Graduate Student Experience Award Terms of Reference

2025 – 2026 Academic Year

Intake Period: January 23 – February 06, 2026
Intake Deadline (including reference letters): **Friday, February 06, 2026, 11:59 PM MT**

[Submit applications online](#)
Applications and/or letter of reference received outside of the intake period will **NOT** be evaluated. Late applications will **NOT** be evaluated. Incomplete applications (unanswered questions or additional information) will **NOT** be evaluated. It is the sole responsibility of the applicant to ensure completeness of the application.

This document and application link are available on the GSA's [website](#).
Questions regarding this application should be directed to the GSA Awards Committee Chair or Vice Chair at awards.gsa@ucalgary.ca

This information is collected following the standards set by the Personal Information and Privacy Act (PIPA). It is required to determine your eligibility for the award and may be used for research and statistical analysis. If you have any questions about the collection or use of this information, please contact the Awards Committee Chair at awards.gsa@ucalgary.ca.

Purpose
This award is established and funded by the Graduate Students' Association (GSA) of the University of Calgary (UCalgary) in recognition of graduate students who have demonstrated initiatives geared towards improving the UCalgary graduate student experience. This award is not meant to fund the initiatives, but rather to recognize the individuals who have created an initiative which benefits the UCalgary graduate community. Initiatives may be academic, non academic, community focused, or wellness oriented and may be formal or grassroots in nature.

Value
$500 CDN award for individual applicants.
$1,000 CDN award for group applicants to be divided among eligible graduate student contributors.

Eligibility
To be eligible for this award:
- Applicant(s) must be Active Members of the GSA during the 2025/2026 academic year.
- GSA Committee Chairs/Members are not eligible for initiatives completed under the formal scope of their committee role.
- The initiative must have been undertaken during the 2025/2026 academic year.
- Applicants may only receive the award once per initiative. Recurring initiatives may be considered separately each year.

Initiatives may serve specific departments, faculties, or equity deserving communities and are not required to be campus wide to be considered impactful. Examples include but are not limited to conferences, workshops, student journals, wellness initiatives, peer support programs, cultural events, and community building activities.

Dispersal of Award

- This award is available to individual graduate students or groups of graduate students.
- Individual graduate students will be awarded $500 CDN.
- For group applications, the award will total $1,000 CDN, and is intended to be divided according to each graduate group member's level of contribution.
- **Undergraduate students may be a part of the group, but are not eligible to receive the monetary award.**

Documents Required
Individual and group applicants MUST submit the following documents:
- A completed online application form.
- One reference letter from a person able to assess the initiative's impact. This may include faculty members, staff, community partners, student leaders, or other relevant individuals.

Applicants who face barriers in securing a traditional referee may request consideration of an alternative form of impact validation by emailing the Awards Committee Chair at awards.gsa@ucalgary.ca.

Accessibility and Accommodation
Applicants who require accommodation or alternative submission formats due to disability, caregiving responsibilities, language barriers, or other accessibility needs are encouraged to contact the GSA Awards Committee as early as possible during the intake period..

Application Specifications
Applications should be completed **online on the GSA awards website (click "Submit Application" to access the application portal)** and consist of:
- A complete application
- Confirmation of enrollment (For group applications, provide for each member)
- One reference letter (maximum 2 pages).
- **Incomplete applications (missing information, extra information/documents and incorrectly filled out) or applications received after the intake deadline will NOT be considered.**

Application Specifications
- Summary of Member's Contributions to the Initiative
  - Please provide a **150-word (individual)** and **a 300-word (Group)** overview of the initiative and how the initiators contributed to its success.
- Confirmation of enrollment **(Strictly Adhere)**
  - Log into your UofC Student Portal – MyUCalgary (https://my.ucalgary.ca/)
  - In the white side banner click "Program and Advising Info"
  - Screenshot this page including your current program information: your name, year of program, degree stream, area of study, and academic load
  - Attach this screenshot as proof of enrollment for the 202526 academic year. **N.B. For group applications, upload all screenshots from group members.**

- Reference Letter (maximum 2 pages)
    - o One completed reference is required.
    - o Reference can be from Graduate Supervisor/Volunteer Supervisor/Manager/Team lead etc.
    - o Application deadline is inclusive of receipt of references.
    - o Ensure your reference knows that this application is an initiative award and as such the ***reference form should focus on your initiative***.

- **<u>The inclusion of any extra documents or material will not be evaluated as part of the adjudication process.</u>**

Adjudication Criteria

Applications are assessed holistically, with reviewers considering the initiative in relation to the applicant's context, available resources, and the needs it addresses within the graduate student community. Reviewers evaluate:
- **Impact on the graduate student experience**, with emphasis on meaningful benefit, relevance, and responsiveness to student needs. Both depth and scale of impact are considered, recognizing that smaller, targeted initiatives may be as impactful as larger ones.
- **Originality and responsiveness**, including innovation, creativity, or thoughtful adaptation of existing approaches to address unmet or emerging student needs.
- **Equity, inclusion, and accessibility**, considering how the initiative advances inclusion, reduces barriers, supports reconciliation, or meaningfully serves underrepresented or marginalized graduate student communities.

Applications are not assessed based on institutional prominence, size of network, or access to resources, and no single criterion is weighted to disadvantage applicants working within constrained contexts.

Additional Regulations
- All application information will be restricted to the Awards Committee and the GSA;
- The Graduate Student Experience Initiative Awards are evaluated by the Awards Committee under the supervision of the GSA VP Academic;
    - o As the number of applicants far surpasses the number of available spots, we are unable to award all graduate students who apply
- Questions about the application process must be directed to the Awards Committee Chair and Vice Chairs at awards.gsa@ucalgary.ca;
    - o The Awards Committee Chair is committed to answering questions regarding this award when possible. Questions that arrive less than 72 hours before the intake deadline may not be answered.
- The Awards Committee will evaluate all application packages based on the adjudication criteria stated above.
- GSEIA decisions will be made 10 - 12 weeks from the intake deadline and application feedback will not be provided;
- The GSA will not be responsible for any tax liability incurred from awarding the funds; and
- Applications must be written in English

Committee Approval Date: January 16, 2026
Elected Council Approval Date: January 20, 2026
Revised Date: