



CRLA

**2026/2027
Postgraduate
Law Fellowship
Prospectus**



California Rural Legal Assistance, Inc.
Rural Roots, Justice for All.



Thank you for your interest in becoming a part of California Rural Legal Assistance Inc., also known as CRLA. This prospectus provides sponsorship candidates, including current or incoming third-year law students and recent graduates, with an overview of CRLA's services and instructions for applying for sponsorship with CRLA.

California Rural Legal Assistance, Inc. is an anti-poverty law firm with 17 field and satellite locations dedicated to dismantling unjust systems through community lawyering in California's historically rural areas. For over six decades, we have partnered with communities priced out of private legal representation to uphold civil rights in housing, employment, health, and public education. Building on a radical legacy rooted in the farmworker movement and the War on Poverty, CRLA continues to fight for the rights and prosperity of rural Californians through bold advocacy, systemic change, and a vision of thriving, empowered communities. CRLA's community-led legal services activate community power to achieve justice, ensuring our clients and partners have the tools to dismantle poverty, discrimination, and systemic inequities.

Our Vision: A just and equitable world where all communities prosper.

Our Mission: To dismantle unjust systems through community lawyering.

Our Values

Community Led: We listen to, respect and partner with our neighbors to shape our work, amplify their voices and unlock our community power.

Committed to Justice: We advance justice and honor dignity by fighting for fairness, empowerment, and systemic change alongside our clients, colleagues and community members.

Radical: We creatively and courageously challenge the status quo to transform things once viewed as radical into the expectation.

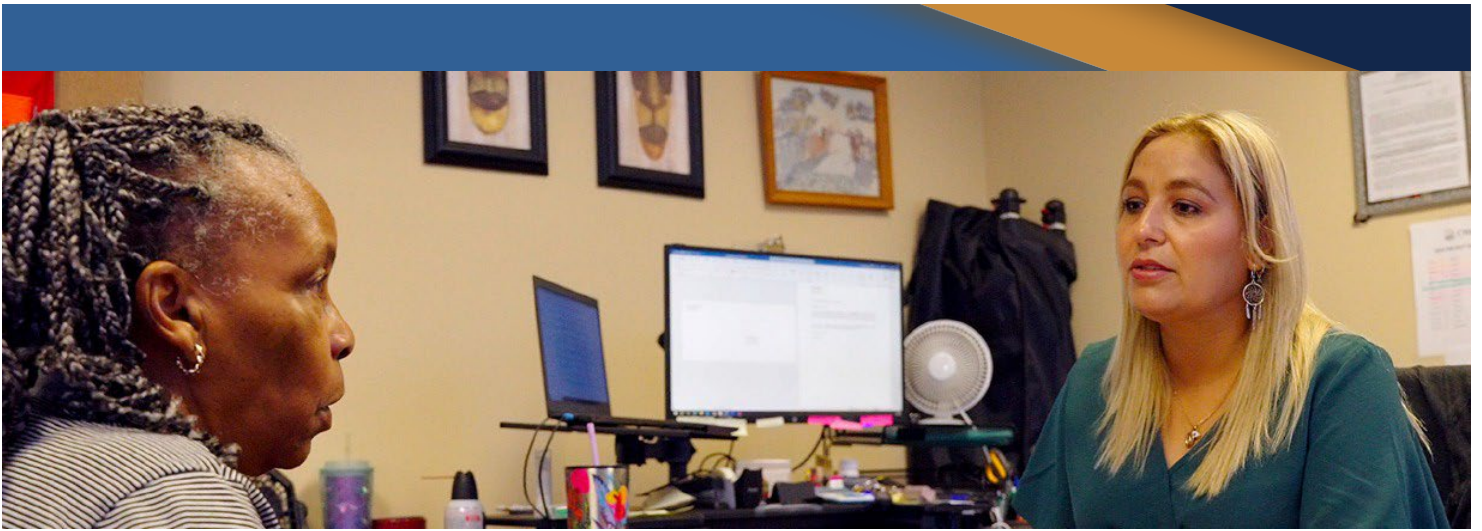
Compassionate: We foster a mutually supportive, caring environment for our clients, colleagues, and ourselves, so together, we can make a positive impact.

You can learn more about our organization by visiting crla.org. If after reviewing the prospectus and website you have questions about our work or the sponsorship, please email Director of Pro Bono and Strategic Partnerships Estella Cisneros at probonosupport@crla.org.

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CRLA Services & Priorities

This Prospectus is intended to provide potential postgraduate law fellows, current law students and recent law graduates with a brief description of CRLA's substantive work and an overview of the projects available for sponsorship with external funders.

Advocates at CRLA'S 17 Rural Justice Center offices provide legal services in Labor and Employment, Education, Housing, Public Benefits and Health. Below is a brief description of CRLA priorities and services.

Labor and Employment

CRLA represents hundreds of workers every year in administrative cases and workforce-wide lawsuits seeking unpaid wages. Over the course of the last year, we have recovered more than \$1 million in wages and penalties for workers subjected to unlawful working conditions in agriculture, landscaping, restaurants, and other businesses that are part of California's underground economy. CRLA has also successfully represented workers who have been subjected to termination and harassment because they complained about working conditions or were singled out due to their race, gender, or sexual orientation.

CRLA also monitors state and federal agencies charged with enforcing these important labor protections to ensure that low-wage workers, immigrants, and non-English speakers have access to complaint procedures

Education

CRLA provides legal assistance to children, youth, and their parents/guardians relating to school discipline, alternative school transfers and quality, discrimination, disparate school funding, language equity, school health and safety (including anti-bullying advocacy), special education, and robust complaint/redress protections.

Our clients include students of color, English Learners, migrants & immigrants, LGBTQ+ students, Indigenous children, students with disabilities, and court-involved youth. CRLA uses multiple strategies to achieve our clients' goals, including investigating unlawful and discriminatory school policies and practices, direct representation in administrative hearings and appeals, filing administrative complaints to enforce compliance with local policies and state and federal laws, litigating impact cases, engaging in limited policy advocacy, and conducting extensive community education and outreach.

Housing

CRLA works across the state to assist homeowners facing foreclosure as well as tenants in both private and subsidized housing who face eviction or substandard housing. CRLA advocates frequently intervene when tenants face illegal lockouts, illegal rent increases, utility shut-offs, issues with their security deposits, or find themselves involved in a foreclosure action. The housing advocacy we pursue extends to code enforcement matters, land use, and community planning, among other areas.

We fight to prevent discrimination and enforce fair housing and fair lending laws, and to increase the quantity and quality of agriculture worker housing, mobile home parks, housing for people experiencing homelessness, persons with disabilities, and housing assistance in the wake of a disaster.

Our work includes litigation, state and federal administrative enforcement proposals, tenants' rights advocacy, and community education strategies to ensure the provision of safe, accessible, and affordable housing throughout rural California.

Rural Health & Environmental Justice

CRLA provides direct legal services in areas that help to improve the health and well-being of low-income families. We view health broadly, considering the availability of direct health services and the impact of social and environmental factors on health outcomes for our client communities. CRLA provides legal advocacy for those facing barriers to health coverage and necessary medical services.

CRLA helps clients access public benefit programs that improve food security, provide supplemental income to people with disabilities and families struggling to make ends meet, and other programs that can positively impact health in our client communities.

We also work to address the impact of social and environmental factors on health outcomes for our client communities. CRLA collaborates with disadvantaged unincorporated communities to undo environmental injustices by advocating for pollution reduction as well as equitable planning and infrastructure investments so that families can thrive in a clean, healthy environment.

CRLA serves diverse communities across California, from Marysville to the U.S./Mexico border. Throughout our 17 office and satellite locations, every effort is made to provide services in a culturally competent and linguistically accessible manner. With 40 percent of Californians speaking a language other than English at home, bilingual and bicultural staff are an integral part of the CRLA strategy for serving the hardest to reach and most in need.





CRLA Programs and Initiatives

In addition to direct legal services carried out by a network of Rural Justice Centers, CRLA staff operate several state-wide programs and initiatives that address a wide range of issues.

Rural Justice Centers

Our Rural Justice Centers seek to eradicate poverty across rural California and address core legal needs of rural Californians. The RJC's are charged with providing legal services in CRLA's priority areas of Housing, Labor and Employment, Education, Health, and Leadership Development, with a combination of direct services and systemic advocacy. The RJC's provide services via a network of 17 field and satellite offices located throughout rural California. The RJC's also include regional collaborations, such as the Monterey County Medical Legal Partnership and Imperial County Health Consumer Alliance, and teams within our Housing Practice who focus on Eviction Prevention, Homeownership Preservation and Mobilehome Ownership Preservation.

Agricultural Worker Justice Program

The Agricultural Worker Justice Program protects and fights for the rights of California's agricultural workers. CRLA's work on behalf of farmworkers and other agricultural workers is a foundational aspect of the firm's advocacy with court victories that span over 40 years. In *Carmona v. Division of Industrial Safety* (1975), CRLA successfully ended the use of "el cortito," the short-handled hoe that crippled generations of farmworkers. More recently, in

Arias v. Raimondo (2018), the 9th Circuit ruled that an employer's attorney may be held liable for retaliation under the Fair Labor Standards Act, after that attorney attempted to orchestrate the worker's deportation in pending litigation where the worker had sued his employer for unpaid wages. AWJP provides direct legal services, represents workers in administrative hearings and files litigation on behalf of low-wage agricultural workers, including farmworkers and dairy workers. The Agricultural Worker Justice Program conducts significant education and outreach regarding employment rights, including health and safety, sexual harassment and wage and hour to agricultural workers all over California.

Unincorporated Community Justice Program

CRLA's Unincorporated Community Justice Program advances environmental justice in Disadvantaged Unincorporated Communities (DUCs) by reversing decades of exclusion from public decision-making. DUCs range from urban pockets that are excluded from cities, to more remote, densely settled rural communities. Residents in these communities often live without the most basic features of a safe and healthy environment—clean air, potable drinking water, sewer systems, safe housing, public transportation, access to healthy food, sidewalks, streetlights, and parks—due to decades of systematic neglect and exclusion from formal decision-making by city, county, and state governments.

UCJP is an interdisciplinary program designed to address and eliminate social, political, and environmental factors that negatively impact DUCs. Through legal advocacy, policy advocacy and community education, UCJP fights alongside community leaders to advocate for equitable planning and community investments, pollution reduction, guarantee fair representation, and build leadership capacity in DUCs so that residents can engage meaningfully in decision-making processes to improve their neighborhoods.

Indigenous Justice Program

In 1993, CRLA launched the Indigenous Farmworker Project to meet the needs of California’s growing Indigenous Mexican farmworker communities. Now known as the Indigenous Justice Program, it provides legal advocacy and educational outreach and supports leadership development in California’s rural Indigenous Latin American communities. A significant portion of California’s Indigenous populations are from rural areas in southern Mexico, and their population has drastically increased over the past two decades. It is estimated that today, one fourth to one third of California farmworkers are Indigenous Mexicans. Indigenous groups speak dozens of

distinct languages; among the most widely spoken in California are Mixteco, Zapoteco, and Triqui. For more than twenty years, the Indigenous Justice Program has partnered with Indigenous clients, communities, and organizations throughout California to develop sustainable solutions to the challenges they face.

LGBTQ+ Justice Program

In 2007 CRLA launched its LGBTQ+ Program, which has been nationally recognized for its innovative work in protecting the legal rights of rural LGBTQ+ Californians. Now known as the LGBTQ+ Justice Program, it continues to address the complex challenges that LGBTQ+ people face on account of their sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression, as well as other intersecting factors including disability, race, economic class, and immigration status. Since its launch, our LGBTQ+ Justice Program has provided trainings to increase cultural competencies and the substantive legal knowledge necessary to serve rural LGBTQ+ communities. These trainings have supported CRLA staff and extend to private attorneys, public agencies, school systems, and community partners.

Alongside community education, the Program delivers trauma-informed legal services across several areas of law, including (but not limited to): identity updates and



corrections, education and student rights, immigration, employment, and access to healthcare. Committed to breaking down barriers that cause entrenched poverty and systemic violence, the LGBTQ+ Justice Program partners closely with rural community leaders, LGBTQ+ community centers, and allied organizations and agencies to support and empower those most impacted.

Immigration Initiative

Launched in 2020, the Immigration Initiative was created after decades of work by many CRLA advocates to aid and represent rural immigrants, particularly victims of trafficking and other workplace related crimes. The Immigration Initiative prioritizes representation of cases that are at the intersection of immigration CRLA's other areas of work, often assisting immigrants who qualify for U visas, T visas, and Naturalization. We also provide services to Afghan parolees in the North Central Valley. The Initiative additionally focuses on creating community resources and outreach materials that help the immigrant community understand their rights and options when it comes to immigration. CRLA's Immigration Initiative has been particularly critical in helping in areas where there is typically little to no immigration representation.

Rural Reentry Initiative

A person's existing criminal records limit access to employment opportunities for a variety of careers. Potential employers can deny applicants based on unexpunged arrest records or convictions. A criminal record is a driver of multi-generational poverty. The influence of the criminal justice system extends beyond the point of incarceration and hinders entire communities unable to overcome intergenerational poverty. The Rural Reentry Initiative combats barriers to reentry by increasing the chances for individuals to expunge their records.

Expungement relief opens the doors to housing and employment opportunities for persons impacted by the criminal justice system. While expungement laws were meant to support reentry and civic participation, the legal process presents obstacles for those unfamiliar with the law and unable to afford a lawyer. The Rural Reentry Initiative provides legal services to dismantle unjust conditions that undermine the needs of the reentry community and empowers them to pursue goals that improve their well-being.





Current Projects

CRLA is particularly interested in matching fellows to a limited number of critical opportunities within the organization, but we are also open to new ideas proposed by candidates. The descriptions below are offered as projects that can be selected by candidates or departure points for candidates to refine, broaden, and develop in more detail. Candidates should only submit a project proposal that they are passionate about and genuinely interested in developing further.

We strongly encourage you to discuss your proposed project with CRLA’s Director of Pro Bono and Strategic Initiatives, Estella Cisneros, prior to submission. Please contact her by email at probonosupport@crla.org.

Environmental Justice and Equitable Investments

Fresno, Modesto, Tulare, or Salinas

In hundreds of rural communities throughout California, residents cannot breathe clean air or count on clean, affordable water. Many communities have water contaminated by nitrates, arsenic, pesticides, and other dangerous contaminants while at the same time paying more than 10% of their salary on undrinkable water and wastewater services. The same communities do not have and cannot afford sidewalks, streetlights, parks, or other elements of basic infrastructure.

CRLA seeks to develop legal and community-based strategies that address environmental hazards and the lack of basic infrastructure, including access to clean water, for migrant farmworkers and low-income, rural communities.

Improving Access to Justice for Rural LGBTQ+ Communities

Flexible – Modesto, Fresno, Madera, Marysville & Stockton Preferred

There are sizable, increasingly visible LGBTQ+ communities throughout the Central Valley, Central Coast, and agricultural regions of Southern California. CRLA partners with LGBTQ+ Centers and local leaders throughout these regions. However, with many LGBTQ+ legal resources centered in urban areas, LGBTQ+ communities in rural areas of California continue to face significant challenges that could be mitigated with stronger legal support. The LGBTQ+ Justice Program is interested in sponsoring fellowship projects to deepen and expand the Program’s legal services, with a focus on:

- Statewide practice area: name and gender marker corrections, education, employment, housing, immigration, or healthcare; OR
- Geographic area: expanding full range of Program services to additional counties in the CA Central Valley or Central Coast; AND/OR
- Intersectional community needs: tailored services to better support specific LGBTQ+ populations facing intersectional systemic barriers to justice, such as LGBTQ+ youth, LGBTQ+ immigrants, transgender & gender non-conforming individuals, or BIPOC LGBTQ+ communities.

Immigrant Rights in Rural Communities

Flexible with preference for Coachella or El Centro

Immigrants account for a large percentage of overall rural population. Yet, most immigration services are centered in urban/metropolitan areas. Leaving rural immigrant communities without access to immigration services, vulnerable to exploitation, and susceptible to misinformation. The Immigration Initiative is interesting in hosting a Legal Fellow to assist us in closing the gap in access to justice for immigrant rural communities through providing direct representation, community education, engaging in strategic advocacy, and building community partnerships.

Enforcing Minimum Wage Standards for Agricultural Workers

Coachella, Fresno, Oxnard, Salinas, or Stockton

Paying agricultural workers below the minimum wage is a common practice in the agricultural industry in California. Although agricultural workers can make above the minimum wage, many agricultural workers are not paid state or federal minimum wage. This is an industry-wide problem and allows growers, marketers and farm labor contractors to increase their profit while exploiting workers. However, many agricultural workers fear retaliation, preferring to keep their job rather than risk being fired for speaking up. CRLA hopes to work with and on behalf of agricultural workers to further develop strategies to address these issues on a workforce and industry-wide basis.

Agricultural Workers Standing Up Against Pregnancy & Disability Discrimination

Coachella, Fresno, Oxnard, Salinas, or Stockton

Many jobs in the agricultural industry are physically demanding, giving employers the false belief they can discriminate against pregnant and disabled workers by prohibiting their employment. The truth is pregnant and disabled workers are entitled to reasonable accommodations that enable them to safely and successfully perform their jobs and obtain the same benefits as other workers. They may also be entitled to job-protected leave to care for their health condition. Disabled and pregnant agricultural workers are too often denied these rights and face heightened barriers to access wage-replacement programs when they are unable to work due to their health. Many workers who assert these rights are illegally denied those accommodations, harassed in the workplace,

asked to resign, or terminated. CRLA seeks a fellow to combat pregnancy and disability discrimination, and help workers access their rights through community outreach, education, and legal advocacy.

Dairy Worker Project

Fresno or Stockton

The dairy industry is well organized and promotes a wholesome image. However, CRLA has exposed the other side of the dairy industry, which profits by exploiting workers with industry-wide illegal practices, including failure to provide overtime, rest and meal periods and medical attention to injured workers, as well as retaliation against workers for exercising their rights, to name a few. CRLA represents and empowers dairy workers through administrative cases and workforce-wide lawsuits holding the dairy industry accountable for its illegal practices. CRLA also engages in outreach and education to dairy workers relating to labor laws, including health and safety laws.

Temporary Foreign Worker Rights

Coachella, Fresno, Oxnard, Salinas, or Stockton

California relies upon the recruitment and hiring of several thousand foreign temporary workers to work in agriculture and other low wage industries under the H-2A and H-2B programs. Those workers have been subjected to exploitation and abuse, unlawfully charged recruitment fees, shorted wages, forced to perform work outside of the jobs they were hired for, and unlawfully denied the benefits of their contract and protections under state laws. The dramatic increase in H-2A workers has also raised issues with respect to mandatory housing and has resulted in production standards and job requirements that are far beyond prevailing practices. Additionally, there have been documented incidents of employers displacing U.S. workers to hire more vulnerable H-2A workers. CRLA seeks a fellow interested in developing and implementing CRLA's statewide approach to the expanded use of H-2A workers. This would include development outreach, advocacy with state and federal agencies, individual representation, and impact litigation.

Fighting Farmworker Sexual Harassment

Coachella, Fresno, Oxnard, Salinas, or Stockton

Sexual harassment and violence against is prevalent in the agricultural industry. It is estimated that 80% of agricultural workers are victims of some form of sexual harassment in the workplace. In many cases, agricultural workers do not know where and how to report sexual harassment. CRLA is a leader in fighting against sexual harassment for agricultural workers, recovering millions for farmworker women fighting against sexual harassment and assault. CRLA seeks a fellow who can work on education, outreach and legal advocacy for brave agricultural workers fighting back against sexual harassment in the workplace.

Improving Agricultural Worker Housing & Community Conditions

Coachella, Fresno, Oxnard, Salinas, or Stockton

There is a link between dangerous housing conditions, inequitable community conditions and poor health outcomes in low-income, rural, immigrant communities. CRLA seeks to improve these living conditions for agricultural workers, their families and communities through litigation, policy advocacy, education, and coalition partnerships. CRLA seeks a fellow who can work alongside and on behalf of agricultural workers in these advocacy spaces.

Language Justice for Indigenous Communities

Lamont, Fresno or Oxnard

The population of Indigenous immigrants residing and working in California has increased drastically over the past two decades. However, Indigenous individuals consistently face significant obstacles when attempting to access services and assert their rights before government agencies and other providers—particularly due to language barriers. Indigenous people often speak their native languages, which are entirely distinct from Spanish; the lack of access to culturally and linguistically appropriate services further marginalizes these historically exploited communities. CRLA seeks to enforce Indigenous community members' rights to language access in healthcare, schools, and public agencies—including

courts, police departments, and local/county/state government—through strategic advocacy, litigation, and community outreach.

Language access in courts

Navigating the judicial system can be a challenging experience, particularly for pro se litigants and people who speak non-dominant languages. Some courts have resorted to the practice of using technology—rather than trained interpreters or translators—to address the need to provide language services to non-dominant language speakers seeking to access the courts. However, relying on this type of technology by itself can be highly detrimental to certain individuals, as it entails a number of risks, including accuracy issues, cultural and contextual gaps, systemic bias, and security and privacy concerns, among others. CRLA is investigating the use of this type of technology with the hope of understanding its scope and its potential impact on Indigenous peoples.

Naturalization Clinics

Naturalization can represent stability and access to opportunities and benefits in the United States. However, language barriers can result in major hurdles to become a US citizen, including difficulty understanding the requirements, completing the necessary forms and preparing for the interview. CRLA seeks to increase access to apply for naturalization for monolingual Indigenous language speakers who are lawful permanent residents and qualify for the English language exception due to their age. Services include community legal education, naturalization application assistance, civic exam study guides in community-appropriate languages, pre-interview preparation sessions and accompaniment to client's citizenship interviews with qualified Indigenous languages interpreters.



Becoming a CRLA Sponsored Fellow

CRLA seeks to sponsor law fellows who demonstrate a strong commitment to working with rural Californians and addressing the primary issues that affect their lives. CRLA offers sponsorship for applications to law foundations and law school fellowship programs.

CRLA has sponsored and hosted fellows from a wide range of foundations and law schools including but not limited to:

- Berkeley Law Foundation
- Equal Justice Works
- Stanford Public Interest Law Foundation
- Ralph Abascal Memorial Fellowship (UC Law – SF)
- Loyola Law School Post-Graduate Public Interest Fellowship
- Skadden Foundation

The CRLA interview and selection process is completed prior to beginning the application process with the fellowship granting organizations and and/or law schools. Materials are reviewed and discussed internally with primary consideration of the fit between the proposed project and current CRLA program areas and need, in addition to the strength of individual candidates.

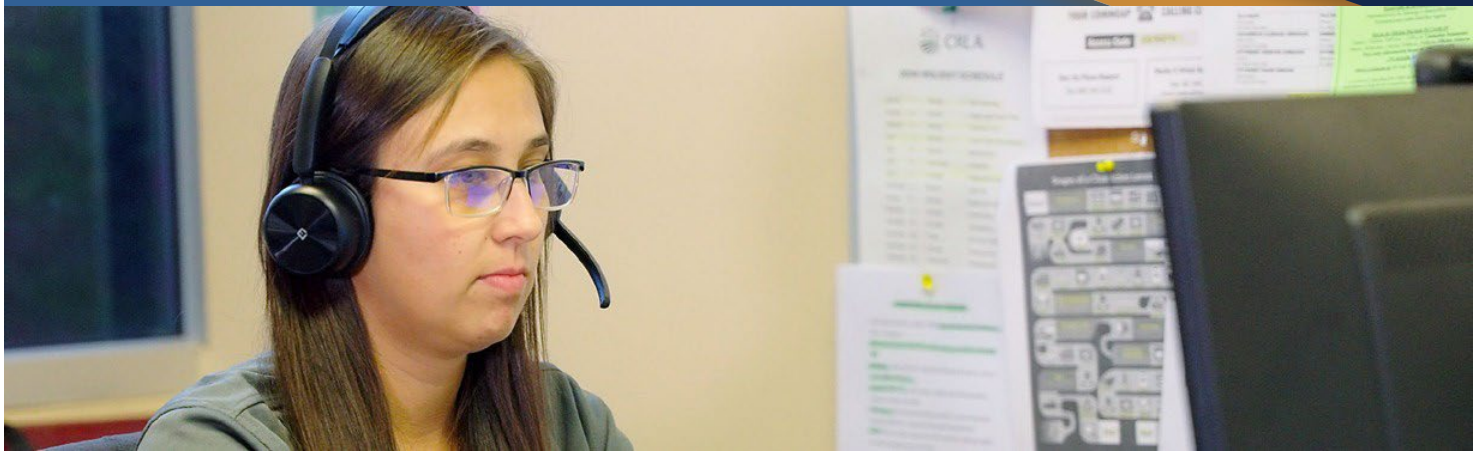
The most promising candidates will be invited to participate in a remote interview with the CRLA Selection Committee in late July through

early August before receiving a final sponsorship decision.

Once an offer for sponsorship is made, the candidate will have one week to accept or decline an offer before an alternate candidate is considered. Upon acceptance of an offer for sponsorship, the chosen candidate will work closely with a supervising attorney to finalize the project description and to assist with the completion of the official fellowship applications, starting in the fall.

Salary, Benefits and Long-term Employment

If the applicant's project is ultimately funded, the fellow will join CRLA and be eligible for CRLA's Attorney salary scale set forth in the current Collective Bargaining Agreement as well as a generous benefits package which includes 100% employer-covered medical, dental, vision, life, and short & long-term disability insurance for employees and up to 50% for dependent coverage; a 401K retirement plan with CRLA contribution effective immediately; up to \$8,000 in law school loan reimbursement assistance; 15 days of sick leave, 15 paid holidays, and 15 – 20 paid vacation days. Fellows would also be eligible for up to 10 weeks of bar leave and interest-free loans for salary replacement, subsequent bar exam registration costs, and professional bar review courses should they not pass a California bar exam taken before joining CRLA. Finally, Fellows who successfully complete their fellowship will be strongly considered for long-term employment with CRLA.



Application Guidelines

Interested candidates, including rising or current third- year law students and recent graduates, should submit all the following materials by **Monday, July 20, 2026**, via email to probonosupport@crla.org.

We strongly encourage you to discuss your proposed project with CRLA’s Director of Pro Bono and Strategic Initiatives, Estella Cisneros, prior to submission, by email at probonosupport@crla.org.

▪ **Cover Letter (1 - 2 pages)**

- In your cover letter tell the committee why you are interested in working with CRLA.
- Identify the external funding sources, such as law foundations, you are interested in applying to (e.g. your law school, Equal Justice Works, etc).
- Based on your knowledge of the organization and your proposed project, highlight the relevant skills and experiences that you will bring to CRLA.
- Describe what motivates you to work in public interest law.
- Explain your motivation to work in a rural community. Describe any experiences you have had working or living in a rural community.
- Identify any challenges you anticipate as part of working or living in rural California.
- If more than 1 office location is available for your chosen project, please indicate your office placement preferences and any other geographical restrictions that impact your preferred office placement.

▪ **Project Description (1-2 pages)**

- In two or three paragraphs describe your area of interest and the parameters of your proposed project. Be sure to identify how your project is tied to the CRLA priorities and program areas listed above.
- In one or two paragraphs, describe the intended goals and outcomes of your project. The selection committee is looking for projects that will have concrete, measurable outcomes. One way to think about this is to ask what an outside observer would see one year after the project is implemented.
- Be specific as to the location of beneficiaries and include some concrete measures of your success (e.g., local policy change, improved worker health, the establishment of a community training program, etc.)

▪ **Current Resume (including two references)**

Please note we currently **don’t** offer any fully remote fellowship projects or placements. This means the fellow is expected to work in/near a CRLA office 5 days a week other than travel required for the project.

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For more information and resources, visit
<https://crla.org/law-fellowships>