Office of the Dean
Faculty of Graduate Studies

Trudeau Foundation Doctoral Scholarship Guide

FOR STUDENTS, PROGRAMS, AND REFEREES

2018-2019
CONTENTS

Introduction to the Guide ................................................................. 3
  Quotas .......................................................................................... 3
  Eligibility .................................................................................... 3
  Key Sites ...................................................................................... 3

Key Timelines and Deadlines .......................................................... 4

Nomination and Application Process .............................................. 5
  For Students ................................................................................. 5
  For Graduate Program Directors and Assistants ......................... 6

Putting Together Your Application ............................................... 7
  Review Evaluation Criteria ......................................................... 7
  What You Need ............................................................................ 7
  How to Write the Short summary of Project ........................... 8
  How to Write the Longer Description of Project .................... 8
  How to Write the Methodological Approach ......................... 10
  How to Write the Personal Statement .................................... 10
  How to Write the Professional Biography .............................. 11

Letters of Reference ....................................................................... 12
  Understanding the Use of a Reference Letter ......................... 12
  For Students: How to Find Academic Referees .................... 12
  How to Find a Strong Referee (Non-Academic) ..................... 14
  How to Write a Strong Reference Letter for a Trudeau Application: Academic Referees ............................... 14
  How to Write a Strong Trudeau Letter of Reference: Non-Academic Referees ............................................. 16

Contact Us ...................................................................................... 17
INTRODUCTION TO THE GUIDE

Each year, the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation awards up to fifteen scholarships to Canadian and foreign doctoral candidates pursuing research related to one of its four founding themes. Trudeau scholars are outstanding students who are interested in growing in a multidisciplinary learning environment and in addressing important questions for Canada and the world. The four themes of the Trudeau Foundation are:

1. human rights and dignity;
2. responsible citizenship;
3. Canada in the world; and
4. people and their natural environment.

The award supports interdisciplinary research and original fieldwork by providing a substantial yearly allowance for research ($40,000) and travel ($20,000) per year for up to three years. The Scholarship also offers the opportunity to interact with an exceptional community of leaders and committed individuals in every field of the social sciences and humanities, to participate in events organized by the Foundation and to hold their own workshops, through available financial support.

This guide has been designed to assist graduate students (our potential applicants/nominees), faculty supervisors, graduate program directors, and graduate program assistants with the preparation and submission of Trudeau Foundation Scholarship applications. This guide is primarily concerned with the York-specific procedures for application assessment and development. No information in this guide is intended to replace the official information as published by the Trudeau Foundation (www.trudeaufoundation.ca), and in any place where the information in this guide and on the Trudeau Foundation site or the Trudeau Foundation Scholarship application differs, the Trudeau Foundation publications are taken to be the most accurate.

QUOTAS

Each Canadian university may submit 8 Trudeau Foundation Scholarship nominations per year.

ELIGIBILITY

Please review the technical and subject matter eligibility criteria at: http://www.trudeaufoundation.ca/en/programs/doctoral-scholarships

KEY SITES

Trudeau Foundation Scholarship: http://www.trudeaufoundation.ca/en/programs/scholarships

The main Trudeau Foundation Scholarship website.
Trudeau Scholars: [http://www.trudeaufoundation.ca/en/community/Scholars/all/all](http://www.trudeaufoundation.ca/en/community/Scholars/all/all)

The list of all past and current Trudeau Scholars. Reviewing their profiles is a useful way to get a sense of the kind and calibre of research and leadership that the Trudeau Foundation seeks in Scholars, and to learn how to craft the Professional Biography section of the application.

**KEY TIMELINES AND DEADLINES**

* All timelines are tentative until the final deadline to submit nominated applications to the Trudeau Foundation is confirmed in early September.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steps, events, tasks</th>
<th>Deadline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2018-2019 Vanier and Trudeau competition announcement by FGS</td>
<td>May 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deadline for students to submit preliminary documents to FGS</td>
<td>June 26, 2017 at 4pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students notified of the result of the first round of nomination process. Successful applicants will be invited to submit a full application.</td>
<td>By July 21, 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deadline to submit full Trudeau applications via Application Portal</td>
<td>October 2, 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students and programs notified of the results of this round of nomination process. Final nominees will receive feedback for revisions</td>
<td>By October 30, 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students and program directors work to revise applications</td>
<td>Until November 30, 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student submit revised applications via Application Portal</td>
<td>November 30, 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final review for completeness, communication of any final revision requests</td>
<td>By December 5, 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final deadline for students to submit revised applications to FGS</td>
<td>December 5, 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final deadline for FGS to submit nominated Trudeau applications to the Trudeau Foundation</td>
<td>December 11, 2017 (TBC)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
NOMINATION AND APPLICATION PROCESS

FOR STUDENTS

Step 1: Preparing Preliminary Documents

* All timelines are tentative until the final deadline to submit nominated applications to the Trudeau Foundation is confirmed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action Item</th>
<th>Time line</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Read application and process information on the Trudeau Foundation site and in this guide</td>
<td>Immediately</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepare and submit preliminary application documents (2 page research statement, 2 page personal leadership statement, 1 page research contributions statement, transcripts and CV) to FGS</td>
<td>June 26, 2017 at 4pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* See more information on how to submit preliminary documents at: <a href="http://gradstudies.yorku.ca/current-students/student-finances/funding-awards/trudeau/">http://gradstudies.yorku.ca/current-students/student-finances/funding-awards/trudeau/</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* At this stage, the transcripts do not need to be official as long as they include your full academic records.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students notified of the result of the first round of nomination process</td>
<td>By July 21, 2017</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Step 2: Developing Full Applications (Invited Applicants Only)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action Item</th>
<th>Time line</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Start your application via Application Portal</td>
<td>Once the portal opens, in early September 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Request a nomination letter from your Graduate Program Director, to be submitted to FGS by <strong>October 2, 2017</strong></td>
<td>July 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Request reference letters, both academic and non-academic, to be submitted by <strong>October 2, 2017</strong></td>
<td>July 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referees submit their letters via Application Portal</td>
<td>By <strong>October 2, 2017</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Complete the full Trudeau application, including reference letters | By October 2, 2017

Students and programs notified of the results of this round of nomination process. Final nominees will receive feedback for revisions | By October 30, 2017

**Step 3: Final Revisions and Submission (Final Nominees Only)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action Item</th>
<th>Time line</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students request a full set of up-to-date transcripts (including York) and submit to FGS</td>
<td>By November 20, 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referees receive request to revise letters based on reviewer and FGS feedback as needed</td>
<td>Early October, 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Based on the feedback received, revise and improve your application, with the assistance of your graduate program director and/or supervisor</td>
<td>Until November 30, 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revised applications and letters of reference due in Application Portal</td>
<td>November 30, 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final completeness/technical eligibility review, any final revision requests communicated to students by FGS</td>
<td>Early December</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final submission of all revised documents in Application Portal by students</td>
<td>December 5, 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final submission of all applications to Trudeau Foundation by FGS</td>
<td>December 11, 2017 (TBC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notification to semi-finalists</td>
<td>Early February 2018 (TBC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notification to finalists invited for interviews</td>
<td>Early March 2018 (TBC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews with finalists in Montreal</td>
<td>Mid-March 2018 (TBC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notification to selected candidates</td>
<td>Late April, 2018 (TBC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public announcement of the new Trudeau Scholars</td>
<td>June 2018 (TBC)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**FOR GRADUATE PROGRAM DIRECTORS AND ASSISTANTS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action Item</th>
<th>Time line</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identify suitable candidates for Trudeau and encourage them to consider applying</td>
<td>June 2017</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Submit Graduate Program Director nomination letters to Richolette Freckleton in FGS (save to program folder in Graduate Studies shared drive) | By October 2, 2017
---|---
Assist candidates in developing their final application as needed | September to November

* With the new online application process for the Trudeau Scholarship, FGS has centralized and simplified the nomination process. Programs are no longer required to collect transcripts and reference letters on behalf of students, although students may contact the program for a copy of transcripts on file at the preliminary stage.

**PUTTING TOGETHER YOUR APPLICATION**

**REVIEW EVALUATION CRITERIA**

Before beginning your application process, it is essential that you review the evaluation criteria thoroughly. The Trudeau Scholarship competition is extremely selective with only 15 Trudeau Scholars selected nationally every year, and it is important to review the criteria and assess your “fit” with the Foundation’s specific priorities. Once you decide to submit your application for nomination, ensure that your application is strong in each of the following evaluation categories:

- Academic excellence
- Communication skills
- Public engagement
- Desire to contribute to public dialogue and transmit knowledge
- Desire to be involved in the community with other researchers or scholars
- Thematic relevance of the doctoral research

**WHAT YOU NEED**

See the instructions on the Trudeau website: [http://www.trudeaufoundation.ca/en/programs/doctoral-scholarships](http://www.trudeaufoundation.ca/en/programs/doctoral-scholarships) for details. The website is expected to be updated with the information for the 18-19 competition in early September. The application documents for the Trudeau scholarship competition, all of which to be compiled via Trudeau Foundation’s Application Portal with the exception of transcripts, consist of the following:

1. **Current or proposed doctoral research**, including short and long summaries of project, and methodological approach
2. **Two academic letters of reference** – Student will send a request via Application Portal, and referees will submit the letters via Application Portal
3. **One non-academic reference letter** – Student will send a request via Application Portal, and referees will submit the letters via Application Portal
Office of the Dean

4. **Personal Statement**
5. **Professional Biography**
6. Additional information including accomplishments, extra-curricular or public service activities, and work experience
7. **Official transcripts of all post-secondary studies** – to be submitted to FGS; FGS will upload the transcripts to student nomination files

**Note:** Students who are invited to submit a full application also need to request a **Graduate Program Director Nomination letter** as a part of the York internal nomination process. The letter must be submitted directly to FGS.

**HOW TO WRITE THE SHORT SUMMARY OF PROJECT**

This section of the Trudeau application functions as a very short abstract of your proposed or current doctoral research project. The “short summary of project” should do three things, in clear, non-technical, and engaging language:

1. Introduce your research topic and its general context. “General” is somewhat misleading, as you still need to be fairly specific here.
2. State why your research question and the answers you propose to seek are significant—why do we care about this topic? What will your new contribution to knowledge do for the field, for Canadian society, for the world? What will change?
3. Indicate what you plan to do in the course of your research, and what research outcomes you seek and/or expect.

**HOW TO WRITE THE LONGER DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT**

The “longer description of project” is a very condensed version of the typical research statement, minus the methodology, which has its own section. “Longer” is misleading, as this section is still extremely short, and you will be challenged to effectively and engaging state your research project and its significance in the space provided. The “longer description” must be clear, concise, precise, clearly related to one or more of the Trudeau themes, and of interest to the adjudicating reader immediately. In many instances, students fail to declare their actual research question until toward the end of this section, which is far too late for this purpose. Remember that the Trudeau adjudication committee is multidisciplinary, so your research must be intelligible and engaging to non-specialists. Also remember that the Trudeau committee is not only looking for an interesting and well-planned research project; they’re looking for one that fits with the mandate and themes of the Trudeau Foundation, and that demonstrates “an ability to engage in lively exchange with other researchers and scholars, and...an expressed desire to contribute to public dialogue.” The “longer description of project” must address the following in an active voice:

1. **Research Topic and Specific Question:** Be specific and avoid vague/huge questions. Articulate your research question early in the statement.
2. **Development and Justification:** Why is your proposed study important? What gap in current knowledge does it aim to address? What impact will answering this research question have on the field, on the community, on the world?
3. **Literature/Research Context**: Very briefly (i.e. by name, but without quoting or extensively paraphrasing) reference the most important research on the topic in order to set your topic, question, and justification in its proper context. The trick, however, is to be brief and to state points succinctly. The context demonstrates that you know the terrain of your field and the place in which you seek to make an original contribution, and also provides non-specialist adjudicators with necessary background and context.

4. **Contributions/Goals**: Indicate the significance and/or implications of the research. In essence, “so what”? Why are you pursing answers to this research question, and why do those answers matter? To what or to whom do they matter, and what will change—in the field, in the community, in the world—once you’ve answered this question?

Your “longer description of research” should aim to address the following points, although not necessarily in this order.

- The placement of your research project within a large general topic of wide interest which will immediately grab your reader, convince them of your project’s immediacy and relevancy, and make clear its connection to the Trudeau Themes (e.g. immigration, economic instability, human rights, fossil fuel extraction, etc.)

- Brief reference to literature

- Rationale or justification for why such an investigation/idea should/must be proposed, i.e., what is lacking in the field
  - **There’s a gap in the knowledge!** (e.g. “However, scholars in these fields have not yet adequately addressed xxxxx...”) XXXX is the subject of your research. This “however” statement, although brief, is extremely important, because it makes very clear the originality and necessity of your research project.
  - **This gap is bad!** (e.g. "Without such understanding, we are left with an inadequate analysis that perpetuates ill-informed policy decisions and a self-sustaining cycle of resentment and misunderstanding...")
  - **Hero narrative: I will fill this gap! I am the hero who will save us from our problematic lack of knowledge about xxxx and all of the repercussions of that lack!** (e.g. “My project will remedy this gap in the literature by examining xx and yy in zz context to more fully illuminate the previously unrecognized relationships between aa and bb.”)

- A very clear and direct statement of your research question and argument
  - “Through a close and fine-grained analysis of XXX, I will show that in contrast to previous assumptions, in fact xxxxx is XXXXXX.”
- A strong conclusion
  - Your fit to the Trudeau mandate and to York University
  - What your project will contribute to the field: “I expect this research to contribute to debates on XXXXX and play an important role in shaping debates on XXXX and X
  - XXX in the coming years.”
  - In addition, what you and your project will contribute to the community and/or the world and the Trudeau community

Sources: Dr. Thomas Loebel (Graduate Program in English, York University), Dr. Karen Kelsky (http://theprofessorisin.com/2011/07/05/dr-karens-foolproof-grant-template/)

HOW TO WRITE THE METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

It is critical that the research method and theoretical perspective you have selected demonstrate your superior research ability, potential and vision. Both must be appropriate to your field and project, and the research project you describe in which they’ll be employed must come across to adjudicators as realistic and doable. Adjudicators are looking to see if your research method/theory suits your research question, promises to allow you to effectively answer that question within the scope of a dissertation, and (ideally) makes an original contribution to methodology or theory.

So much of any study – its possibility, its validity – depends on the appropriateness, ingenuity, and accuracy of the methodology. It does not matter whether one researches in the sciences, social sciences, humanities or fine arts, the methodology tells readers how one seeks to derive the results – by which type of analysis? Methodology may seem more explicit in the sciences since methods and techniques are foregrounded explicitly throughout the education process. Often in the arts and humanities, method is taught implicitly, embedded within the articulation of the project’s content and significance. Techniques in the fine arts are part of a method of production, but in graduate-level research, method moves into intellectual approach, analysis, and concept creation.

A frequent error is to assume that simply presenting the common names of theoretical approaches is sufficient to explicate a methodology. Explain why you are approaching your research question this particular way, rather than in some other way. Explain how the method you propose is best suited to your research project, will allow you to effectively and interestingly answer your research question, and will help you to generate new knowledge that will have an impact on your field and on the world. Ideally, your method will be an innovative departure from those currently in common usage—have you transplanted a method from another field to great effect? Or revised some procedures to mitigate the limitations of a major method in your field? Or combined parts of two existing methods to create an innovative third?—and thus will itself be an original contribution to knowledge.

HOW TO WRITE THE PERSONAL STATEMENT

The Trudeau Foundation provides the following direction when writing your personal statement: “Please describe below your study objectives and career goals, while reflecting on how a
Trudeau Scholarship will help you attain those objectives and goals. Please reflect on a person or event that greatly influenced your personal philosophy or approach and attitude towards academic study. In the assessment of your application, your statement will be heavily weighted.

It is crucial that you address every aspect of this direction in your personal statement, as the statement is heavily weighted during the adjudication process, and is used to determine if you are a good fit for the scholarship. Fit is extremely important to the Trudeau Foundation, as the Trudeau Foundation Scholarship is intended not just to fund exceptional doctoral researchers. It is intended to find and welcome new members of the Trudeau community, members who will engage in lively exchange with that community, contribute to it, and enhance its reach and reputation through their life and work. Remember too that this is the Trudeau Foundation Scholarship, created in honour of Canada’s former Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau. The Foundation is looking for candidates who embody Trudeau’s passion, drive, and motivation to enact positive change in the world.

The purpose of the personal statement is to teach the adjudicators more about you as a candidate, about what has shaped your life philosophy, and about how your life experiences have led you to your particular research area and question. Let your voice and personality shine through in the personal statement. It is intended to be personal. From this statement, adjudicators will try to ascertain how the Trudeau Foundation Scholarship will help you attain your objectives and goals, and how the scholarship might change and broaden the scope of your goals. What opportunities might receiving the Trudeau Foundation Scholarship, and the support of a Trudeau Mentor, provide you—opportunities to which you wouldn’t otherwise have access?

When writing the personal statement, it is important to remember that you are also required to complete a separate professional biography. The personal statement, therefore, should not be to be a listing of one’s professional biography, although you should speak to significant activities or contributions in the context of their impact on you and your attitude toward academic study.

**HOW TO WRITE THE PROFESSIONAL BIOGRAPHY**

The first thing to do before beginning to write your professional biography is to review the professional biographies of current Trudeau Scholars. This will give you a strong sense of how the biography should be constructed, and the elements that the Foundation is looking for. These biographies can be found at [http://www.trudeaufoundation.ca/en/community/Scholars/all/all](http://www.trudeaufoundation.ca/en/community/Scholars/all/all).

The professional biography must be clear, concise, and interest the adjudicating reader right away. Your biography should convey your personality as well as your accomplishments. Imagine that you are writing the biography as though you were already a Trudeau Scholar—write it so that you seem like you are already a member of the Trudeau community, like inviting you to join that community will be the inevitable outcome of the application and interview process.

The following checklist can be used to guide the preparation of the professional biography. Most Trudeau Scholar biographies contain these components, in some form. The lists of suggested items to include in each category are intended as a prompt, and are by no means intended to be exhaustive or exclusive. Most importantly, include those activities and accomplishments which
are most important to you, and which you believe speak the most strongly to who you are as a person, as an academic, and as a future Trudeau Scholar.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional Biography Checklist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Who are you?</strong> Community and/or academic affiliations. You might mention, if it is important to you, where you were born and/or what community you belong to. You should also mention where and what you study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What are you doing?</strong> A brief description of your current research project and its importance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What’s your academic history?</strong> Previous degrees, any awards and/or honours in those degrees, significant research projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What are your significant academic accomplishments?</strong> Edited a journal? Published books and/or articles? Authored an influential study? Won a major award? Did important teaching? Ran a conference or student society?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What are your significant community, work, or other accomplishments?</strong> Significant job or volunteer employment? Community work? Did you start a business? Did you sit on the board of a non-profit or advisory body? Do you do public speaking? Do the media call you for opinions? Are you a well-known blogger? Do you act, dance, sing?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

LETTERS OF REFERENCE

UNDERSTANDING THE USE OF A REFERENCE LETTER

Reference letters are used to:

- Distinguish between first class applicants—every applicant for the Vanier has excellent grades, a strong research track record, and leadership skills, so the letters become crucial in setting you apart
- Gain a sense of the applicant as a person
- Ensure that you meet the selection criteria of the scholarship
- Confirm whether the applicant excels in all aspects of the selection criteria
- Confirm what you’ve indicated in your application—don’t get caught in a lie! Applications that fail immediately are those in which an applicant has indicated X and the referee mentions something that leads a committee to believe that X is untrue

FOR STUDENTS: HOW TO FIND ACADEMIC REFEREES

Reference letters form one of the most critical components of any scholarship application. But students rarely spend much time considering how to find a strong referee and when/how to ask for help. You need to explain to your referee the criteria of the scholarship award, the type of reference required by the adjudicating committee, and your suitability for the scholarship. One reason for explaining the scholarship, the type of reference required, and suitability is to allow potential referees to determine whether they will be able to write a strong and compelling letter on your behalf. Their honest response should be most important to you, since the ultimate goal
is to obtain the strongest letters of reference possible. The following is meant to guide the process of finding a good referee and ensuring you attain the strongest reference possible.

**Think Before You Ask**

Most individuals seeking a reference believe that “title” is everything. They think that a reference letter from a “President” or “Distinguished Research Professor” or a “CEO” is the best thing to have in a reference. This couldn’t be further from the truth, although it is not recommended to seek reference letters from teaching assistants or, unless in exceptional circumstances, contract academic faculty. The most important thing in a reference letter is substance—a letter that shows that the referee knows you well, has plenty of experience working with, teaching, or supervising you, and can place your strengths and accomplishments in context. The best referee, therefore, is the professor, or supervisor who can provide a letter of substance. Ask yourself these questions when thinking about whom to ask for a letter of reference:

- Have I asked my two most recent research supervisors? Vanier requests that these people are, if applicable, your two referees. This will normally mean that your two assessors are your PhD supervisor and your Master’s supervisor. However, if your PhD and Master’s supervisor are the same person, or if you did a course-based Master’s and did not have a supervisor, or if you do not yet have a PhD supervisor, you will need to carefully consider the questions below in seeking a second academic reference.
  - How long have you known the person you are asking?
  - Can this person evaluate all or most of your academic achievements and research potential? Do they have extensive knowledge and experience of your achievements and potential?
  - Can this person speak to your ability to conduct the proposed research? Have they supervised your research, and do they know what your research plans are for your PhD?
  - Can this person discuss your leadership style, your ability to function in teams, your communication ability? Your academic referees must also speak to your leadership, and indeed are provided with more space to do so than they are to speak about your academic excellence and research potential.
  - If there are aspects of your academic, research, or leadership accomplishments that your referee does not have direct knowledge of (which will almost always be the case), do I believe that my referee can speak to these positively if I provide them with information about these activities?

**Provide Information**

Adjudication committees want to see letters that speak to the specifics found in your application. They assess how your qualities and experience align with the scholarship and look for a convergence in what you bring as an applicant and what they are looking for in the selection criteria. Vague letters, no matter how praiseworthy, are generally useless and can hinder a committee’s ability to judge the applicant.

It is important to provide your referees with all of the information they need to write a strong letter. You aren’t looking for a good letter; you’re looking for a strong letter that helps set you apart from the other applicants. Provide your referee with the following:

- Your CV
What Should You Ask for From Your Referee?

It is critical that your referee demonstrate an alignment between your academic excellence, research ability and potential, leadership experience and potential, and the selection criteria. Ask them to highlight your strengths, especially with context. Are you the best student they’ve supervised in a 20 year career? Did you achieve the top grade in their course? Did you write one of the best Master’s theses they’ve read? You should also ask them to explain any weaknesses or missing components in your application. See below for more information on writing strong reference letters, which will give you a sense of what you should be asking for.

Note: Most students who are applying for the Vanier and the Trudeau use the same referees for both applications. It is strongly recommended, however, that the Vanier and Trudeau letters are each written to suit the specific nature and selection criteria of these awards.

HOW TO FIND A STRONG REFEREE (NON-ACADEMIC)

All of the advice on finding a good referee in the above section also applies to finding a referee to write the Trudeau non-academic reference letter. This letter should be written by someone who knows you in a non-academic capacity and should describe your non-academic activities (i.e. work, public contributions), how you have demonstrated and will potentially continue to demonstrate leadership, your interest in contributing to public debate, and your embodiment of the values of Trudeau and the Foundation. Faculty members may provide this letter, as long as they have direct experience of and can speak to the non-academic aspects of the application. You should choose a referee who has direct experience of your non-academic work, can speak to that work in one or more contexts, and who you know thinks highly of you and your non-academic contributions. It is better to choose someone in a supervisory or management role rather than a colleague as your referee. Try to secure a referee who can speak to and has experience of your most significant and impactful non-academic activities.

HOW TO WRITE A STRONG REFERENCE LETTER FOR A TRUDEAU APPLICATION: ACADEMIC REFEREES

Writing a strong reference letter for a Trudeau nominee can be a time consuming process. When writing a reference letter for a Trudeau nominee, you must refer to the student’s Trudeau Foundation Scholarship application form and the selection criteria for the scholarship. If you were not provided these documents by the nominee, please ask for them.

The Trudeau Foundation states only that the letter of reference must be from an academic referee, and must principally concern academic achievement. We suggest that your letter address the nominee’s academic excellence, research potential, and positive personal characteristics. The list below contains prompts and sample language for each section (Note: the sample letter language is taken from a letter for a student in science, but Trudeau nominees
are exclusively in the social sciences and humanities). Please see also the section of this guide on the graduate program director’s nomination letter, which may be helpful.

**Academic Excellence**

- How long have you known the applicant and in what capacity?
- How does this student’s academic ability compare to other students you have known during your academic career?
- Has this student received scholarships? Any internationally awarded?
- Does this student have an exemplary grade point average?
- Has the student studied at any noteworthy institutions? This might include universities or institutes with a national reputation, or the pursuit of degrees or courses at universities outside the student’s home country.

“Anthony’s academic achievements, including his stellar A+ average in his Master’s degree, place him in the top 2% of the 60 doctoral students I have supervised over the past 20 years.”

**Research Potential**

- How does this student’s research ability/potential compare with other students you have known and supervised in the past?
- How has the candidate demonstrated research potential and in what capacity do you evaluate this potential? Have you supervised the candidate’s research before?
- Does the student have publications in prestigious journals? Has the student presented papers or posters at major conferences?
- Has the student held any funded research positions (e.g. NSERC USRA, Mitacs Accelerate internship)?
- Has the student won any awards for their research, either scholarships that heavily weight research contributions (e.g. Tri-Council awards), or awards for a specific research project (e.g. a thesis prize)?
- Is the proposed research original? Has the research topic been neglected in the field and published literature?
- Has the student established research collaborations with a diverse set of scholars?

“Anthony stands out among the 60 doctoral students I’ve supervised. His research contributions and the leadership in the lab make are closer to the level of an assistant professor than they are of a second year doctoral student. Part of his Dean’s Award-winning Master’s thesis was accepted for publication in Nature, and he has another article, a groundbreaking analysis of X, under consideration at Science. His proposed topic seeks to answer why it is that X happens when X, a question that still has no satisfactory answer despite much study. Given my own lab’s work in this field, I was immediately intrigued by the approach that Anthony is taking, because it combines X and X while using the X technique, which is, quite frankly, an approach that I failed to consider, and one that has already demonstrated great promise in Anthony’s early trials. Through Anthony, our lab has engendered a highly productive collaboration with his Master’s supervisor, Dr. X, one which has already produced three co-authored publications. Anthony’s exemplary results in the lab are not limited to his experimental ones—he has taken an active leadership role in supervising Master’s and undergraduate students, and spearheaded...
the new PhD-student-led series of monthly workshops to provide junior students with extra training in time and lab management, experimental design, and collaboration."

Positive Personal Characteristics and Achievements

- **Personal characteristics:**
  - Commitment and ability to engage in lively exchange with other researchers and scholars
  - Contributions to public dialogue
  - Goal achievement (which is in line with the nominee’s vision for change and improvement of self, the field, society)
  - Self-management (the nominee’s ability to establish and set goals, prioritize tasks, self-improve)
  - Social skills (the nominee’s good personal and business relationships, communication and negotiation skills, dependability, respect by the others)
  - Other characteristics (creative, initiative, courage, commitment, strategic thinking, ability to solve complex problems, curiosity, artistic ability, etc.)

- **Personal achievement:**
  - Impactful involvement and achievement in professional programs/associations such as sports, arts, science, business etc.
  - Entrepreneurial achievement (start-up company)
  - 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 academic/professional societies
  - Organization of conferences, meetings, courses etc.

- **Volunteerism/community outreach:**
  - Community involvement in charity or not-for-profit organizations

- **Civic engagement:**
  - Parliamentary page positions and internships
  - Political activity
  - Elected positions

- **Other**

HOW TO WRITE A STRONG TRUDEAU LETTER OF REFERENCE: NON-ACADEMIC REFEREES

The reference letter is your opportunity to provide the Trudeau adjudication committee with a broader and more complete understanding of the nominee’s achievements and strengths. You
are the only non-academic referee, and likely the only person who has worked closely with the nominee in their non-academic life. Please review the above section, for academic referees, and the below section, for graduate program directors, for guidance on writing a strong letter of reference. The same guidelines apply to the leadership reference letter. The key difference is that your letter will focus solely on the nominee’s non-academic and leadership achievements, and will place those achievements within a context that extends beyond the academy. You will also have the ability to speak to the ways in which the nominee’s non-academic achievements speak to his/her embodiment and enactment of the values of Pierre Elliott Trudeau and the Trudeau Foundation.

Your letter should be written on your corporate or personal letterhead, and should be a maximum of two pages. When the letter is complete, you should email it to the nominee’s graduate program assistant. You may be requested, after the entire nomination package has been reviewed by the University, to make amendments to your letter in order to ensure that the package is as strong as possible. If you would like additional guidance on writing a strong leadership reference letter, please see the contact page at the end of this document.

**CONTACT US**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contact Name or Position</th>
<th>Type of Help Available</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Yuko Sorano</strong></td>
<td>Substantive and technical queries from nominees, referees, Vanier-Trudeau development committee members, Graduate Program Assistants, Directors and faculty supervisors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Officer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty of Graduate Studies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>416-736-2100 x44168</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="mailto:fgsro@yorku.ca">fgsro@yorku.ca</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Richolette Freckleton</strong></td>
<td>Technical questions regarding eligibility, process and timelines from students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarship &amp; Awards Coordinator</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty of Graduate Studies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>416-736-2100 x33954</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="mailto:fgssac@yorku.ca">fgssac@yorku.ca</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Graduate Program Directors</strong></td>
<td>Substantive application review and development assistance, program nomination letter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Graduate Program Assistants</strong></td>
<td>Technical questions regarding eligibility, process and timelines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>