Sofia Brandt - Columbia Business School MBA application

Philadelphia, PA · sofia.brandt.test@example.com · Applying to: Columbia Business School MBA, 2026-27

Fictional applicant written for this sample; her employers, volunteer group and recommenders are invented.

Program

- Full-time MBA, August 2027 entry, January (Regular Decision) round. Not applying to J-Term or a dual degree.

Education

- **Pennsylvania State University** - BS Finance, minor in Earth Sciences, May 2022. GPA 3.38.
- Spring 2020 semester GPA 2.71 (see Optional Essay). Every semester after that was 3.4 or above.
- Relevant courses: Corporate Finance (A-), Energy Economics (A), Financial Statement Analysis (B+), Statistics (B), Calculus I (B-).

Test

- GMAT Focus Edition (September 2026): 655 (Quantitative 82, Verbal 84, Data Insights 80). Second sitting; first was 615 in June 2026.

Resume

KEYSTONE SUNSHARE - Philadelphia, PA (Jun 2024 - present) *Community solar developer: 48 MW operating in Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Maryland, about 60 employees.*

Senior Associate, Project Finance (Jan 2026 - present)

- Own the financial models for 9 projects (41 MW) in development; present go/no-go recommendations to the investment committee.
- Ran tax-equity and debt diligence for a 3-project, 14 MW portfolio; closed $38M of financing in March 2026, two weeks ahead of schedule.
- Recommended abandoning a 5 MW project in Lehigh County after the utility's upgrade estimate rose from $0.6M to $3.1M. The committee agreed; we wrote off $410K instead of building a project with a negative return.
- Built an AI-assisted review of utility interconnection studies: a language model pulls conditions and deadlines from 200-page reports into a checklist, which an engineer then verifies. Review time fell from two days to about half a day per study.

Associate, Project Finance (Jun 2024 - Dec 2025)

- Rebuilt the subscriber-revenue model after New Jersey changed low-income subscription rules; it is now used for every new bid.
- Wrote Spanish and Portuguese subscriber materials with the outreach team; low-income enrollment on two Camden projects rose from 31% to 52% of capacity.

MARLOWE ENERGY ADVISORS - Pittsburgh, PA (Jul 2022 - May 2024) *Consultancy of about 35 people serving municipal utilities and rural electric cooperatives.*

Analyst

- Built rate and cost-of-service models for 6 municipal electric utilities; presented findings at two borough council meetings.
- Modeled a 20-year solar purchase agreement for a 9,000-customer cooperative; the cooperative signed it in 2023.

EDUCATION Pennsylvania State University - BS Finance, minor in Earth Sciences, 2022. GPA 3.38. Worked 20-25 hours a week as a campus dining shift supervisor.

ADDITIONAL

- Crew lead, Fairhill Weatherization Corps, Philadelphia (2023 - present, about 6 hours a month): lead Saturday crews that seal drafts and install insulation in older rowhouses; 70+ homes so far.
- CFA Level I: passed February 2025 on second attempt (failed August 2024).
- Languages: English (native), Portuguese (fluent; my mother is from Belo Horizonte), Spanish (intermediate).
- Interests: recreational volleyball (Wednesday league, team captain), long-distance train trips, making pão de queijo badly.

Short answer

What is your immediate post-MBA professional goal? (50 characters) Associate, energy infrastructure investing

Essay 1: Career goals (500 words)

Through your resume and recommendations, we have a clear sense of your professional path to date. What are your career goals over the next three to five years and what is your long-term dream job?

The hardest email I have written at work said: we should not build this. The Lehigh County project was mine. I had modeled it for eight months, walked the site, and met the farmer leasing us the land. When the utility's upgrade estimate jumped to $3.1 million, I reran the model four times hoping to be wrong. Then I recommended we walk away.

That project taught me how energy actually gets built. The panels are the easy part. What decides whether a solar farm exists is capital: who will lend, at what rate, against which risks. At Marlowe I

advised small utilities on what to buy. At Keystone I learned to build. What I want next is to understand capital at a larger scale.

In the next three to five years, I want to be an associate and then vice president at an infrastructure fund investing in distributed solar, storage and grid upgrades. Federal tax credits are being phased down, so the projects that survive will need sharper underwriting and new kinds of investors. I want to be one of the people deciding which projects get funded.

My long-term dream job is to lead a developer or fund focused on the places big developers skip: rust-belt towns, cooperative territories and low-income neighborhoods like the Camden blocks where our enrollment work doubled low-income subscribers. I grew up in Allentown, and I want the energy transition to reach towns like it, not just suburbs with good credit.

If fund roles are scarce when I graduate, my plan B is a development finance role at a larger developer or utility, which would still put me on the path to leading projects.

I need an MBA now for three gaps. First, finance beyond project models: portfolio construction, fund economics, and how investors think about risk. Second, leadership: I have led volunteer crews and diligence workstreams, but never a team that reports to me. Third, a network outside Pennsylvania, among investors and operators who think at a national scale.

Essay 2: Teamwork (250 words)

Describe a time when you were part of a team that faced a challenge. What was your role?

In early 2026, our 14 MW financing nearly stalled. The tax-equity investor questioned our panel degradation assumption, and our finance director wanted to keep it, arguing that the manufacturer's warranty supported it. I disagreed: our own operating data from 2023 showed faster degradation on two sites.

I asked for a half hour with him before the investor call, not during it. I brought the operating data, showed that the more conservative assumption cost us only 0.4% of returns, and argued it would buy credibility. He agreed to present both cases. The investor accepted the conservative case, and we closed two weeks early.

I also changed how we ran diligence. Our site technicians knew the most about degradation but had never been invited to finance meetings. I added them to weekly diligence calls, which surfaced an inverter issue that none of us in finance had seen.

Essay 3: Why CBS (250 words)

Why do you feel Columbia Business School is a good fit for you?

New York is where infrastructure capital is raised and argued about, and I want to learn from those investors during the school year, not only in the summer. I first visited my cousin in Astoria at fourteen. I still take the train up a few times a year, and each time I notice something new about how a city runs: the substations under sidewalks, the solar on Brooklyn warehouse roofs.

I am drawn to Climate Finance and to the Value Investing Program's discipline about margin of safety, which I learned the hard way in Lehigh County. The Tamer Center and the Columbia Climate School would let me work with people who think about energy policy, not only deal terms. I want to join the student energy and climate club and bring Keystone's practitioners to campus.

I would contribute a developer's view of what fails in practice. I would also love to organize a weekend weatherization day with a New York nonprofit, as I do with Fairhill.

Optional essay

In spring 2020 my father had back surgery and could not work for four months. I took extra dining shifts to help my family pay bills, and my GPA that semester was 2.71. Every semester afterward was above 3.4.

Recommenders

- **Daniel Okonjo**, Director of Project Finance, Keystone Sunshare (my direct supervisor since 2024).
- **Renata Feld**, Principal, Marlowe Energy Advisors (my engagement lead, 2022-2024).