

# Vanier Canada Graduate Scholarships

## Demystifying the process

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<http://www.vanier.gc.ca/en/home-accueil.html>

<http://www.mcgill.ca/gps/funding/students-postdocs/students/vanier>



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# Outline

- Overview of the 2020 competition
  - selection of candidates by McGill University (GPS)
- Review process
  - what the reviewers are looking for; how they score the application
- Components of a winning application
  - how to assemble the pieces so that everything meshes together
  - leadership referees (2)
  - academic referee
  - proposal
- Writing help – Graphos/Skillsets/McGill Writing Centre

# Overview of the 2020 Competition Process

- Applications are initiated in one of two ways. Either:
  - the candidate informs the academic unit at the selected university of their intent to apply to the Vanier CGS competition; or
  - the university initiates the nomination process by contacting the candidate.
    - **Academic excellence - first class academic record**
    - **Leadership evidence of community involvement beyond academic excellence**
    - Success in peer-reviewed competitions (NSERC, CIHR, SSHRC)

# Overview of the 2020 Competition Process

- The nominating university sets its internal deadline.
- The nominating university performs its internal candidate-selection process and gives feedback (**Sept – Oct. 2020**).
- The nominating university forwards recommended nominations to the appropriate granting agencies by **November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020**
  - ❖ **GPS will notify nominated applicants of the outcome of internal review**
- The granting agencies perform their peer review process.
- The granting agencies forward their nominations to the Vanier [Selection Board](#).
- The Vanier [Selection Board](#) recommends Vanier CGS scholars to the three granting agency presidents.
- Successful candidates are notified of the competition results in Spring 2021.



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# Overview of the 2020 Competition Process

- Applications are prepared and submitted using the ResearchNet application system.
  - ResearchNet account
  - ResearchNet PIN
  - access to Common CV
- Therefore, **it is a priority to obtain PINs, and start Common CV.**
  - All supervisors know how to do this, use them as resource person
- The nominating university sets its internal deadline .
  - ***McGill GPS deadline: Sept 17, 2020, 20:00 (8:00PM) EST***
  - Application ***must be complete*** on ResearchNet by this date (including all reference letters)
  - ***Departments/Units will have earlier internal deadlines***

# Quota

- Vanier Secretariat awards Up to 166 scholarships are awarded annually
- McGill University Quota for 2020 Competition
  - CIHR 26
  - NSERC 14
  - SSHRC 13
- Most departments can submit 2 - 4 applicants to GPS (quota)

## McGill awards for the past 3 years

| Year      | CIHR | NSERC | SSHRC |
|-----------|------|-------|-------|
| 2017-2018 | 5    | 3     | 7     |
| 2018-2019 | 6    | 5     | 4     |
| 2019-2020 | 8    | 5     | 6     |

# Review process

## Selection criteria (weighted equally)

- Academic excellence, as demonstrated by past academic results and by transcripts, awards and distinctions.
- Research potential, as demonstrated by the candidates research history, his/her interest in discovery, the proposed research and its potential contribution to the advancement of knowledge in the field, the potential benefit to Canadians, and any anticipated outcomes.
- Leadership (potential and demonstrated ability), as defined by the following qualities:
  - Personal Achievement:
  - Involvement in Academic Life:
  - Volunteerism/community outreach:
  - Civic engagement:
  - Other

# 1. Academic excellence

Demonstrated by past academic results and by transcripts, awards and distinctions.

- Supporting evidence evaluated for this criterion:
  - Academic record (**institution transcripts**)
  - Choice of candidate (**academic unit's nomination letter**)
  - Scholarships/awards (**CCV**)
  - Duration of previous studies (academic background, CCV, institution transcripts and special circumstances)

## 2. Research potential

Demonstrated by the candidate's research history, his/her interest in discovery, the proposed research and its potential contribution to the advancement of knowledge in the field, the potential benefit to Canadians, and any anticipated outcomes.

- Supporting evidence to be evaluated for this criterion:
  - Scholarships/awards (CCV)
  - Duration of previous studies – ability to complete project within an appropriate time period (academic background, CCV, institution transcripts, referee assessments and special circumstances)
  - Academic training and relevant work experience (CCV, description of leadership and communication skills attachment and the referee assessments)
  - Contribution to research and development – publications, patents, reports and posters (CCV, research contributions attachment and referee assessments)
  - Research proposal – feasibility, merit and significance (research proposal)
  - Critical thinking, application of knowledge, judgment, originality, initiative, autonomy and enthusiasm for research (description of leadership and communication skills attachment, referee assessments and nomination letter)
  - Mobility: Students are instructed to include a strong and compelling justification as to why they have chosen the same/nominating institution to undertake their PhD. and are told that this will be assessed as part of the review process.

# Application Documents Requirements

## Personal Leadership Statement Document (2 pages max)

This document should present to the committee a clear statement of what challenges and opportunities have shaped your doctoral research.

When crafting your Personal Leadership Statement, consider the following points:

- What led you to doctoral research? How has your relevant life experiences and personal circumstances (may include administrative responsibilities, maternity/parental leave, childrearing, illness, cultural or community responsibilities, socio-economic context, or health-related family responsibilities) shaped your academic, research, leadership choices, challenges, and successes.
- How has your personal life driven you to share and disseminate your research?
- How have you created opportunities to make change, and how have you overcome obstacles to your vision?

# Application Documents Requirements

## Personal Leadership Statement Document (con't)

- How have you fostered your ability to lead others, and how have you leveraged that skill?
- Why have you chosen to undertake your PhD at the nominating institution? How does your nominating institution provide an environment that nurtures both your academic and your leadership skills?

Leadership can take many forms. When crafting this statement, be sure to outline not just your accomplishments for the committee, but how those accomplishments required you to leverage your leadership skills to achieve your goals.

Your academic transcript, your CCV and your reference letters will provide details of your commitments and accomplishments, but this essay gives you the opportunity to present the overarching narrative about your life, leadership accomplishments and research goals for the selection committee.

# Application Documents Requirements

## Leadership Reference Letter

- The Vanier CGS application package requires **two** letters of reference for the Leadership criterion. Having two letters will allow the candidate to include a broader spectrum of referees, which will in turn provide the committee more information when assessing the Leadership selection criterion.
- The leadership letters are to be uploaded by the applicant in the via ResearchNet. Applicants upload one letter at a time under the same task. The letters are a **maximum of two pages each**. For more information on this task, please refer to the instructions page on Vanier [website](#).

# 3. Leadership (potential and demonstrated ability)

- **Personal achievement:**
  - professional involvement in dance, arts, music, etc.;
  - significant artistic achievement;
  - recognized athletic achievement, especially in a leadership role;
  - entrepreneurial achievement (startup company); and/or
  - foreign travel and study.
- **Involvement in academic life:**
  - mentoring/teaching;
  - supervisory experience;
  - involvement in student government and in the university community, including committees, teams, senate, boards, ethics committees, etc.;
  - project management;
  - roles in professional societies; and/or
  - organization of conferences and meetings.
- **Volunteerism/community outreach:**
  - community involvement in charity or not-for-profit organizations.
- **Civic engagement:**
  - parliamentary page positions and internships;
  - political activity; and/or
  - elected positions.
- **Other**

# Evaluation of Leadership

- **Leadership activities/accomplishments** - impact (CCV, description of leadership and communication skills, leadership reference letter, nomination letter, referee assessments and special circumstances attachment)
- **Mobility**: this award provides opportunities for research trainees to study, conduct research, and engage in knowledge mobilization in a national and international context. Candidates should explain the rationale behind their proposed research institution with this in mind. (nomination letter, research proposal and Personal Leadership Statement)
- **Participation in publication writing** (CCV, research contributions attachment and referee assessments)
- **Professional and extracurricular interactions and collaborations** with supervisors, colleagues and peers (CCV, description of leadership and communication skills, leadership reference letter and referee assessments)
- Those who have volunteer/professional experience outside of their domain of study should provide context that demonstrates how their contribution went beyond the expectations of the work/volunteer position.
- **Overall quality and presentation of the nominating institution**



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# Evaluation of Leadership Potential

There are **four opportunities** in the nomination package for a Vanier CGS candidate to highlight their leadership potential:

- Students must list their previous leadership activities/accomplishments according to the categories listed under [Selection Criteria](#) in the program description. Students are also asked to write **a self-assessment detailing the impact of their activities and accomplishments**, and how they judge themselves to be a potential Vanier CGS recipient and a leader in their research community. [2 pages]
- The student's **referees** are asked to comment on the student's leadership potential and to elaborate on the impact of the activities and accomplishments mentioned in the self-assessment.
- The **leadership reference letters** should be written by someone who knows the student in a non-academic capacity. It should describe how the student has demonstrated, and will potentially continue to demonstrate, leadership. [2 pages]
- The Vanier **nomination letter** submitted by the university (unit) should also highlight the student's leadership qualities—especially if the nominee is an international student, as some context may be required. The university must also address how it will support the nominee to help them fully develop their leadership potential.



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# Reference Letters (Academic)

## Instructions for Referees Page on Vanier CGS Website

All Vanier nominations must have two referees. Vanier has a information on their website that is intended to provide instructions for referees. The page outlines the assessment criteria for the Vanier program and other information useful for the referee.

- Solicit referees
- Choose referees judiciously
- Referees use the format given to them by ResearchNet
- Provide them at the very least with a leadership CV so that they can comment on your accomplishments
- If possible, provide them with a completed application so that they are aware of the significance of the project and can comment knowledgeably on your research environment
- Please inform referee they may be contacted by GPS if there is a need to have the letter revised i.e. spelling, grammatical etc.



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# Reference Letters (Leadership)

How to choose the person -

- Someone who has not been involved with you academically (but can be an academic)
- Someone who knows you very well, and can comment on multiple aspects of your life
- Someone who has credibility and stature in the community

The letter –

- Two-pages in length, original signature
- If possible, on letterhead
- Not confidential
- Applicant uploads it on ResearchNet

# Research Proposal

- Provide a detailed description of your proposed research project for the period during which you are to hold the award.
  - Be as specific as possible (without using jargon)
  - Provide background information to position your proposed research within the context of the current knowledge in the field (use a cartoon or figure if necessary)
  - State the objectives, hypothesis and research question.
  - Outline the experimental or theoretical approach to be taken (citing literature pertinent to the proposal), the methods and procedures to be used, and the contribution of the project to the advancement of knowledge.
- Your research proposal should be readable by someone with a background in the discipline but no specialized knowledge of the particular field of research.
  - It has to have a WOW factor for the Vanier Selection Board and be understandable



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# New Application Documents Requirements

## NEW - Doctoral Studies Timeline form

- Applicants are now required to submit the [Doctoral Studies Timeline](#) form along with the Official Transcripts.

## NEW - Sex- and Gender-based Analysis Plus (SGBA+)

- In order to ensure funded research is impactful and relevant to the diversity of the population, applicants are required to systematically examine how differences in identity factors (such as sex, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, age and mental or physical disability) affect the outcomes of research and the impacts of research findings. Applicants are now encouraged to take SGBA+ principles into account in their proposed research (see [Application/nomination instruction - Task 10](#)).

## Reminder - Lay Abstract - Research respectfully involving Indigenous communities:

- If your proposed research respectfully involved Indigenous communities, please include “This research respectfully involves Indigenous communities” at the beginning of your lay abstract ([see agency web page for important detailed instructions](#))

# Academic Excellence

| Criterion  | Indicator   | Source   |
|--|---|--|
| <p>The candidate's research history and the impact of their activities to date in their area(s) of expertise to date and in the communities associated with their research are important indicators of their potential as research leaders of tomorrow.</p> <p>Reviewers should consider the sphere of influence of candidates relative to others along the following continuum of expanding impact:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Research program</li> <li>•Canadian university</li> <li>•Research community</li> <li>•International research community</li> <li>•Society at large</li> </ul> <p>In the case of those with non-traditional academic paths, consideration should be given to standards of research productivity, etc. for their level of experience/qualifications relative to a PhD student.</p> | Past Academic Results and Transcripts                               | •University transcripts  |
|  | Institutions comments   | •Institutional Nomination letter   |
|  | Scholarships/award (competitiveness, amount, duration and prestige) | •Common CV   |
|  | Duration of previous studies  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Academic Background section—Common CV</li> <li>•University transcripts Research Program</li> <li>•Personal Leadership Statement</li> </ul> |

# Research Potential

| Criterion  | Indicator   | Source   |
|--|---|--|
| <b>Research Potential</b><br>Demonstrated by the candidate's research history, his/her interest in discovery, the proposed research and its potential contribution to the advancement of knowledge in the field, and any anticipated outcomes. | Academic training and relevant work experience (co-op included)   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Work Experience section – Common CV</li> <li>•Personal Leadership Statement</li> <li>•Referee assessments</li> </ul> |
|  | Contribution to research and development  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Research contributions</li> <li>•Referee assessments</li> <li>•Common CV</li> </ul>                                  |
|  | Research Proposal (feasibility, merit and significance)   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Research Proposal</li> </ul>   |
|  | Critical thinking, application of knowledge, judgment, originality, initiative, autonomy, enthusiasm for research | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Personal Leadership Statement</li> <li>•Referee Assessments</li> <li>•Institutional Nomination letter</li> </ul>     |

# Leadership

| Criterion   | Indicator                       | Source   |
|---|---------------------------------|--|
| <p><b>Leadership (Potential and Demonstrated Ability):</b> Given the prestige of the Vanier CGS program, this is an important criterion that has to be assessed in an indirect manner, since there is no opportunity for the selection committee to interview candidates.</p> <p>When assessing the leadership criterion, consider how the nominee has gone above and beyond the expected norms in order to overcome obstacles, foster others, spearhead change, or otherwise demonstrate Leadership.</p> | Personal achievement            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Impactful involvement and achievement in professional programs/association such as sports, arts, science, business etc</li> <li>• Entrepreneurial achievement (start-up company, establishing an NGO or charitable initiative, establishing arts/sports based festivals/competitions);</li> <li>• Foreign study</li> </ul>  |
|   | Involvement in academic life    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• mentoring/teaching;</li> <li>• supervisory experience;</li> <li>• involvement in student government and in the institution community, including committees, teams, senate, boards, ethics committees, etc.;</li> <li>• project/lab management;</li> <li>• roles in academic/professional societies;</li> <li>• organization of conferences, meetings, courses etc.</li> </ul> |
|   | Volunteerism/community outreach | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• involvement in charity or not-for-profit organizations.</li> </ul>  |

## Leadership cont'd

|                       |   |
|-----------------------|---|
| Civic engagement      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•parliamentary page positions and internships;</li> <li>•political activity;</li> <li>•elected positions</li> </ul>  |
| Goal achievement      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•a clear vision of what they want to accomplish;</li> <li>•a developed personal vision for the future that defines a impactful/meaningful change for the community or a group, cause or organization;</li> <li>•strategizes on how to achieve desired outcomes and has specific, realistic and timely goals.</li> </ul>  |
| Self-management       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•knows how to prioritize and complete tasks to reach the desired outcome and is confident of success;</li> <li>•establishes learning goals and tasks;</li> <li>•reaches goals in an efficient, organized and innovative way; and</li> <li>•is constantly working on self-improvement</li> </ul>  |
| Integrity             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•acts consistently with core ethical and personal values and convictions; and</li> <li>•accepts personal accountability for the consequences of their actions/decisions.</li> </ul>  |
| Other characteristics | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•is creative and takes initiative;</li> <li>•is curious;</li> <li>•deals well with complexity;</li> <li>•has a strong sense of reality;</li> <li>•is courageous;</li> <li>•is strategic, a big-picture thinker;</li> <li>•focuses on solutions, not problems;</li> <li>•is capable of producing extraordinary results; and</li> <li>•is able to solve real problems and create real products.</li> </ul> |

## Leadership cont'd

### Social skills

- knows how to develop positive relationships with a diverse range of people;
- cares about and listens to what others say and gives feedback;
- knows how to motivate individuals;
- is persuasive;
- is supportive of peers;
- is able to negotiate;
- is viewed as trustworthy, ethical and dependable;
- is well-respected; and
- displays mastery of presentation skills and public communications.

### Notes:

The evaluation on this criterion should not be based on only the nominating letter but also on the referee assessment and the leadership reference letters:

- Look for well-rounded individuals that went above and beyond then the expect norms.

When evaluating this criterion, reference the [instructions provided to candidates](#).

More information on leadership is available in the SSHRC-funded study, [Leadership at the Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Levels \[ PDF \(260 KB\) \]](#)

*This list is not intended to include all possible categories and is provided for guidance only.*

## **Graphos Vanier CIHR, NSERC, and SSHRC Support**

To register for one or both of these activities, please go to the Graphos site (<https://www.mcgill.ca/graphos/groups/fwg>) and complete the related webform by July 24, 2020.

### **1) Graphos Workshop "Writing Your Vanier Fellowship Application" – via Zoom** Tuesday, August 4, 2020, 10:00 am-11:30 am (eastern time).

- 1.5-hour workshop led by an experienced writing facilitator and a current Vanier recipient. Workshop participants will review sample funded applications and identify ways to structure their writing with the non-specialist review panel in mind.

### **2) Graphos Fellowship Review Groups – via Zoom**

August, 2020: Exact dates to be scheduled with each group (CIHR, NSERC, SSHRC)

- Review group will consist of ~5 Vanier applicants who will meet and exchange their fellowship application for feedback.
- Review group facilitated by a McGill postdoc or a Vanier recipient.
- Participants are expected to submit their documents in advance of the meeting and provide constructive criticism to improve the written documents of the group.
- Members will meet remotely via Zoom for ~3 hours (not counting the time to read and comment) on the other applications).

# Next steps

- Get PINs for Common CV, ResearchNet
- Contact academic referees through ResearchNet
- Contact Leadership referee
- Get writing advice
- Convince your Department/Unit to help with editing
- If selected by your department, by **Sept 17<sup>th</sup>**, you have to upload a ***pristine*** application on ResearchNet

Good Luck!

# Help with Writing

## McGill Writing Centre

- Tutorial Service:
  - Can book up to 7 hours/semester. Appointments fill quickly so book in advance!

## Skillsets

- Would You Fund It? Fellowship Consultation Session **TBA**
  - Please check back with <http://www.mcgill.ca/skillsets/home> for up-coming sessions and registration instructions.

# Resources

Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies contact – [graduatefunding.gps@mcgill.ca](mailto:graduatefunding.gps@mcgill.ca)

ResearchNet Support - [support@cihr-irsc.gc.ca](mailto:support@cihr-irsc.gc.ca)

Vanier Canada Graduate Scholarship - <http://www.vanier.gc.ca/en/home-accueil.html>

Instruction to Applicants - [http://www.vanier.gc.ca/en/nomination\\_process-processus\\_de\\_mise\\_en\\_candidature.html](http://www.vanier.gc.ca/en/nomination_process-processus_de_mise_en_candidature.html)

Information for referees - [http://www.vanier.gc.ca/en/information\\_for\\_referees-information\\_a\\_l\\_intention\\_des\\_repondants.html](http://www.vanier.gc.ca/en/information_for_referees-information_a_l_intention_des_repondants.html)

# Questions?

