDTC's Summer Institute and the follow-up weekend trainings are a mandatory component of the Fellowship. Fellows will be required to attend the 14-day SPDTC Summer Institute from July 28-August 11, 2012 and five (5) subsequent 2-day trainings every six (6) months for three (3) years. Through the SPDTC program, all Fellows will receive the skills needed to provide the highest quality representation to clients and imbue them with a commitment to indigent defense reform.



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20) How long is a Fellowship?

A Fellowship is currently 3 years.

21) Are judicial law clerks eligible for the Fellowships?

Yes, clerkships that end in the late Summer or early Fall are eligible to apply. However please note that you will have to make arrangements with your judge to attend a two-week training session in Birmingham, Alabama during the first two weeks of August, 2012.

22) Should I apply if I do not have any Public Defender experience either through internships, clinics, etc.?

Perhaps. While we consider candidates who have a demonstrated commitment to social justice, preference is given to those who have experience in public defense work, specifically work that involves indigent defense representation, criminal appellate work, capital defense, innocence projects, public defense clinics and human rights. Of [the 18 fellows who were selected for the first class](#), they had personal, professional or law student experience in the criminal justice field.

23) How will my application to Public Defender Corps affect my ability to apply for other Equal Justice Works Fellowships?

Your application for the Public Defender Corps will not affect positively or negatively your applications for other Equal Justice Works Fellowships. If you apply this year and are not accepted, please apply again next year as our goal is to continue to develop the Public Defender Corps.

24) What impact can Public Defender Corps have on my student loan debt?

Depending on your needs and situation, there are different options that you can take advantage of as a Public Defender Corps Fellow. Taking advantage of funds provided by LRAPs (loan repayment assistance programs) to make lowered payments on the IBR (income-based repayment) plan may pay off greater in the long run if one has a goal of seeking public interest loan forgiveness. While the John R. Justice Act's loan repayment assistance payments may be helpful while received, the program is subject to the



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availability of funds and funding for the program is dependent upon the discretionary funding process and budget negotiations. Moreover, awards received through your state agency under the John R. Justice program are considered taxable income.

There are several staff members at Equal Justice Works who are experts on loan repayment assistance and serve as national advocates for debt relief. Our Educational Debt Relief experts provide [information, resources and educational webinars](#) where you can obtain helpful information on educational debt relief. To learn more about how to take advantage of available educational debt relief, please contact us at EducationalDebt@equaljusticeworks.org.

25) What is the difference between the Public Defender Corps and the Southern Public Defender Training Center?

The Public Defender Corps (PDC), a new, three-year public defender fellowship program, is a joint initiative between Equal Justice Works and the Southern Public Defender Training Center. PDC will recruit and place new lawyers, also known as “Public Defender Corps Fellows,” in public defender offices in selected host sites.

The Southern Public Defender Training Center (the SPDTC) is an organization that provides support and training to public defenders with less than three years of experience who work throughout the South. As funding permits, the SPDTC will provide support to all PDC fellows as a part of an SPDTC’s unique training and mentoring model during their three-year commitment.

Both programs aim to recruit, train and support new public defenders who will provide client-centered representation and ensure high quality representation to individuals who cannot afford an attorney.