Tips for Completing a Scholarship Application
Welcome and/or welcome back!

• Tips for writing a strong scholarship application

• Adjudication procedures

• Point you to some useful online resources
Scholarship opportunities

• Federal Scholarships
  • Natural Science & Engineering Research Council (NSERC)
  • Social Science & Humanities Research Council (SSHRC)
  • Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR)

• University of Manitoba Graduate Fellowship (UMGF)

• Research Manitoba (link)

• Online FGS Awards Engine

• Ask your department, advisor, and lab mates; they will point you to the opportunities that fit your situation
Your research proposal

• Write to a general audience

• Points you should hit
  • Motivation and purpose
  • Your ideas
  • Methods
  • Feasibility
  • Contribution

• Writing well
  • Write directly
  • Be organized (narrativize)
  • Find a victim helpful ear
    • Academic (advisor, lab mates)
    • Nonacademic
  • Ask for past examples
Reference letters

• Pick academics
  • They should be able comment on your academic work and potential
  • Confirm they can write you a strong letter

• Help your writers
  • Give them the information they need
  • Give them a list of the things that they could choose to write about
  • How can they support your proposal and application?

• Timing
  • Ask them early
  • Good letters take time to write
Other components

• Contributions
  • Explain your contributions
  • Do not rely on journal impact factors and the like to make your case – be explicit

• Research experience
  • Highlight your skill set
  • Techniques and methods
  • Explain how you will use your skillset
  • Skills set the horizon on innovation and creativity

• Relevant activities
  • Past and future opportunities
  • Connections to your career path
If I knew what a reviewer was looking for when grading applications, I would be better able to create a strong application.

How to reverse engineer a strong application.

Step 1: Read the instructions

Step 2: Read the Selection Committee Criteria to find what criteria reviewers will be looking for
- Read the selection criteria
- Determine if there is a rubric

Step 3: Ask colleagues and mentors to read your draft application early and ask them to provide feedback about clarity of how your ideas are being expressed. Ask them to provide a lot of feedback if possible.

Be ready to receive their feedback. It might hurt your ego, but your colleague is helping to strengthen your application by being critical.
Selection committee guide

Foreword

This document is a guide for members of the Vanier Canada Graduate Scholarships (Vanier CGS) selection committees of the three federal granting agencies: the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC) and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC). It describes the review process for members and chairs of these selection committees, as well as the policies, guidelines and deliverables that define each stage of the review process.

Members of the Vanier CGS selection committees are appointed from the Canadian and international academic communities, and are familiar with the mandate, structures and programs of the federal granting agencies. New members and those appointed from other sectors, should refer to Selecting the Appropriate Federal Granting Agency for more detailed information regarding federal granting agency mandates.

Although this Selection committee guide strives to be comprehensive, committee members may still have questions after reading it. Members are asked to direct all questions to the program administrator responsible for their selection committee.

Table of contents

1. Overview of the Vanier Canada Graduate Scholarship program
2. Roles and responsibilities
   2.1 Selection committee

### 3.1. Selection Criteria

Nominations are evaluated and selected based on the following three criteria, weighted equally:

- Academic Excellence
- Research Potential
- Leadership (Potential and Demonstrated Ability)

When evaluating nominations, both the prestige of the Vanier CGS and the stage and nature of the candidate's academic career should be considered.

The Tri-Agencies are actively engaged in promoting equity and diversity, as well as in decreasing unconscious bias in their review processes. To this end, the Secretariat has curated a list of resources for selection committee members regarding equity, diversity and inclusion consideration.

Members should base their reviews solely on the information included in the nomination.

Reviewers must assess productivity broadly (i.e., not just based on publications) and consider the applicant's context (e.g., career stage, leave history). The Tri-Agencies have signed the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA), which recognizes that scholarly outputs are not limited to published journal articles but can include a broader range of outputs. Reviewers are encouraged to include these in their assessments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criterion</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Sources</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic Excellence</strong></td>
<td>Academic Record, such as:</td>
<td>• Academic transcripts</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>◦ Transcripts</td>
<td>• Academic Background section—Common CV</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>◦ Duration of previous studies</td>
<td>• Personal Leadership Statement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>◦ Program requirements and courses pursued</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>◦ Course load</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>◦ Relative standing in program (if available)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institution comments</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Institutional Nomination letter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarships/award</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Common CV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(competitiveness, amount, duration and prestige)</td>
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1. Consider individual workstyles, contributions, commitments, and variations in disciplinary, community and cultural standards, ex. collaboration, teamwork and mentoring are important and valid contributions to research and to training highly qualified personnel.

Stories have a way of humanizing the activities that we do routinely. Those routine activities may actually be leadership activities that resulted in change.

All parts of your application provide you an opportunity to tell the true story of who you are as a scholar and a leader.

Tell the reader what you want them to know!

**Story**
A *story* is an account of imaginary or real people and events told for entertainment.
  - ‘an action story’

**Saga**
A *saga* is a story of heroic achievement, especially a medieval prose narrative in Old Norse or Old Icelandic.
- ‘a figure straight out of a Viking saga’
What types of things should be in a training expectation section of a scholarship application?

https://cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/50516.html
Questions for Each IDP Step

Self-Assessment

Trainee
Questions for conducting a self-assessment:

- Where am I now?
- Am I developing a variety of competencies across research, communication and transferable skills?
  - Which activities have I performed in relation to developing each skill?
  - Which skills are important for me to develop?
- What are my passions and values?
- Regarding professional development and networking opportunities:
  - What activities am I interested in or do I already participate in?
  - Who do I already know who can assist me with my career goals?

Mentor
Questions for assessing the potential and interests of the trainee:

- When I review my trainee’s skills, passions, values and established network, do I see any gaps, strengths or trends?
- What possibilities do I see to support my trainee’s development?
- Do I see any alignment with any other career paths?
- What resources, opportunities and networks could be valuable in my trainee’s development? Can I facilitate access to them? If not, who could?

Career Exploration

Trainee
Questions for exploring career opportunities:

- What careers are available to me, and which ones am I most interested in pursuing?
- What are the requirements for these careers? What skills do I have and which ones will I need to develop for pursuing my careers of interest? For each skill, do I show a “fit” or a “gap”?
- Are my passions and values aligned with each career and its activities?
- Could my networking activities be adjusted to pursue these careers?

Mentor
Questions to assist looking for appropriate career opportunities for the trainees:

- Does my trainee show a strong match with the careers they are exploring? Do I see potential for other careers?
- What are the job opportunity trends in the sector(s) of interest (academic and non-academic) of my trainee?
- So my trainee can further explore or pursue these career options:
  - What resources and experiences can I provide access to?
  - Who within my network of peers, collaborators, other partners and industries can I provide access to?
- Are there professional development opportunities available for my trainee to further explore career options or develop job-search skills?
Goal Determination

Trainee

Questions to help determine goals:

- Where do I want to go career-wise?
- What actions could I take to develop the skills necessary to pursue the career(s) I am interested in? How can I turn these into goals?
- How long will it take to accomplish these goals? In what order should they be completed? Should any be divided into smaller goals?
- Which networking activities should I prioritize?

Mentor

Questions to explore potential goals with the trainee:

- Are my trainee’s goals well thought-out, relevant to their career choices and aligned with their passions and values?
- Does my trainee correctly identify the skills needed to pursue their career(s) of interest?
- Which conferences and/or networking opportunities could benefit my trainee? Which ones does my trainee want to attend and explore further?

Plan Development

Trainee

Questions to outline a plan of action:

- Does my action plan define how I will reach my goals (as well as the objectives within each goal)? Are the components of my action plan SMART:
  - Specific?
  - Measurable?
  - Achievable?
  - Relevant?
  - Time bound?
- What will work best for me in my environment:
  - Explicit step-by-step plan?
  - A higher level plan?

Mentor

Questions to refine a plan of action:

- Has my trainee written goals and objectives that are SMART? Are they challenging but attainable? Are the timelines realistic?
- How can I support my trainee? How can I facilitate skills development?
- How can I encourage success in achieving their goals?
  - What mentorship can I provide?
  - What access to resources or experiences can I facilitate? (e.g. lab access, opportunities to make presentations)
  - Who in my network can help my trainee?
Plan Refinement and Implementation

Trainee

Questions to help review, revise and implement your plan:

○ What insights does my mentor(s) have?
○ How can I leverage my mentor(s) to identify and facilitate opportunities to develop skills, acquire experiences and expand my network?
○ How can I use my IDP and related discussions about it to support my progress toward my career goals, noting that the IDP is a living document and may evolve as I develop?
○ How will my mentor(s) and I use my IDP to track my progress? How often will we meet?
○ Do my mentor(s) and I both agree on my IDP?

Mentor

Questions to support the plan refinement and implementation of the trainee's IDP:

○ Based on my review of my trainee’s IDP, can I bring forward any insights?
○ What am I able to commit to in order to best support my trainee and facilitate the implementation of their plan?
○ How can I encourage my trainee? How can I manage expectations and increase their confidence to reach their goals that may evolve as they develop?
○ How will my trainee and I use the IDP to track progress? How often will we meet?
○ Do my trainee and I both agree on this IDP?
What is leadership?

Finish this statement:
A great leader is successful because they....

Or fill in this blank...
The worlds best leaders _(insert a phrase here)_____ better than anyone else in the world.

What does academic literature say about leadership?

Definitions of leadership abound. For example, an often cited critique of this messy field identifies more than two hundred separate definitions of leadership (Rost, 1993). In general, however, most leadership theories fall into one of two broad approaches: trait-based or process-based (Northouse, 2009).

Leadership abilities may have been demonstrated through participation in extra-curricular activities including volunteer or other community involvement, including sports or the arts, and/or previous work experience.

- What did you do in these areas that went above and beyond participation to become leadership?
Take a moment to think about your leadership story.
- Write down bullet points about your story.
- Review your list, start to reorganize the bullet points into themes.
- Reflect on the identified themes, start articulating how those themes might inform your leadership philosophy or leadership statement.

An interesting leadership story...
• Do you have a leadership philosophy or a perspective about what good leadership does well?

• What issue/problem did you see? What did you do to address it? Why was it important for you to work on this?

• How have you created opportunities to stimulate change? Who did you lead? What impact did you have on others? How have you fostered your ability to lead others?
Sex- and Gender-Based Analysis (SGBA) is an analytical process used to assess how diverse groups of women, men, girls, boys and gender-diverse people may be impacted by Government of Canada initiatives. [https://cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/50837.html](https://cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/50837.html)

- It might be challenging to identify how SGBA is relevant to some research fields, but NSERC says that…
  - “Not all NSE research has potential sex, gender and/or diversity dimensions, but these dimensions are more pervasive than one might think.”

Here are some interesting resources to consider:

This is an interesting perspective worth considering:
- “Gendered innovations: harnessing the creative power of sex and gender analysis to discover new ideas and develop new technologies”

If after reading these documents, you have no idea how to move forward, I suggest that you speak with your advisor or a trusted mentor in a national academic society to seek their advice on the topic. They both should be familiar with how to articulate your disciplines perspective on SGBA.
More information from NSERC & SSHRC

How to incorporate Equity/Diversity/Inclusion considerations into a scholarship or grant application, with specific examples (NSERC).

Overview of NSERC’s review process.

The journey of a SSHRC application.
Other tips for grant writing

Universities want their students to succeed, and many have information and advice for writing compelling applications.

University of Manitoba, McGill and Dalhousie all have such resources.

Some of the advice is mechanical (how to navigate the submission site, reminder to check your spelling) but there also tips/sources on improving your writing.

The information will also be useful for preparing grant applications, which some of you will undertake going forward.
What does success look like?

NSERC Awards Database
SSHRC Awards Search Engine
CIHR Funding Decisions Database
Research Manitoba Funding Decisions Database

All of these have titles, amounts, of successful scholarship applications. Searchable by institution and other parameters.

The CIHR Database also includes abstracts.
Alice: Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here? Cheshire Cat: That depends a good deal on where you want to get to.

Where do you want to get to?

Are you in graduate studies because of your passion for your subject?
Planning a career as an academic?
Planning a career in research outside of the academy?
Planning to use your specialized knowledge and skills to make the world a better place?

Your answer(s) to the above will inform the choices you make on your scholarship application.
Resources for those big picture questions

CIHR has information on putting together an Individual Development Plan: identify and establish career goals; identify short-term needs and strategies to improve your current performance; identify long-term career options for realize your goals.

AAAS has tools for evaluating skills/values/interests, using the self-assessment to set goals to prepare you for your career path(s).

VITAE has development planning tools, advice on CVs and how to present yourself and your research.
I know where I want to get to - how do I get there?

MITACS is a non-profit research organization that partners with academia/industry/government on training programs for industrial & social innovation.

MITACS offers training courses on:
Networking skills
Project and time management
Reconciliation and EDI
Communication skills
Career planning
R&D management
Leadership skills
Writing and presentation skills
Links (from NSERC)

NSERC advice & tips videos
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=St7LWVYA5tQ&list=PL6ox0GB7vXYlhaAY7mEqwmMqYK9TGCP1E&index=9

Other NSERC videos

NSERC incorporation of EDI
Links² (NSERC, SSHRC, Universities)

NSERC review process
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ftx9fg4h3mY

SSHRC application journey

From U of M
https://umanitoba.ca/research/ors/media/Grant_writing_May_Days_2015.pdf

From McGill

From Dalhousie
https://www.dal.ca/faculty/arts/research/external/Grant-WritingTips.html
Links³ (Awards databases)

NSERC AWARDS DATABASE

SSHRC AWARDS SEARCH ENGINE

SSHRC AWARDS RECIPIENTS

CIHR FUNDING DECISIONS DATABASE (includes abstracts!)

RESEARCH MANITOBA FUNDING DECISIONS DATABASE
https://gms.researchmanitoba.ca/funding-search/
Links\(^4\) (On individual development plans)

From CIHR
https://cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/50516.html
https://cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/51129.html
https://cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/50516.html

From AAAS
https://myidp.sciencecareers.org/?AspxAutoDetectCookieSupport=1

From VITAE
https://www.vitae.ac.uk/researcher-careers/career-management-for-researchers
Links$^5$ (MITACS)

MITACS training courses
https://www.mitacs.ca/en/programs/training/training-courses

MITACS workshop bundles (same content as above, links to register)
https://umanitoba.ca/graduate-studies/student-experience/graduate-student-workshops#mitacs-workshops
Getting help

- Information about scholarship opportunities available on the FGS Website (see FGS Funding, Awards, and Financial Aid)

- Check out the FGS Awards Engine

- Your department, advisor, and lab mates
Getting help

- Information about scholarship opportunities available on the FGS Website (see FGS Funding, Awards, and Financial Aid)

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- Your department, advisor, and lab mates

- FGS Awards Team (PDF)
Questions?