Preparing a Strong CGRS D Application
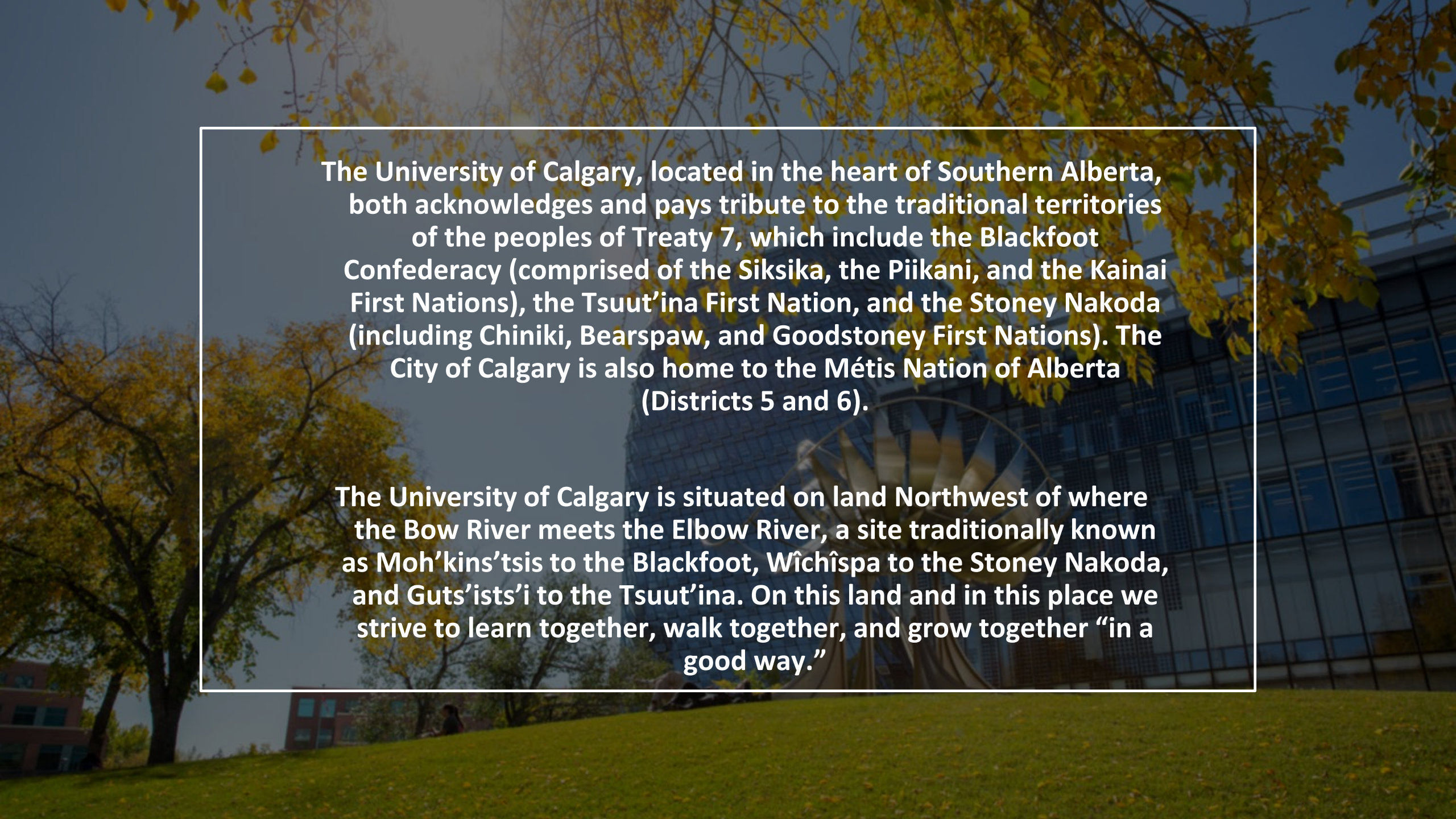
Dr. Daniel McGrath, Associate Dean, Grad Awards
Erin Coburn, Team Lead, Grad Awards

Graduate Leaders Circle Co-Chairs
Katelyn Horsley, NSERC CGS D Scholar
Philippa Ngaju, NSERC Vanier Scholar

September 2025

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY
FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

The University of Calgary, located in the heart of Southern Alberta, both acknowledges and pays tribute to the traditional territories of the peoples of Treaty 7, which include the Blackfoot Confederacy (comprised of the Siksika, the Piikani, and the Kainai First Nations), the Tsuut'ina First Nation, and the Stoney Nakoda (including Chiniki, Bearspaw, and Goodstoney First Nations). The City of Calgary is also home to the Métis Nation of Alberta (Districts 5 and 6).

The University of Calgary is situated on land Northwest of where the Bow River meets the Elbow River, a site traditionally known as Moh'kins'tsis to the Blackfoot, Wîchîspa to the Stoney Nakoda, and Guts'ists'i to the Tsuut'ina. On this land and in this place we strive to learn together, walk together, and grow together "in a good way."

Agenda

- Overview
- Timeline and Process
- Eligibility
- Selection Criteria
- Application Components
- How to craft a strong application
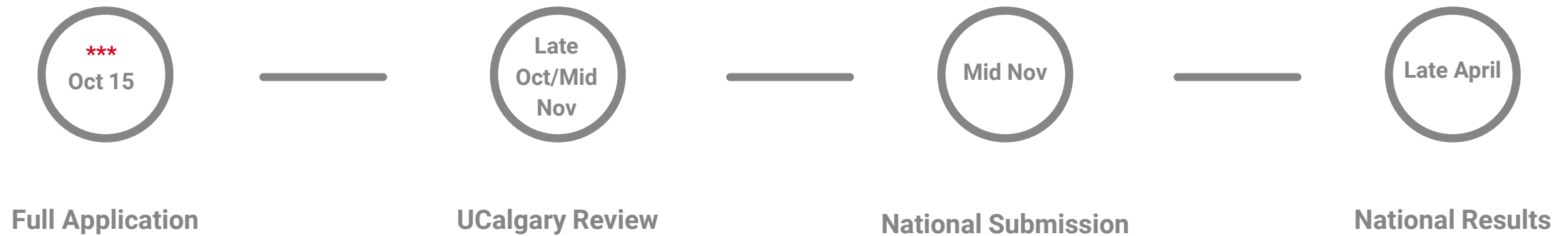- Resources
- Questions

CGRS D Overview

Value	Up to $40,000 per year
Duration	36 months
Tenure	Eligible Canadian or international institutions
Application deadline to UCalgary	October 15, 2025 before 11:59:59 pm (MST/Calgary time)
How to apply	Refer to the Application Procedures
Results announced	**April 30**
Application forms & instructions	**CIHR** ResearchNET and Instructions **NSERC** Online System and Instructions **SSHRC** Online System and Instructions

https://www.nserc-crsng.gc.ca/Students-Etudiants/PG-CS/cgrsd-besrd_eng.asp

Timeline & Process

Timeline: Full Application → Results

*** Oct 15	Late Oct/Mid Nov	Mid Nov	Late April
Full Application	UCalgary Review	National Submission	National Results

*** No opportunity to edit application prior to national submission ***

Process

1. Register for Full Application account
   - **CIHR** ResearchNet
   - **NSERC** NSERC Online System
   - **SSHRC** SSHRC Webapp Portal

2. Register for CV
   - **CIHR** Canadian Common CV
   - **NSERC** CV incorporated into application (no registration required)
   - **SSHRC** SSHRC web-based curriculum vitae (SSHRC web CV)

3. Identify and Contact Referees

4. Complete & Submit Full Application electronically through the relevant agency platform
   - **CIHR** Doctoral Research Award Application, Common CV, and Instructions
   - **NSERC** Form 201 and Instructions
   - **SSHRC** CGRS D Application Form, SSHRC web CV, and Instructions

5. Submit full application before **11:59:59 pm (MST/Calgary time) Oct 15**
   - Incomplete / late applications will not be accepted

Eligibility

Eligibility Criteria

- **Applicants:** Canadian citizens, permanent residents, protected persons (*IRPA* 95(2)), or international students **with a successful PAF**

- **Study limit:** ≤ 36 months full-time doctoral study toward the doctoral degree for which funding is requested by Dec 31 of application year.

  If you have completed any other doctoral studies where the courses/time in program has been credited toward your degree, reply to your CGRS D invite email immediately!

- **Application limit:** 1 CGRS (M or D) application per year to either CIHR, NSERC, or SSHRC

  - If you submit more than one application, only the eligible application submitted first will be retained.

  - Effective 2026 competition, applicants may be forwarded to the national CGRS D competition no more 3 times.

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  Restrictions: No prior doctoral-level award from CIHR/NSERC/SSHRC (incl. Vanier); no concurrent tenure/tenure-track role (see *Tri-agency Guide* for exceptions)

  Refer to the [CGRS D website](#) for more information

Selection Criteria

Full Application Selection Criteria

	Research Potential	Relevant Experience & Achievements (Within & Beyond Academia)
CGRS D	50%	50%

Reviewed first by a broad tri-agency specific committee at UCalgary;
If forwarded, reviewed by a research area specific committee in Ottawa

Application Evaluation Criteria

Score		RESEARCH POTENTIAL
Out of 50%		**Quality of research proposal:** Specific, focused, and feasible research question(s) and/or objective(s); clear description and soundness of methodology; significance and expected contributions.
		Research feasibility: Demonstrated potential to carry out proposed research relative to stage of study, lived experience, and knowledge systems.
		Contributions to the field: Publications, patents, reports, posters, abstracts, monographs, presentations, creative outputs, knowledge translation outputs, community products, etc
		Critical thinking & judgment: Demonstration of sound judgment, critical thinking, and ethical research conduct.
		Research ethics: Honest and thoughtful inquiry, rigorous analysis, commitment to safety, dissemination of results, and adherence to professional standards
		Originality & initiative: Original ideas, autonomy, relevant community involvement, and outreach.
		Communication skills: Ability to clearly and logically communicate theoretical, technical, and/or scientific concepts in written and oral formats.

Application Evaluation Criteria

Score		RELEVANT EXPERIENCE AND ACHIEVEMENTS OBTAINED WITHIN AND BEYOND ACADEMIA
Out of 50%		**Relevant training:** Academic training, lived experience, and traditional teachings.
		Awards & distinctions: Scholarships, awards, and distinctions (amount, duration, prestige)
		Academic record: Transcripts, duration of previous studies, program requirements, course load, relative standing (if available).
		Professional, academic, and leadership activities: Teaching, mentoring, supervising, coaching, project management, chairing committees, organizing conferences and meetings
		Research, science promotion, and community engagement: Participating in science/research promotion, volunteer work, civic engagement, and community outreach
		Community engagement: Volunteer work, civic engagement, and community outreach.
		Institutional involvement: Participation in departmental or institutional organizations, associations, societies, and clubs.

Evaluation Criteria – EDI Considerations

Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Principle

- **Tri-agency commitment:** Achieve a more equitable, diverse, and inclusive Canadian research enterprise to advance impactful, innovative research addressing local, national, and global challenges.

- Guided by the Tri-Agency Statement on EDI and the EDI Action Plan.

- Self-identification and consent may be used to determine eligibility for additional awards or priority funding for underrepresented groups.

Evaluation Criteria – EDI Considerations

Indigenous Students & Research

- Indigenous applications are submitted above the University quota.

  - documentation verifying your Indigenous citizenship and/or membership is required to be considered over and above the quota and must meet the criteria of both the University and the tri-agencies.

- Option to designate proposed program as Indigenous research → merit review guidelines apply (CIHR & SSHRC).

- Review committees instructed to consider special circumstances affecting academic/career paths.

- Efforts to include Indigenous members and experts on review committees.

Black Students

- Additional funding provided by the Government of Canada for Black student researchers.

- CGRS D applicants who self-identify as Black and consent may receive reserved awards (up to 10 per agency).

Application Components

Major Application Components

1. Application Portal
2. Research Proposal
3. Special Circumstances (Optional)
4. References
5. Curriculum Vitae (CV)
6. Transcripts

Each Tri-Agency Online Application differs in format & components

Application Portal

Submission form and portal depends on Tri-Agency

CIHR
- Doctoral Research Award Application
- Common CV
- Instructions

NSERC
- Form 201
- Instructions

SSHRC
- CGRSD Application Form
- SSHRC web CV
- Instructions

Research Proposal

Goal of Research Proposal: craft a clear, concise plan describing the research you intend to carry out during your doctoral studies.

- Outlines your specific research question or objective

- Details the methods you will use to achieve your goals

- Explains the significance of the work

Tip: Think of the proposal as an academic story of your research … stories are methodical in the **choice and timing** of their words

Research Proposal - CIHR Criteria

- **Training Expectations** Max. 2 pages PDF

  - Outline **professional, academic, and extracurricular achievements** - link to training success.
  - Explain how expected training supports **career goals** & **research objectives**.
  - Describe **impact within & beyond** the research environment.
  - Justify choice of **institution** & expected learning outcomes.
  - For joint/clinical doctoral programs: show **significant research component**.

- **Research Project Summary** Max. 1 page PDF

  - Define **your role** in the project
  - Write in **general scientific language** for a multidisciplinary audience.
  - Include **specific, feasible** research questions, objectives, and methodology.

More Information: [CIHR CGRS D Guidelines](#)

Research Proposal - NSERC Criteria

- **Outline of Proposed Research** Max. 2 pages PDF
  - Written in clear, jargon-free language for broad reviewers
  - Includes background, objectives, hypothesis, methods, and significance
  - Explains what's new if continuing thesis work

- **Bibliography (Optional)** Max. 5 pages PDF
  - Only cited/relevant references
  - Proper citation style, no fillers

More Information: NSERC CGRS D Guidelines

Research Proposal - SSHRC Criteria

- **Research Proposal** Max. 2 pages PDF
  - Written in plain language for a multidisciplinary audience.
  - Include: current study level, program & rationale, thesis/project outline (question, context, objectives, methods, significance, contribution), supervisor (if known), and award tenure plan.
  - If relevant: justify SSHRC eligibility, address Indigenous research guidelines, or describe research-creation component.

- **Bibliography & Citations** Max. 5 pages PDF
  - Works cited for all proposal references.
  - Any clear, complete referencing style accepted.

More Information: SSHRC CGRS D Guidelines

Special Circumstances (optional)

- Information about interruptions to the applicant's academic career and choice of nominating institution should be included

- Refer to individual agency instructions for details
  - **CIHR** 1 Page PDF Attachment to Full Application
  - **NSERC** Special Circumstances Section of Full Application
  - **SSHRC** 1 Page PDF Attachment to Full Application

References

- **Typically, <u>2 references</u> are required, with goal of:**
  - providing an informed, credible assessment of the applicant's academic excellence, research potential, and personal qualities to support their suitability for doctoral funding, in the context of the broader application.

- Refer to individual agency instructions for details
  - **CIHR** More information
  - **NSERC** More information
  - **SSHRC** More information

Curriculum Vitae (CV)

Goal of CV: Highlight experience & achievements, within and beyond academia

- CIHR: <u>Canadian Common CV</u>
  - Start this as early as possible
  - Link to <u>CIHR Research NET account</u>

- NSERC: <u>Contributions and Statements Section</u>
  - Upload as attachment via NSERC Online System

- SSHRC: <u>SSHRC web CV</u>
  - Start this as early as possible
  - Attached by the system when the application form submitted

Transcripts

- Upload **official, up-to-date transcripts** from *all* **post-secondary institutions** via the Tri-Agency online application system.
  - Must include **UCalgary fall semester transcript** for the current term, even if no grades or degree completed
  - **Format**: Electronic official copy or high-quality scan of official hard copy (watermarks acceptable).
  - **Transfer Credits**: upload original transcript or ensure credits are listed on degree-granting transcript.
  - **Accepted**: UCalgary program-provided transcripts or UCalgary Record of Grades.
  - **Not accepted**: screenshots, Student Centre printouts, or missing transcripts → application ineligible.

- **Your Responsibility:**
  - Ensure transcripts are **correct, complete, legible, and in the right format for your specific Tri-Agency**.
  - Always review your uploads in the **Tri-Agency system** before submission.
  - Must include **UCalgary fall semester transcript** for the current term, even if no grades or degree completed

How to craft a strong application

General Strategies For Crafting a Strong Application

- 🎯 **Address Evaluation Criteria**: Directly respond to each criterion with clear, structured language.

- 📈 **Emphasize Impact**: Go beyond listing activities—highlight outcomes and contributions (e.g., "Led X, resulting in Y").

- 🔗 **Create a Coherent Narrative**
  Show how experiences, training, and research goals form a focused trajectory; avoid repetition.

- 📊 **Be Specific & Evidence-Based**: Use concrete examples, data, and metrics; avoid vague statements.

- ✂️ **Align with Tri-Agency Priorities**: Frame research and training goals to reflect the funding agency's focus.

- 🔍 **Edit & Seek Feedback**: Have mentors, peers, or supervisors review for clarity, completeness, and relevance.

Research Proposal Tips

- **Keep in mind the different styles of each agency**
    - Example: NSERC vs CIHR vs SSHRC proposal styles
    - Relate proposal to your experiences and explain alignment with program, university, provincial, and federal priorities.

- **Ensure writing is:**
    - Logical, clear, concise, and flows well from start to finish
    - Write mainly for non-specialists but ensure specialists can follow
    - Use descriptive titles and define discipline-specific terms and acronyms.

- **Make sure that the implications of the research are clear**
    - Reader should understand **prediction** in the context of the field, **how** it will be evaluated, **why** it matters, and **what** is its significance
        - I.e. A logical story of why your project should get funded over others

Research Proposal - CIHR example

Link to Training Environment and Trajectory (CIHR)

Training Environment: Dr. Gavin McCormack (supervisor) is a leading international expert in built environment and physical activity research. He has several CIHR grants, including a CIHR Foundations Scheme Grant, which will financially support my research. The research team is supported by an in-house GIS technician and researcher. Dr. McCormack's collaborators have a broad range of expertise (health geography, urban planning, nursing, population and public health, epidemiology) that will be invaluable during my training. I will be involved with interdisciplinary research teams and I will have various mentorship opportunities, including supervising undergraduate students. In addition, one of our co-investigators is a transportation planner with the City of Calgary, which will facilitate my training in knowledge translation and research implementation.

Research Proposal - NSERC example

- "Hooking" your audience
  - Draw the audience into the importance of the work quickly
  - Introduction written at newspaper level
    - Understandable regardless of educational level

Introduction:

Fishing beyond sustainable yield (i.e., overfishing) in recent decades has led to changes to ecosystem function, losses to ecosystem services, and declines in 63% of global fish stocks[1-4]. Overfishing is expected to increase worldwide in the near future[4,5]. Historically, overfishing appeared to be a problem only for commercial fisheries, as fishers were economically incentivized to continue fishing a diminishing resource[7]. Since 2002, it has become evident that non-commercial inland fisheries have been similarly overfished, including Canada's $8.4 Billion·yr[1] freshwater recreational fishery[5-11].

Research Proposal - SSHRC example

Research Objective/Hypothesis Statement

- **The goal** of my Doctoral research is to offer new insights into preschoolers' development of social categories and stereotypes.

- **My focus** will be on preschoolers' sensitivity to group variability when drawing inferences about mental traits based on information about the group and individual.

- **My primary research question** is 1) Does the type of exposure children experience with social groups influence their development of stereotypes?

My secondary research questions are as follows: 2) How does the degree of mental trait similarity of a group affect children's assessments about group membership? 3) How does the degree of variability influence children's ability to consider individual-level information over category-level information? 4) What individual differences contribute to children's ability to balance category-level and individual-level information?

References Tips

- Provide your Referees with the details of how your application will be assessed so that they can ***Address the criteria – align with criteria***.
  - Provide examples of your relevant experience and achievements obtained within and beyond academia
    - Refer to the website for specific activities suitable for your application
  - If there are special circumstances or alternate career paths, ask them to speak to these
  - Provide details of scholarships and awards that could be referred to in the letters
  - Provide your research proposal and contributions
  - **Have a conversation in person/via Zoom/phone**
  - **Make your request ASAP. Follow up with reminders.**

Canadian Common/Other CV Tips

- **Start early:** Completion takes longer than expected.

- **Highlight breadth:** Include knowledge translation, working papers, non-peer-reviewed contributions, and leadership activities.

- **Select impactful activities:** Showcase the most relevant experiences; you don't need to list everything from your Leadership Statement.

- **Publications matter:** Provide full details, avoid acronyms, indicate conference level (international vs. regional), and include manuscript # and date for submitted papers.

- **Show prominence:** Note journal impact (e.g., Impact Factor, top journal in field).

- **Be detailed:** Make each entry clear and informative to strengthen your application.

CV Description – Example 1

Melin AD, **Webb SE**, Williamson RE, and Chiou K (2017) (In review). Methods in Primate Foraging Ecology. In U. Kalbitzer & K. M. Jack (Eds.), *Primate Life History, Sex Roles, and Adaptability - Essays in Honour of Linda M. Fedigan*. Switzerland: Springer International Publishing.

- **Title / Activity:** Contributed to book chapter on behavioural sampling methods for arboreal primates

- **Role / Contribution:**
  - Tested optimized data collection methods during six months of master's fieldwork (2016)
  - Applied advanced statistical models to analyze feeding behaviour data
  - Authored chapter section on recommended data analysis

- **Impact:** Improved methodological standards for studying primate foraging behaviour, providing long-term guidance for researchers and students in primatology

CV Description – Example 2

Melin AD, **Webb SE**, Williamson RE, and Chiou K (2017) (In review). Methods in Primate Foraging Ecology. In U. Kalbitzer & K. M. Jack (Eds.), *Primate Life History, Sex Roles, and Adaptability - Essays in Honour of Linda M. Fedigan*. Switzerland: Springer International Publishing.

- **Description:** "I contributed to a book chapter on behavioural sampling methods for arboreal primates. During six months of master's fieldwork in 2016, I tested optimized data collection methods and applied advanced statistical models to analyze feeding behaviour data. I also authored the chapter section on recommended data analysis practices. This work has improved methodological standards for studying primate foraging behaviour, providing long-term guidance for researchers and students in primatology."

Transcripts Tips

IDENTIFY AND GATHER REQUIRED DOCUMENTS EARLY

ORGANIZE MATERIALS IN THE PROPER FILE FORMAT

VERIFY COMPLIANCE WITH AGENCY-SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS

Before You Submit Tips

- Read the application instructions again
- Review your application one last time, check for spelling, grammar, formatting, or factual errors
- Ask Writing Support Services to review application
- You will increase your chance of success by following these tips and following the instructions exactly

Resources

CGRS D Scholarship Cafes and Drop-In Mentoring

- Registration Details and links are available on the UCalgary CGRS D website

Other Sources of Support

- Writing Support Services
  - Language and writing support
  - https://ucalgary.ca/student-services/student-success/writing-support

- Supervisor, Colleagues, Family, & Friends
  - CGRS D applications benefit from multiple sources of support, so reach far and wide for feedback.

Contacts

- Crafting a Strong Application, Cafes/Drop-in
  - GLC gradlead@ucalgary.ca

- Eligibility & Application Criteria
  - Review the CGRS D Criteria and consult the agency specific CGRS D Instructions
    - CIHR Instructions
    - NSERC Instructions
    - SSHRC Instructions

- UCalgary Criteria (Deadlines, Administrative Support etc)
  - Graduate Award Office gsaward@ucalgary.ca

Questions