

## Banting Postdoctoral Fellowship Application Tip Sheet for Applicants & Supervisors

In an effort to assist applicants, supervisors, and faculties to prepare and review Banting Postdoctoral Fellowship applications, the SGS Graduate Awards Office has created this document based on feedback received with regard to the Banting review process.

First and foremost, applicants and supervisors are strongly encouraged to review in detail the relevant sections in both the [Application Guide](#) and [Selection Committee Guide](#) posted on the Banting website while paying special attention to the selection criteria section to ensure the application fully addresses each of the criteria evaluated by the committee members.

**Universities do not have access to the online ResearchNet application system.** Applicants must submit a copy of their application documents to the nominating supervisor/department/faculty for use in the university's reviewing process. Referees should be instructed by the applicant to send a confidential copy of their assessment form to the nominating supervisor/unit directly once they have submitted their assessment online to ResearchNet. This way, units/faculties are able to review the complete application of each candidate ensuring the strongest candidates are being put forth.

### Tips for Applicants

All three criteria are equally important and weighted the same (i.e. 1/3 each). Banting has instituted a minimum threshold score for funding: In order to be considered fundable, applicants must achieve a score of at least 5.1 in each individual criterion. Those with an average score of 7.5 and higher are recommended for funding. Please see the [selection committee guide](#) for more information on pre-scoring:

1. Research excellence and leadership in the research domain
2. Quality of the applicant's proposed research program
3. Institutional commitment and demonstrated synergy between applicant and institutional strategic priorities

### Research excellence and leadership

Applicants should demonstrate:

- Clear evidence of potential to be future leader;
- That both research excellence and leadership are equally exceptional;
- Participation in leadership activities contributing to the broader community (scientific or civic);
- High profile leadership with national/international impact and/or society at large;
- Contributions within the university having continuous and lasting impact; service within the university is expected and not generally viewed as exceptional.

### Quality of the applicant's proposed research program

#### **Lay Summary:**

Ensure that it is very well-written in "lay" terms, suitable for an educated non-expert or even the public to understand. The language from an abstract for publication is usually considered too technical. This component is considered extremely important as it's often the first thing the reviewers read and it gives them a first but lasting impression of the application and sets the tone for the rest of their comments. As the national selection committees are interdisciplinary, reviewers are often outside of the applicant's discipline and will need to understand the lay summary and research proposal, and must be convinced that the proposed research is important.

#### **Research Proposal:**

- o Write clearly and effectively; geared towards a non-expert, highlighting the significance/importance of the research;
- o Clarity and simplicity of language is of utmost importance;

- Divide proposal into subsections, e.g. background, hypotheses, experimental design, etc., provide potential obstacles and solutions, make sure the proposal has a clear and logical structure;
- Proposed research should reflect applicant's independent thinking (not simply an extension of the proposed supervisor's existing research), be relatable and have real world impact;
- Use headings, spaces, paragraphs, highlights strategically. Avoid having four pages of dense, single space typed text as it makes a proposal difficult to read;
- Ensure consideration of sex/gender is addressed whenever applicable;
- Selection Committee members may review the proposal in the same manner as they would a research grant proposal so it should be very strong and well written;
- Use graphics where appropriate to help illustrate the proposal;
- Have a non-expert read the research proposal.

#### Other:

Applicants should elucidate a well thought out career trajectory with strong consideration of where they would like to be by providing a layout of current training, identifying what is missing, and explaining why and how U of T and the supervisor will provide that missing piece and the best environment to achieve the applicant's goals.

Reviewers are looking for potential significant research impact based on a combination of a great research proposal and a fantastic fit between the applicant, supervisor, and the applicant's aspirations.

**Note from Banting Secretariat:** All applicants should clearly justify the choice of institution and supervisor, and should highlight the benefits expected with respect to fulfilling their career aspirations. If they are already at the proposed host institution, they **must** justify the decision to remain at the same location. There should be a direct correlation between the strength of the justification and the amount of time already spent at that institution. The longer the applicant has been at the same institution (or research environment), the stronger the required justification. ***Only in exceptionally rare circumstances will a Banting PDF be awarded to an applicant who is staying at the same institution or within the same research environment where they completed their PhD, PhD- equivalent or health professional degree.***

#### Institutional commitment and demonstrated synergy between applicant and institutional strategic priorities

- Referees letters should express how they think the applicant's choice of institution and supervisor is the best move for fulfilling the applicant's aspirations.

#### Selecting referees

- Applicants should direct their referees to submit a confidential copy of their assessment report directly to the supervisor's attention. These letters will be required for the university's review process. Choose referees carefully, ensuring that they are prepared to write supportively and in detail.
- To assist referees in writing a strong and highly customized letter of recommendation, it is the applicant's responsibility to provide them with all relevant information for each section of the assessment list below and the [full instructions for referees](#):
  - The applicant's research excellence and demonstrated leadership
  - Merit of the proposed research
  - Suitability of the proposed research environment
- **Reminder - Mandatory arm's length referee:** All applications must have at least one arm's length referee from among the three invited referees. The arm's length referee cannot be:
  - a relative or close friend, or have a personal relationship with the applicant;
  - in a position to benefit from the funding of the application;
  - affiliated with the applicant's current and/or proposed institutions;
  - professionally affiliated with the applicant, as a result of (but not limited to):
    - being their supervisor or trainee;
    - collaborating, publishing or sharing funding with the applicant or having plans to do so in the immediate future.

## Tips for Supervisors

The "**Supervisor's Statement**" is a major component of the application (accounting for 1/3 of the score) from which the Banting committee members will assess the criteria of "**Institutional commitment and demonstrated synergy between applicant and institutional strategic priorities**". To ensure the statement covers all points listed, review the relevant section in both the [Application Guide](#) and especially the [Selection Committee Guide](#), which specifically outlines how the Committee will be assessing this criteria, keeping the points below in mind.

**Supervisors should demonstrate:**

- A synergistic and custom fit between institution/supervisor and candidate and show that the host institution is the best place for the candidate to pursue the next stage of his/her career;
- That the supervisor is personally committed to training and furthering the career and personal development of the candidate as a future leader (i.e. not only scientifically but can provide leadership opportunities outside “the lab”);
- Specific talents the candidate possesses that are also important in the supervisor’s work;
- Growth and productivity of the candidate/supervisor team – this point is especially important if the candidate has already been working with the supervisor prior to the application;
- The significance of the applicant's contributions and proposed research and how it fits within the supervisor’s and institution’s research plan/objectives;
- Where possible, highlight very unique opportunities for postdoctoral fellows which are not offered elsewhere. E.g. faculty/departmental funding to foster interdisciplinary collaborations and networks.

**Other tips regarding supervisor’s statement:**

- Use very strong positive language about the candidate’s skills/knowledge;
- It is helpful to state what rank (e.g. top 1%) the candidate is compared to all others supervised, if the supervisor has supervised many postdoctoral fellows in the past and the current candidate is in the top few percentile;
- Supervisor’s own contributions/achievements should be described in light of how they are beneficial to the candidate. However, while describing the excellence of the supervisor is important, there should be greater focus on the candidate rather than the supervisor’s own achievements.

One aspect of the supervisor statement should communicate the institution's commitment to the applicant's professional development, clearly indicating the resources and/or mentoring activities available through the institution to support career development. It should be explained how this support is above and beyond what is offered to regular postdoctoral fellows, and that this support should be reasonable and appropriate to the institution and requirements of the applicant and the proposed research. As part of the Banting End of Award Report process, the Banting Postdoctoral Fellowships program will include follow-up questions to confirm whether the support outlined in the application was granted to the Banting Fellow during their award.

In addition to opportunities made available by the supervisor, as well as the specific department or faculty, it may be helpful to include the following [resources made available by U of T](#):

The University of Toronto is committed to supporting the professional and personal development of postdoctoral fellows. A centralized postdoctoral office is established within the School of Graduate Studies to ensure successful training experiences for postdoctoral fellows by providing consistency of access to resources to prepare them for the next step in their careers.

Postdoctoral Fellows have full access to the Gradlife, a website which provides access to specialized workshops, and online resources and programming covering both academic and non-academic issues. They are also able to partake in the Leadership Skills for Graduate Students program which offers a special series of workshops in communication, facilitation and conflict resolution skills. Additionally, postdoctoral fellows may take advantage of their access to the Career Centre, which offers a comprehensive, personalized range of career education and employment services to support and empower participants in making informed decisions about their career and employment goals. Postdoctoral fellows are eligible for individual career consultations with a career counselor. Launched in September 2014, MyGradSkills is an online and free portal with a series of learning modules that allow students and postdocs to acquire professional skills on their own time, at their pace, and anywhere they can access the Internet. The 18 module topics are varied: academic and research integrity, converting a CV to a résumé, entrepreneurship and new venture creation, understanding mental health and well-being, exploring diverse career paths for PhDs, and teaching online. Finally, postdoctoral fellows have access to a range of workshops offered by the Graduate Centre for Academic Communication, including topics such as “writing a grant proposal” and “maximizing poster presentations.”

**Equity, diversity and inclusion**

The Banting PDF program encourages equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI), as part of the Tri-Agency’s broader commitment to excellence in research and research training in Canada. EDI considerations will be taken into account throughout the Banting PDF competition, including during the selection committee member recruitment process and during the selection, endorsement and review processes of an application.

The [EDI page](#) of the Banting PDF website provides guidelines and resources geared towards applicants, host institutions, referees, and reviewers and readers, and addressing the following topics: research respectfully involving Indigenous communities; reducing unconscious bias; and promoting equity, diversity and inclusion more generally.

Applicants, Supervisors, & Referees are encouraged to visit the following links:

- 1) [Tri-Agency unconscious bias training module \(19 minutes\)](#)
- 2) [Unconscious Bias \[ PDF \(208 KB\)\]](#)
- 3) Harvard tests on [Implicit Association](#) (recommended: Gender – Science, and Gender – Career tests)
- 4) [Tips for Banting Selection Committee Members on reducing gender bias in the review process](#)

At the University of Toronto, we strive to be an equitable and inclusive community, rich with diversity, protecting the human rights of all persons, and based upon understanding and mutual respect for the dignity and worth of every person. We seek to ensure to the greatest extent possible that all students and employees enjoy the opportunity to participate as they see fit in the full range of activities that the University offers, and to achieve their full potential as members of the University community.

**Disclaimer:** The above suggestions are based on feedback requested by SGS Graduate Awards Office from various stakeholders, including previous national selection committee members, in an effort to assist potential applicants and supervisors in submitting a strong application but cannot guarantee a successful outcome.