What Adjudicators are Looking for. Tips for Students and Nominators

This document was created to help students, nominators and others better understand what adjudicators are looking for when they read each file. Adjudicators are asked to divide their rankings equally into two key areas: Leadership and Educational Insight, Experiences and Achievements.

Leadership pertains to the ways in which candidates demonstrate leadership in their educational institution, as well as in communities external to their college or university. Educational Insights, Experiences, and Achievements pertain to the candidate’s depth of engagement in identifying challenges facing post-secondary education in Canada, transformational educational experiences, their reflections on their experiences (academic and otherwise) to date, and their achievements (academic and otherwise).

While this fellowship does seek to recognize the contributions of candidates to date, it also seeks to identify real potential, supporting the future development of the candidate. Adjudicators are encouraged to look for evidence that the candidates are committed to building on their past experiences as they seek to create change in the future (and not simply ‘rest on their laurels’ from past achievements).

Here is more about what adjudicators are looking at:

Depth – many candidates will have applications overflowing with activities. When did this candidate have the time to do all that is on the paper, and to what depth? Do they get involved in one-off, short-term activities, or do they make long-term commitments? Are they collecting a list of activities to build an impressive resume and win prizes, or do their activities stem from passion and a desire to make change? Are they taking on more superficial responsibilities or do they have ‘dirt under their fingernails’?

Breadth – Is the application balanced? Are they involved only in pursuits that would come easily to them or are they testing their comfort zones. Adjudicators keep in mind the context of the student – each application will likely look different due to the different kinds of opportunities available in each setting.

Context – Be wary of overusing lists of accomplishments. Do candidates ‘dump’ information, or are they telling a story of who they are and their passions? Does the application (including letters) read like it was recycled from another award application or is it tailored to the specific sections and challenges in this 3M NSF Call for Nominations?

Anomalies and challenges – If there are anomalies in the application, especially around grades, the candidate should explain why. Anomalies may represent rich moments of learning, and they must be contextualized. As well, do the candidates discuss any challenges that they have faced, and their responses to the challenges? How do the candidates respond to challenge?

Relationships – How do the candidates relate to other students, staff, faculty, and community members? We are not looking for “me” oriented students nor those who seem to take all the credit for a project that likely involved others. Do they have a compassionate and responsible attitude towards taking leadership? Do they learn from other people? Do they appreciate those they work with? How do they express these?

Extension of the student role – What is the role of students in a post-secondary institution? How do they extend this role in unique, challenging, and creative ways? How do candidates view the process of teaching and learning, and how have they identified problems in the process? Is it complaining or is it
problem identification with the purpose of finding real solutions? What are their visions? What are the actions they have taken so far to bring their visions to life?

**The role of the nomination letters and the letters of support** – Consider how the nomination letter (required) and letters of support (optional) relate to the candidate’s application. These letters should complement the application, not act as its foundation nor ‘simply repeat’ what is already in the nomination file. Do the letters speak to the candidate’s leadership as opposed to solely academic excellence (the latter is not the focus of the fellowship). What kinds of relationships does this candidate build with others? Do the letters provide concrete examples of the candidate’s leadership?

**Academic performance** – Impressive as certain numbers may be, the highest grades are not evidence of intellectual and creative promise, nor leadership which forms the focus of this fellowship. The spirit of this fellowship is not solely focused on academic excellence – the award seeks to identify change-makers. As well, the award is open to students in different programs and different years of study.