

## TRANSCRIPT

### Demystifying the review process for NSERC scholarships and fellowships

You have confirmed that you meet all of the eligibility criteria to apply for a Postgraduate Scholarship, Canada Graduate Scholarship or Postdoctoral Fellowship from the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council. You have diligently prepared your application, completing all the forms and including the correct attachments and references. You have written a compelling presentation, which clearly conveys your scientific or engineering experience and expertise. It highlights your interpersonal, communication and leadership abilities. Your submission also succinctly and convincingly outlines your research plan, what you hope to achieve and the expected impacts of your work. In addition to what NSERC is looking for, you have met all the requirements set by your institution. And, you met the deadline.

So, what happens when you hit “submit” and your application is forwarded to NSERC for evaluation?

Your application will go through a number of important procedures before you potentially receive the hoped-for news that your request for an NSERC scholarship or fellowship was successful. These steps take place from October to March every year. In the first step of the process, NSERC staff members assess applications to establish their subject matter eligibility, making sure proposals fall within the Council’s mandate. The proposed research must advance knowledge in the natural sciences or engineering. Staff members also verify both the person’s and the program’s eligibility. Having passed those tests, applications deemed eligible to proceed are assigned to the appropriate selection committee. The applicant’s selection of Research Codes helps NSERC identify the best match.

NSERC recruits research experts from academia, industry and government to serve on selection committees. Committee members come from Canada and abroad, and they are chosen in a way that gives each committee a balance of gender, geographical representation and language abilities. These highly qualified researchers volunteer to participate in a thorough peer review process to evaluate the thousands of scholarship and fellowship applications NSERC receives each year.

For each application, two members are selected to conduct the preliminary review. The most appropriate members are assigned, based on their expertise as well as the applicant’s research topic, to ensure a good match. Members evaluate the applications independently.

The selection criteria vary for postgraduate scholarships and postdoctoral fellowships applications.

Postgraduate Scholarship applications are evaluated for their:

- Academic excellence;

- Research ability or potential; and
- Communication, interpersonal and leadership abilities.

The weight attached to each criterion differs, depending on whether you are applying for a CGS or PGS Master's level award or a CGS or PGS Doctoral level award. The overall goal is to identify candidates who are well rounded and accomplished.

Applications for NSERC Postdoctoral Fellowships are judged on two criteria:

- Research ability or potential; and
- Communication, interpersonal and leadership abilities.

Research-related considerations account for the biggest share of the final score.

Selection committee members give each application a preliminary score for each of the criteria. The overall score at this stage is calculated by averaging the two reviewers' scores for each criterion, multiplying those by the appropriate weights and then adding the results to get a total score out of 100.

These scores indicate the individual's ranking relative to other applicants rather than an academic grade.

Prescores are used to create an initial ranking of applications. The top ranked applications in each committee are brought forward to Competition Week in February for discussion. Any applications where there are discrepancies between the two members' prescores are also brought forward to Competition Week.

Selection committees meet in Ottawa for the final step in the review process. The two reviewers initially assigned to assess an application briefly present the application to the full committee, pointing out its strengths and weaknesses.

The rest of the committee then discusses the merits of the application before voting. After the discussion, each member provides an anonymous score for each of the selection criteria.

Members with a potential conflict of interest do not take part in the discussion. This can happen if the member and applicant have connections such as being from the same department or collaborating on previous research.

On the last day of the competition, a final ranked list of all applications is produced. The top-ranked eligible postgraduate scholarship candidates are offered a Canada Graduate Scholarship. The next tier of applicants will be offered an NSERC Postgraduate Scholarship. All successful Postdoctoral Fellowship applicants will receive the same award. The number of successful applicants is based on budget availability.

All applicants are notified of their results in March.

The Students and Fellows section of NSERC's Web site includes resources that can help you write a more effective application. You can also find details about the evaluation processes for other NSERC scholarships or fellowships by reading the appropriate program description.