

Bonner Application **Roadmap**

One of the most important pieces of the Recruitment and Selection process is crafting a Bonner application that is inclusive and also effective at distinguishing students who would be a good fit for the program. This roadmap was designed to help you put together a comprehensive Bonner application that meets the needs of your program and can help you effectively select a new cohort of committed Bonners. This resource was drawn from compiling resources from Bonner applications from ten different Bonner Scholar and Leader programs (Brown University, Guilford College, Mars Hill University, Middlesex County College, Rutgers-Camden, The College of New Jersey, University of Tampa, University of Richmond, Ursinus College, and the College of Charleston). It is made so that you may tailor and edit each piece of the application to fit the needs of your program.

This roadmap tool is split into five sections that mirror the five conventional components of a Bonner application:

- I. Information about the Bonner Program**
 - II. Applicant's Personal Information**
 - III. Short Answer Questions/Essay**
 - IV. Letters of Recommendation**
 - V. Analysis.**
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I. Information about the Bonner Program

The first part of your Bonner application should include a short introduction to the Bonner program, as well as its expectations and program benefits. Though this introduction can link back to the Bonner program page on your campus website (or Bonner Foundation website) for more details about the program, it is important to include some kind of background knowledge on the application so that applicants understand what they are applying for. This section is ordinarily a page long, including the following components.

- What is the Bonner Program?
- Expectations
 - 300 hour time commitment, 8-10 hours per week
 - Participate in two summers of service
 - Attend and engage in training, education, and reflection multiple times a month
 - Maintain good academic standing
 - Log Hours on the Bonner Web-Based Reporting System (BWBRs)
 - Participate in Campus-Wide Service Days
- Program Benefits
 - Membership in a nationally recognized program
 - Financial package
 - Federal Work Study Stipend
 - Covers student's full cost of need
 - Scholarship
 - AmeriCorps Education Award (if applicable)

- Participation in national conferences
 - Leadership development
 - Community of peers, passionate about service and social justice
 - Mentorship of staff and faculty
 - Skill and leadership development
 - Networking opportunities
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II. Applicant's Personal Information

The Bonner context is most often followed by questions about the applicant. The following questions are common among nearly all Bonner applications, though additional questions may be added based on necessary details to qualify for each Bonner program.

- Name
 - Address
 - Cell Phone Number
 - Email
 - High School
 - GPA
 - Financial Aid (if applicable)
 - Expected Family Contribution (EFC)
 - Federal Work Study (FWS) Eligibility
 - First Generation College Student
 - Ethnicity/Race (optional)
 - Gender (optional)
 - Languages (optional)
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III. Short Answer Questions/Essay

The Short Answer portion is the largest component of the Bonner application and often provides the most insight as to each applicant's motivations and fit for the program. In order to choose the questions for your application, consider the priorities of your Bonner program and what attributes are necessary for a Bonner to thrive that environment. In order to help with forming application prompts, below are seven categories of questions, compiled from real Bonner applications in the network. These seven categories represent the most common themes that application questions fall within:

- *Ethic of Service*
- *Social Justice/Issue Focus*
- *Knowledge of Bonner Program*
- *Diversity and Identity*
- *Personal Growth and Reflection*
- *Community-Building*
- *Academic-Service Integration.*

Consider adapting some of these questions to form the short answer portion of your Bonner application. Applications typically include 3-6 short answer questions, dependent on word limitations for each question.

Ethic of Service:

- Please describe a past or current volunteer experience and what you learned through your participation. If you have not volunteered or performed service in the past, please explain service that you would like to do in future and what you hope to gain from it?
- If applicable, please describe any civic engagement or community service projects, initiatives, or advocacy efforts you have led and your role in the process (e.g., spearheaded letter writing campaign to request installation of more trash receptacles in a neighborhood park to cut down on littering; organized a book drive to donate books for a local youth outreach center).
- Describe in detail one experience in community service or activism in which you spent a significant amount of time and which you found particularly rewarding. Describe this activity in detail, explaining what you did, why you did it, and how it made a difference in both your life and the lives of others.
- In prospective service leaders, we look for committed people who have shown dedication to community engagement in their lives. Please list your experiences in community service or activism in the following categories:
 - A. special one-time events and short-term service projects
 - B. ongoing weekly or monthly service and advocacy commitments
 - C. summer service experiences
- Recount an experience you had through service in the community that made you want to learn more about something. What did you want to learn and how did you go about it?

Social Justice/Issue Focus

- The Bonner program is for students who have a passion to build capacity for just communities. Bonners will focus their work on the issue areas of education, health, environment, economic justice, and the arts. Which area interests you most, and why?
- We are seeking applicants who are committed to working for social justice as well as engaging in acts of compassion and solidarity with community members who are in need. Choose a social justice issue (homelessness, education, immigration, literacy, etc.) that you feel strongly about. Explain why you chose this issue and tell us about ways you have been or would like to be involved in addressing that issue.
- What social, political, or economic issue/s in the world today are you most passionate about? Put another way, when you watch or read the news or simply live your life, what issue grabs your heart and head and won't let go? Why?
- Income inequality "is the unequal distribution of household or individual income across the various participants in an economy." Describe an instance of income inequality that you have observed, whether in the news, in your town, or otherwise.

- A homeless person on the steps of the library asks you for money. How do you respond?
- The Bonner Program is committed to the idea that students can change the world through service. What single social or public policy issue do you think is the most urgent crisis in your community and/or in today's society at large and why?

Knowledge of Bonner Program

- The Bonner program is a four-year, structured program designed to develop community leaders like you. Describe one of the Common Commitments or Cornerstone Activities from the larger Bonner network that particularly interests you and share your ideas for this area.
- Select one Common Commitment and share the ways in which it speaks to you the most. Describe what excites you about it, using either past experiences or the ways in which you would like to engage with it in the future.
- Civic engagement is "working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values, and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes." How can participation in the Bonner program help you achieve these outcomes?
- What unique skills/qualities/experiences do you think you can bring to the Bonner program? What do you hope to get out of the Bonner program?
- Ongoing program design and improvement is a key component of Bonner programs across the country. Bonner students make important contributions to the growth and development of their campus' program. What and how are you excited to contribute to the development of this program at [your university]?

Diversity and Identity

- As we enter into partnerships with community agencies to create a more just world, our identities play an important role in informing our work. Describe how you identify and how your understanding of your identities informs your approach to community engagement (race, gender, class, sexuality, ability, first-generation and/or immigrant status are all examples of identities).
- What does diversity mean to you? What will you bring to a diverse group? What do you hope to gain from a diverse group? What role does diversity play in service?
- Describe an experience where you worked with someone different from yourself, which can include differences in terms of age, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, religion, physical or mental disability, or other perspective. What did you learn from this experience?
- An appreciation for diversity in all aspects (ethnic, cultural, religious, sexual orientation, etc.) is prized as a strength of the Bonner Program and is the foundation of our community work. Explain why this would appeal to you and what you could offer to this emphasis.

Personal Growth and Reflection

- What motivates you to keep a positive attitude and accomplish your goals?
- What is your idea of “community”? Can service ever be selfless? Why or why not?
- Describe a difficult situation you've encountered in the last four years. How did you respond to that situation and what did you learn from that experience?
- Please describe three of your strengths and two of your areas for growth.
- How would you handle having a disagreement or conflict with your supervisor?
- Describe the talents, skills, sensitivity, and perspective you bring to service work.
- Balancing community engagement with your academic commitments can be challenging. Which aspects of the Bonner program commitment, as outlined in our letter, do you foresee as a challenge or obstacle for you if you were selected for this role? How might you overcome or address this challenge?
- Read the passage below and respond to the following question: What does bell hooks say about the passion for learning? What do you agree or disagree with, and why?

From: bell hooks, Teaching Critical Thinking, 2010

Thinking is an action. For all aspiring intellectuals, thoughts are the laboratory where one goes to pose questions and find answers, a place where visions of theory and praxis come together. The heartbeat of critical thinking is the longing to know-to understand how life works. Children are organically predisposed to be critical thinkers. Across the boundaries of race, class, gender, and circumstances, children come into the world of wonder and language consumed with desire for knowledge. Sometime they are so eager for knowledge that they become relentless interrogators-demanding to know the who, what, when, and why of life. Searching for answers they learn almost instinctively how to think.

Sadly, children's passion for thinking often ends when they encounter a world that seems to educate them for conformity and obedience only. Most children are taught early on that thinking is dangerous. Sadly, these children stop enjoying the process of thinking and start fearing the thinking mind. Whether in homes with parents who teach via model of discipline and punish that it is better to choose obedience over self-awareness and self-determination, or in schools where independent thinking is not acceptable behavior, most children in our nation learn to suppress the memory of thinking as a passionate, pleasurable activity.

Community-Building

- As a Bonner, you will be serving alongside fellow students who have likewise dedicated themselves to engaging with communities. Collaboration among Bonner Scholars is key to fostering our institution's mission of civic engagement. Describe an experience working in a group or team. How did your efforts contribute to the achievement of collective goals? Did the group encounter conflict? How did you work through it? What role did you play?

- Describe a time you were an active member of a civic community. What were your motivations for participating and how were you affected?

Academic-Service Integration

- How does service and civic engagement connect with your academic interests, your values, and your long-term goals?
 - If selected as a Bonner, how would you demonstrate good time management by balancing this commitment with your classes and other involvement?
 - Explain your major (or intended major, academic concentration, etc.) and its application to civic engagement to the executive director of a nonprofit community garden.
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IV. Letters of Recommendation

Though not a part of every Bonner application, some programs ask applicants to submit 1-2 letters of recommendation. This can be useful to gather insight about the applicant's background and skills, from an individual familiar with his or her character and community involvement.

Letters of Recommendation often include a short prompt to guide the letter and/or specific skills for the recommender to assess. You can find a few sample Reference Forms below.

Reference Forms:

- [Mars Hill University Bonner Scholar Program Reference Form](#)
 - [Middlesex County College Recommendation Form](#) (adapted from Rutgers University Bonner Program)
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V. Analysis

Though not formally written into a Bonner application, it is important to establish an evaluative strategy for reviewing and analyzing submitted applications as a part of the application design process. There are many factors that affect an applicant's fit with the Bonner program, including financial aid, diversity, and academic standings; however, the short answer component often requires the most analysis and provides the most insight into a student's commitment to Bonner and its values. Therefore, it is especially important to determine a way to evaluate the short answer questions critically, as well as the rest of the application.

One way to accomplish this task is to identify the attribute(s) being assessed by each short answer prompt and articulating qualities that allow an evaluator to assess the applicant's answer. View examples of this assessment-based approach from [The College of New Jersey](#). Taking this approach a step further, the University of Richmond not only articulated a central skill or quality being assessed by each question, they also crafted a rubric to be able to quantify each question. View their Bonner

application rubrics as an example for how you may be able to do this for your application questions as well.

After establishing an evaluative process, it is recommended that applications are reviewed by a Bonner recruitment team, comprised of Bonner staff, students, faculty, and community partners. This process normally ends in choosing a set of applicants to move on to the Bonner interview process.