



Professional Development Grant Guidelines

Purpose

The Graduate School at Duke University has established a Professional Development Grant to support meaningful graduate student professional development programming at the department or program level.

Description

The Graduate School and its campus partners offer [professional development programs, events, and opportunities](#) for graduate students across disciplines. To complement these offerings, The Graduate School recognizes the need for discipline-specific professional development programming and acknowledges that professional development needs across disciplines may vary. For this reason, The Graduate School offers the Professional Development Grant to fund department/program and student efforts to offer professional development programming. This includes activities that support the development of transferable skills relevant to a range of careers, not limited to the tenure-track path. Programming that is only relevant to an academic faculty career must be balanced with parallel programming for students pursuing broad career options.

Examples of topics that could be funded by this award include:

- Career decision-making (e.g., academe vs. industry)
- Job search strategies
- Negotiation skills
- Alumni networking events
- Leadership and management skills
- Work-life balance
- Organizational and time management skills
- Conflict management and communication skills
- Mentorship and advising skills
- Presentation/communication skills
- Faculty career topics, such as the academic job search, applying for positions at teaching institutions, finding a postdoctoral position, first year on the job, the tenure process, job searching in a difficult economy, etc. **Note: These must be balanced with parallel resources for students pursuing diverse career paths.**
- Career paths beyond academia (careers beyond academia for PhDs, invited speakers from industry, alumni events, CV to résumé workshops, etc.)

Award-Eligible Expenses

One-time events, event series, and activities of a longer duration (e.g. research on topics related to professional development, development of new resources, etc.) will all be considered. Activities must take place during the calendar year for which funding is awarded (i.e., January 1 through December 31.) Funds **up to \$2,000** may be requested. The Professional Development Grant may fund any of the following:

- Honoraria for guest speakers, either virtual or in-person
- Travel costs for in-person guest speakers
- Refreshments for attendees
- Operational costs (book purchases, room or equipment rentals, etc.)
- Publicity and/or printing costs

Funds may not be used for any individual professional development (such as individual travel grants or conference attendance for individual students). In addition, Grant funds may not be used to pay Duke faculty or staff for activities that fall within their job description.

Eligible Applicants

- Faculty or administrators of any academic program that falls within the purview of The Graduate School.
- Ph.D. and master's students enrolled in Graduate School degree programs

To encourage dialogue about professional development among multiple members of departments and programs, preference will be given to proposals that include many perspectives in the planning and implementation—that is, faculty-led proposals that include student members in their organizing committees and student-led proposals that include faculty members.

Since this award is focused on departments and programs, GPSG-affiliated student groups are not eligible to apply. Instead, these groups should consider resources such as [GPSG's Alumni Engagement Fund](#) or [Student Group Funding from Graduate Student Affairs](#).

Proposal Guidelines

The proposal submission process is handled through a [Qualtrics survey](#). Applicants are required to provide the following information to complete the submission process:

- Sponsoring department, which will incur the expenses and to which the award funds can be transferred.
- Name and contact information for the department business manager who will serve as the contact for the funds transfer, and a departmental fund code **beginning with 3XX or 4XX** to which Grant funds can be transferred. *(Students should identify their department's business manager and contact them to identify the appropriate fund code for use in this application at least one week before the proposal deadline.)*
- A summary of the activities the proposal would fund. This abstract will be made public if the proposal is funded.

Deadline: October 15, 2025, at 5 p.m. All submissions must be completed through the [Qualtrics survey](#) by this time.

Proposal documents should be uploaded as a single PDF file, with the filename in the format SponsoringDepartment_LeadContactLastName.PDF through the Qualtrics survey. Proposals should total no more than four (4) pages in length and must include the following information and headings:

1. Title of Proposed Activities (up to 200 characters)

2. Abstract (up to 150 words). The abstract will be made public if the proposal is funded.

3. Need and Impact

- Explain the need for the professional development activity and the intended impact on graduate student professional development. If a similar resource or program already exists at the university, explain why an additional resource is necessary.
- Identify existing professional development programming and resources the department or program currently provides to support graduate students in identifying and pursuing career options, including both faculty and broad career options.
- Explain the potential for long-term impact beyond the award period if this proposal is funded. For example, if this event/series is part of a larger plan for professional development, please explain.

4. Proposed Funded Activities

- Provide a description of the professional development activities or event(s).
- For events, include plans for timing and number of graduate students likely to participate. Explain what successful event attendance would look like for this type of program (e.g., number of graduate students attending, number of faculty attending, disciplinary diversity of attendees, etc.).
- Provide a marketing plan for an event or series, if proposed. Note: In order to remain eligible for future award funding through this grant, awardees must provide marketing materials to The Graduate School at least three weeks in advance of the event or the first event in the series so that TGS can assist in publicity efforts, when marketing across departments/programs is desired.

5. Key Personnel

- Name those individuals who will be responsible for planning and logistics of the program or event, and indicate their roles in the process.
- Identify any other campus partners or resources that may be useful in making the event(s) or activities successful.

6. Budget

- Include a detailed budget for how funds will be spent.
- List existing funding sources or funding already applied for.
- List other anticipated sources of funding for the program.

7. Assessment

- How will you measure the activities' success? (Examples: total number of attendees at an event, proportion of department faculty attending, an average evaluation rating of at least 4 on a 5-point Likert scale, etc.)

- All events/series funded by this Grant should include participant evaluation feedback in the year-end assessment report.

Review Criteria and Procedure

A Proposal Evaluation Committee composed of Graduate School deans, faculty, students, and representatives of partnering units will review the grant proposals. In addition to reviewing the proposals' congruence with the guidelines above, the review committee will strongly consider proposals that:

- Demonstrate involvement of both faculty and students in the proposal development and implementation process
- Provide programming not already offered at Duke University or that expands upon programming already offered
- Where relevant, include the opportunity for postdocs to participate

To encourage a diversity of professional development opportunities for graduate students across campus, priority may be given to departments and programs that have not been previously funded by this award.

The Proposal Evaluation Committee may request additional information or budget changes on selected proposals, will determine the amount of funding to be granted, and will notify the department in writing of the award.

Contact

For questions, please contact Dr. Melissa Bostrom, Assistant Dean for Graduate Student Professional Development, at melissa.bostrom@duke.edu.

Acknowledgement

This grant program is based on the model developed by The Graduate School at Northwestern University. We make grateful acknowledgement to Kate Veraldi, Director of Student Services, for her advice in adapting their model.