**Seven tips for a strong BFJE application**

The Balkan Fellowship for Journalistic Excellence is a fantastic opportunity. So how do you maximise your chances of winning a place on the programme?

Here are some tips, based on reviewing more than 300 applications over the past two years:

1. **Look at fellowship stories from previous years.** If a subject has been covered by the fellowship in recent years, it’s very unlikely it will be chosen again. At the very least, you’d need a radically new angle. Better to go for a different subject. (You can find previous years' stories online in the [programme archive](http://fellowship.birn.eu.com/en/fellowship-programme/fellowship-programme-programme-years-topics).)

2. **Be as specific as possible.** Don’t just say you want to look at a broad subject, say what in particular you want to explore. For example, not just “migration”, but “changes in migration between country X and country Y in the last five years”. And tell us *how* you plan to do it.

3. **Do your pre-research.** You're not expected to research your entire story but do as much as you can to give a sense of what you expect to show. A proposal that says “I want to find out what’s happening with X” is not as strong as one that says “I want to find out what’s happening with X and my research so far suggests this is the answer and this is why”.

4. **Tell us what’s new.** Make sure to include what’s new about your proposal, compared to other media reporting on the subject. What do you hope to reveal or highlight? Why will this be interesting/important to readers?

5. **Remember the investigative/analytical element.** Your story does not have to be a hard-core investigation but it should be more than just descriptive. It should show not just what's happening but *why* it's happening. Make clear what you will investigate or analyse — and how. For an investigative story, this might mean obtaining documents. For an analytical story, it might mean analysing data and/or talking to academic experts. But...

6. **Keep it journalistic.** The fellowship features seminars and mentoring and insists on the highest standards of accuracy but it is not an academic programme. It exists to help journalists improve their skills and produce a high-quality piece of journalism, not an abstract academic article. Your story should be accessible to a broad audience.

7. **Whatever happens,** **don’t be downhearted.** Every year there are more outstanding proposals than there are places on the fellowship. Don’t take it personally or regret the work you put in if you're not selected. The fellowship is such a great opportunity that it’s worth giving it your best shot. If your proposal is strong but isn’t chosen, you may be able to publish the story elsewhere.

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