



RSC SRC

# Recognizing Excellence:

A Guide to Nominating Fellows of  
the Royal Society of Canada





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## Leaders with Purpose

The Royal Society of Canada (RSC) was created in 1883 by an Act of Parliament as Canada's National Academy, the senior collegium of Canada's leading artists, public intellectuals, scholars, scientists, and creative writers. The RSC serves Canada and Canadians by recognizing these leaders in research and innovation and mobilizing them in open discussion and debate about complex and timely issues in the headlines or on the horizon. Their integrated interdisciplinary knowledge and understanding is a valuable national resource.

The concept of excellence has always been at the heart of the RSC. In recent years, scholarly and scientific research and the arts have contributed new ways of defining and pursuing an inclusive excellence that both builds on and moves well beyond previous perspectives. Today, excellence is recognized to depend on diversity and equity, as [highlighted in Canada](#) and [around the world](#).

The Strategic Plan 2018-2022—*Mobilize, Catalyze, Sustain*—renews the RSC's historic mission by defining excellence as necessarily inclusive. The RSC embraces equity and diversity, methodological and epistemological openness, and the full range of disciplinary excellence. It welcomes nominations from all intellectual endeavours across linguistic, gender, racial, regional, and institutional boundaries. The RSC also judges these nominations without bias. The RSC selection process seeks to ensure that recognition and inclusion are accorded to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis candidates.

These are our principles.

This guide will assist nominators in preparing dossiers for consideration by Fellowship selection committees. Nominations are valid for one year only.

## Fellows of the Royal Society of Canada

The RSC consists of Fellows elected in three Academies (Academy I, Arts and Humanities; Academy II, Social Sciences; and Academy III, Science), Members of the College of New Scholars, Artists and Scientists, and Institutional Members from across Canada. There are currently more than 2,300 RSC Fellows, more than 280 members of the College, and more than 50 institutional members.

Three categories of Fellows belong to the Royal Society of Canada:

- **Fellows** are those with exceptional and original publications, intellectual achievements, and creative activities. Their achievements are in the arts, the humanities, the social sciences, and the sciences. They are either Canadian citizens or Canadian Permanent Residents for at least three years.
- **Specially Elected Fellows** are those in public life who have made exceptionally valuable contributions to promoting the objectives of the RSC in ways that contribute significantly to Canadian society. They are either Canadian citizens or Canadian Permanent Residents for at least three years.
- **International Fellows** are those who — through exceptionally distinguished accomplishments in the arts, humanities, social sciences and sciences — have promoted the objectives of the RSC with clear relevance to Canadian society. They are neither citizens nor permanent residents of Canada.

*Research interests and practices are changing. Our processes for selecting Fellows reflect these changes. They are principle-based but leave room for each Academy to respect differences and be flexible.*



## Key Dates

The process for selecting Fellows operates on an annual cycle.

For **Fellows** and **International Fellows**, the review and selection process is as follows:

### December

All nominations must be received by the RSC Secretariat by December 1 at 8:00 p.m. EST.

### January-April

RSC selection committees review dossiers and make recommendations.

### April

The RSC Council considers the list of recommended candidates to stand for election, and the RSC President invites approved candidates to express their interest in standing for election.

### May/June

RSC Fellows vote on approved candidates who have confirmed their interest in standing for election. Candidates must receive 75 per cent of all votes cast, excluding abstentions.

### July

Elected candidates are notified by the RSC President and invited to accept Fellowship.

### September

Elected candidates are publicly announced.

### November

At the RSC Induction Ceremony, elected candidates recite the oath, sign the ledger book, and are formally welcomed into the Fellowship.

## An Overview of the Process

### The Role of the Nominator

The nomination process follows a series of steps, each with requirements to ensure that prospective Fellows are evaluated fairly. An important role is played by the Nominator who submits the nomination dossier for review.

Those eligible to nominate a candidate are:

- RSC Fellows
- Institutional Members of the RSC

The Nominator determines under which discipline to nominate the candidate. If the candidate conducts her or his work in a multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary field, the Nominator chooses the discipline that is the best fit. The choice of discipline by the Nominator is critical since disciplines are grouped within nine multidisciplinary Divisional Selection Committees (described later) that begin the selection process.

The disciplines are as follows:

#### *Academy of Arts and Humanities (Academy I)*    *Academy of Social Sciences (Academy II)*

- |                                   |                             |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| ➤ Architecture/Urbanism           | ➤ Administration/Management |
| ➤ Area Studies                    | ➤ Anthropology/Archaeology  |
| ➤ Art History                     | ➤ Criminology               |
| ➤ Arts                            | ➤ Demography                |
| ➤ Classics/Humanities             | ➤ Economics                 |
| ➤ Creative Writing                | ➤ Education                 |
| ➤ Folklore/Ethnology              | ➤ Geography                 |
| ➤ History                         | ➤ Industrial Relations      |
| ➤ History & Philosophy of Science | ➤ Journalism                |
| ➤ Languages/Philology             | ➤ Law                       |
| ➤ Library/Archival Science        | ➤ Political Science         |
| ➤ Linguistics                     | ➤ Psychology                |
| ➤ Literature                      | ➤ Sociology                 |
| ➤ Medieval Studies                | ➤ Social Work               |
| ➤ Musicology                      |                             |
| ➤ Philosophy/Ethics               |                             |
| ➤ Religious Studies               |                             |
| ➤ Theology                        |                             |

#### *Academy of Science. (Academy III)*

- |                                     |                                  |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| ➤ Animal biology                    | ➤ Medical sciences               |
| ➤ Applied sciences and engineering  | ➤ Microbiology and biochemistry  |
| ➤ Astronomical sciences             | ➤ Molecular biology and genetics |
| ➤ Atmospheric sciences              | ➤ Ocean sciences                 |
| ➤ Chemistry                         | ➤ Physics                        |
| ➤ Earth sciences                    | ➤ Plant biology                  |
| ➤ Mathematics and computer sciences |                                  |

## The Nomination Dossier

1. Letter from the nominator
2. Two letters of support from co-nominators (one must be an RSC Fellow)
3. Short citation (generally prepared by the primary nominator)
4. Detailed appraisal from the primary nominator
5. Letters of reference
6. Short biographical note for each referee
7. Curriculum Vitae of the candidate

### Letter from the primary nominator

This is a short letter with a maximum of 400 words. It is not an appraisal but instead introduces the nomination by presenting the referees and explains why the referees have been chosen. The letter should not highlight or repeat information from the detailed appraisal.

*TIP: Make sure the letter is signed and is not longer than 400 words.*

### Letters of support from co-nominators

These are short letters, stating the support of the co-nominator in no more than 200 words. At least one of these letters must be from an RSC Fellow. The letter is *not* an appraisal of the candidate's work.

*TIP: Make sure the letters are signed and are not longer than 200 words.*

### A short citation

The short citation should include the candidate's full name, institution and discipline or artistic field. It should briefly summarize the appraisal and be written for non-specialists. The citation cannot exceed 70 words.

The citation is provided to Fellows when they vote on candidates recommended by RSC selection committees.

*TIP: Citations must be succinct.*

### A detailed appraisal

The detailed appraisal is the opportunity to describe the candidate's exceptional achievements and impact. The appraisal cannot exceed 1,200 words.

The appraisal should clearly state how the candidate has made exceptional contributions to her or his field. It is important to be only as technical as necessary, such that all members of the relevant multidisciplinary selection committees can confidently assess the merits of the work.

*This is not the time to be modest. Be clear about the excellence of the nominee's achievements.*

The appraisal should be explicit about the original, innovative, and significant qualities of the candidate's work. The appraisal should describe the national and/or international impact of the work, and the candidate's reputation and expertise. Examples of this include: publications in top-rated journals; scholarly books; translations of work into foreign languages; invitations to give influential or named lectureships at Canadian or international universities or other similar fora; election to significant international academic bodies; service on advisory panels of leading international agencies and non-governmental organizations; and performances or juried exhibitions.

In summary, the appraisal should describe the impact of the candidate's achievements, and clearly outline the larger relevance of her or his work.

***TIP: Include accessible explanations of highly technical aspects or avoid them in favour of describing the larger significance of the work.***

## Letters of reference

Letters of reference are crucial components of the nomination. These letters are each a maximum of 750 words. A 250-word *biography of each referee must be included separately*. Nominators and co-nominators cannot act as referees for a candidate whom they have nominated. Selection committees will consider not only the quality and persuasiveness of the letters from referees, but also the reputation of the referees themselves.

*Letters of reference are crucial. Referees should be distinguished and internationally recognized experts in the domain of the candidate.*

Letters of reference should emphasize the originality, significance, and impact of the candidate's work. Referees should disclose in their letter the nature and extent of their relationship with the candidate and any possible conflict of interest. It is not considered a conflict if the referee has collaborated with or mentored the candidate in the past — as long as that collaboration is disclosed.

*Letters of reference should be fact-heavy and provide specific and objective examples to back up assertions.*

Reference letters are typically “fact-heavy.” They explain the specific originality, significance, and impact of the candidate's achievements. Details of the practical or theoretical implications of the candidate's work are useful.

*Use clear non-technical language. Make sure the description of the nominee's work is exciting, engaging and persuasive. Instead of summarizing the CV, state the original and exceptional contributions of the candidate.*

Referees should comment on the national and international reputation of the candidate.

Details of teaching quality or administrative posts are relevant *only to the extent* that they have contributed significantly to the candidate's artistic, creative, intellectual, scholarly, and scientific achievements and impact.

***TIP: Referees must provide a short biographical note about themselves – maximum 250 words***

The number of reference letters required varies by Academy. The Academy of Arts and Humanities and the Academy of Social Sciences require three letters of reference. The Academy of Science requires five letters. These requirements are for all types of Fellowship (Fellows, International Fellows and Specially Elected Fellows).



## Curriculum Vitae

The CV is intended to help the selection committee appreciate the full scope of the candidate's contributions and achievements. The page limit for the CV is 50 pages, and ideally begins with publications; then key scholarly presentations; awards and distinctions; and grants.

The CV format can vary, depending, for example, on standards in particular fields and among diverse candidates. Selection committees seek to evaluate CVs appropriately in keeping with the RSC's commitment to inclusive excellence.

Administrative posts are relevant only to the extent that they have contributed significantly to the candidate's artistic, creative, intellectual, scholarly, and scientific achievements and impact.

*TIP: Remove or downplay references to activities that cannot be clearly seen as contributing to exceptional achievement.*

## The Selection Process

After the completed nomination dossier is received, it will be reviewed by one of the nine Divisional Committees for the Selection of New Fellows. These multidisciplinary committees are composed of a particular Division's director and secretary, and between five to ten Fellows. The RSC and its Academies ensure that selection committees are populated in a manner that reflects the diversity of the relevant scholarly community, and the spread of disciplines within the Division. Committee members are provided with guidelines to ensure awareness of best practices for inclusive excellence, including those related to unconscious bias. The RSC Conflict of Interest Policy is also reviewed in advance.

The Divisional Committees are:

### Academy of Arts and Humanities

- Humanities (English)
- Lettres et sciences humaines (French)
- Arts (Bilingual)

### Academy of Social Sciences

- English
- French

### Academy of Science (Bilingual)

- Applied sciences and engineering
- Earth, ocean and atmospheric sciences
- Life sciences
- Mathematical and physical sciences

All nominations recommended by the Divisional Committees are then forwarded to the appropriate Academy Committee for the Selection of New Fellows. Each Academy's list of recommended candidates is then forwarded to the RSC Council for consideration for election. If approved, each recommended candidate receives a letter inviting them to express their interest in standing for election by the RSC Fellows. The letter outlines the rights and responsibilities associated with Fellowship. Those recommended individuals who confirm their interest in standing for election are then put to a vote by all Fellows in the appropriate Division. Candidates must be approved by 75 per cent of the votes cast by Fellows in the appropriate Division (excluding abstentions).

## Checklist

Make sure the nomination dossier includes:

- A letter from the primary nominator, signed by either an RSC Fellow or university president (from the RSC Institutional Members) (maximum 400 words).
- A letter of support from each of two co-nominators. One of these must be an RSC Fellow (maximum 200 words).
- A citation (generally prepared by the primary nominator), written for non-specialists, with a maximum of 70 words.
- A detailed appraisal from the primary nominator, outlining the candidate's contributions to her or his field. (maximum of 1,200 words)
- Letters of Reference, with details emphasizing the originality, impact and significance of the candidate's work (maximum 750 words). Academy I (Arts & Humanities) and Academy II (Social Sciences) require three letters of reference. Academy III (Science) requires five.
- Short biographies (maximum 250 words) from each referee (separate from the letters of reference).
- Curriculum Vitae, including a list of publications, key scholarly presentations, exhibitions, artistic performances, awards, distinctions and honours. Maximum 50 pages.
- Should the above-mentioned criteria not be met, you will receive a notification stating that the nomination dossier has been rejected.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Who can nominate Fellows?

There are two ways to be nominated for election to the RSC:

- o By a current Fellow
- o By an Institutional Member.

### Can letters of nomination or reference be signed by more than one person?

No.

### How does the primary nominator decide in which discipline to nominate a candidate, if the discipline is not included on the RSC list?

The primary nominator determines in which discipline to nominate a candidate. The discipline should be the one that most closely matches the candidate's work. The list of possible disciplines can be found [here](#).

### How does the choice of discipline affect the selection process?

The selection process is based on review by multidisciplinary committees that group together specific disciplines. Each nomination file will be adjudicated in the Divisional Committee that includes the discipline chosen by the primary nominator. The list of Divisional Committees can be found [here](#).

### What makes a nomination stand out?

Excellence and impact are the fundamental and most important characteristics of a nomination. The scholarly originality, impact, and expertise of the referees are critical factors in making the case for candidates.

### Should nominations make reference to teaching awards or administrative appointments?

Include reference to teaching awards or administrative appointments only to the extent that they have directly contributed to exceptional achievement.

### Can nominators or co-nominators act as referees for a candidate they have nominated?

No.

### What makes a good reference?

Referees should be outstanding in their own right, with significant national and international reputations. They should be experts in the candidate's field. They should have direct knowledge of the candidate's work and be able to describe the significance, impact and originality of the candidate's career. International referees are valued, as the nominee's national and international reputation is a primary determinant.

### How technical or field-specific is the selection process?

As the nomination advances through the process, the selection becomes less and less specific to the candidate's research speciality. This is why it is important to describe the candidate's work in non-technical, readable prose. For example, a researcher specializing in raccoon behaviour might have a nomination dossier with letters of reference from other raccoon researchers. This dossier might initially be evaluated by colleagues in animal biology, then by a committee in the Life Sciences Division. It would then go to the selection committee of the Academy of Science to be, if selected, voted on by all Fellows in that Division.

### Does the RSC provide feedback on dossiers that did not make the cut?

The RSC does not provide feedback on nominations that are unsuccessful.

### For how long is my nomination file valid?

A nomination dossier is valid for one competition. The primary nominator of an unsuccessful nomination is contacted during the summer months.