



Medical College of Wisconsin  
Graduate Student Conference Education Fund  
Award Policy  
Revised: December 2023

**Purpose:** The Graduate Student Conference Education Fund (Travel Fund) is available to help defray the costs of degree-seeking students attending a regional, national, international, or virtual scientific meeting. The fund is intended to give students an opportunity to present their research before a scientific audience, obtain helpful feedback for future progress, and network with other scientists. The pool of money comes from yearly contributions from the Friends of MCW, the Graduate Student Association (GSA), and annual GSA fundraising. The Development Office assists the GSA with annual fundraising efforts and offers the Travel Fund as a targeted option in solicitation materials used for the Annual Faculty and Staff Fund Drive.

**Governance:** The Travel Fund procedures and student eligibility are determined by the GSA Representative Council (GRC) in consultation with departmental administrators, the Graduate School Business Manager, the Director of Enrollment, and other faculty advisors.

**Award Amount:** \$800

**Application Deadline:** No more than 20 business days after receiving notice of abstract acceptance for the conference for which the student is seeking the Travel Fund. If notice of abstract acceptance is received less than 20 business days before the start of the conference, the application must be submitted no later than the day before the conference begins.

**Calendar:** The Travel Fund operates on a calendar year (January 1<sup>st</sup> – December 31<sup>st</sup>). Any eligibility events completed after November 1<sup>st</sup> of the previous calendar year will satisfy the following year's requirements. Therefore, "eligibility year" will refer to November 1<sup>st</sup> of the previous year to October 31<sup>st</sup> of the following year.

**Application Requirements:**

1. The student is the **first and presenting author** for a poster/talk at one of the following:
  - a. An international meeting/conference.
  - b. A national meeting/conference.
  - c. A regional meeting/conference sponsored by a national society.
  - d. A virtual meeting/conference.
2. The student submits proof of abstract acceptance for the conference they wish to attend.
3. The application is signed by the applicant, their mentor, and their program director.
4. The student has volunteered at an approved Travel Fund volunteer event during the eligibility year **prior to submitting the application**.
5. The student has given a GRC-approved Travel Fund Presentation during the eligibility year **prior to submitting the application**.
6. The student submits a signed Travel Fund Volunteer Service Form and Letter of Travel Fund Presentation Completion.

**Travel Fund Volunteer Service Guidelines:**

The Travel Award Committee holds the responsibility for conscientiously choosing and endorsing MCW volunteer opportunities that align with the objectives of the community service requirement (see point #2 below). The GRC and Travel Award Committee will compile a list of

approved MCW volunteer opportunities and post this list in the *Graduate Student Association* module on Brightspace in “Module 3.4 Awards” or under “Travel Awards” on the GSA website.

A member of the MCW community may submit a formal request for an event to be evaluated for approval following the guidelines outlined below:

1. *Submission of Volunteer Opportunities:* Requests for a new MCW volunteer opportunity to be considered for GRC approval must be submitted to the Travel Award Committee (gsa@mcw.edu). Submissions should include comprehensive details about the proposed activity, its objectives, how it aligns with the community service requirement, and how this service will be tracked (*i.e.*, number of hours, screenshot of virtual event, items delivered to GRC, etc.).
2. *Travel Award Committee Evaluation:* The Travel Award Committee will review each submitted volunteer opportunity to ensure that the activity directly benefits the betterment of the MCW community. Examples of events with a high positive impact on the MCW community are events involving the growth and support of graduate student organizations, professional development, and student recruitment at MCW. Service that does not *directly* benefit or support the aforementioned will not satisfy this volunteer requirement. The Travel Award Committee will vote to approve volunteer opportunities. If a volunteer opportunity is approved, it becomes a “qualified event.”
3. *GRC Evaluation:* All qualified events will be recommended to the GRC for final approval. GRC will then vote whether or not to accept the recommendation from the Travel Award Committee. If the applicant wishes to challenge the Travel Award Committee decision, appeals will be handled directly by the GRC.
4. *Communication to Students:* Approved opportunities will be added to the list of Approved GRC Travel Fund Events along with the date of approval.

Approved Travel Fund Volunteer Service Events: \*See [Approved GRC Travel Fund Events](#).

### **Travel Fund Presentation Guidelines:**

Students are required to deliver a presentation regarding their research at a GRC approved event. These events will be open to all students, faculty, and staff at MCW. This presentation serves as an opportunity for students to showcase their research. The intention is for the students to highlight the work they will present at the conference for which the Travel Fund is being sought. Any student who may attend a conference during the calendar year is encouraged to give a talk during the eligibility year.

The following guidelines outline the process for scheduling these talks:

- a. The available presentation dates for the eligibility year will be shared with students by September 1<sup>st</sup> along with instructions on how to sign up.
- b. Students must sign up for a talk by September 30<sup>th</sup> if presenting in November or December, and by January 31<sup>st</sup> for all other dates. Signups are first come, first serve.
- c. Three members of the GRC (at least one Executive Board member) will sign up to attend: 1 moderator and 2 attendance trackers. These roles will not satisfy the Travel Fund Volunteer Service requirement.
- d. Students will be notified of the selection of their talk date and mediator’s contact information via email by October 7<sup>th</sup> if presenting in November or December, and by February 7<sup>th</sup> for all other dates.
- e. After January 31<sup>st</sup>, the Travel Award Committee will decide whether to create more presentation dates on an as needed basis.

The following guidelines outline the process for conducting these talks:

- a. Each student will be allotted eight minutes (five-minute talk with up to three minutes for questions). The content of the presentation should summarize an aspect of the student's research (*e.g.*, methods used, results obtained, an overview of the student's poster). A brief research overview with limited jargon is recommended.
- b. A slide deck is required to be emailed to the designated moderator at least 24 hours before the event. The deck must not contain more than 5 content slides; title and acknowledgement slides do not count towards this limit. Any content slides above this limit will be removed by moderator. The file must be sent in PowerPoint format and follow the naming convention FirstInitialLastName\_MM\_DD\_YYY.pptx with the date signifying the presentation date (*e.g.* JSmith\_02\_05\_2024.pptx). The email must have the subject line "GSA Travel Fund Presentation".
- c. Presenters are required to stay for the whole event and will need to check in and check out with a GRC attendance tracker at the event. Failure to do so will result in not completing this requirement.
- d. These talks are open to all MCW students, faculty, and staff. Attending this talk without presenting does not satisfy the Travel Fund Presentation requirement.

Approved Travel Fund Presentation Events: \*See [Approved GRC Travel Fund Events](#).

### **Important Annual Events Regarding the Travel Fund:**

#### September-October

GSA Program Representatives meet with their Program Director(s) to discuss their program's current usage of the Travel Fund and future plans.

GSA will release the dates of Travel Fund eligibility events.

#### October-November

The Development Office communicates available funds to the Graduate School.

The Travel Award Committee meets with the GSA Treasurer, the Business Manager, and advisory faculty to discuss the award amount for the next calendar year.

#### November-December

The GRC reviews financial reports from the previous calendar year's award distribution.

Based on funds available and projected student travel, the Travel Award Committee presents its recommendation for the year's Travel Fund Award Policy and award cap to the GRC.

The GRC votes on their contribution to the following year's Travel Fund.

The Travel Award Committee and GRC Treasurer update the Travel Award Policy to reflect the GRC vote. The new policy is communicated to Department Administrators and to the graduate students via email.

#### January

A list of the previous year's awardees is shared with the GRC and posted in the *Graduate Student Association* module on Brightspace in "Module 3.4 Awards" or under "Travel Awards" on the GSA website.

### **Application Process:**

- a. Students apply for the award by completing an application located in the *Graduate Student Association* module on Brightspace in "Module 3.4 Awards" or under "Travel

Awards” on the GSA website. It is the student’s responsibility to ensure all portions of the application, including the faculty sponsor’s comment and signatures, are complete.

- b. **Each eligible student may apply once in a calendar year for the Travel Fund to be used at one conference. Any unused funds must be returned to the GSA.**
- c. Completed applications must be submitted to the Graduate School office (gradschool@mcw.edu) before the application deadline as described above.
- d. Should the application be incomplete, the Graduate School will communicate this to the student. The student will have no more than seven days to amend their application and resubmit it to the Graduate School for committee approval. Failure to return a completed application within this time window will constitute a rejection of said application.
- e. If a conference occurs early in the calendar year, students can submit completed applications during the previous calendar year to prepay flights/registration. However, the award amount for the year in which the conference occurs is to be used. If prepaid expenses initially charged to the Travel Award Cost Center exceed the new award amount (*i.e.*, the previous year’s award amount was higher than the award amount for the conference’s year), the Department Administrator, or the student (if the Department Administrator did not approve funding in excess of the Travel Fund), must reimburse the difference to the Travel Award Cost Center from alternative funds.

#### **Awards Committee Review Process:**

- a. Only completed applications submitted prior to the deadline will be forwarded to the Awards Committee of the Graduate Studies Council (GSC) who will review the application to determine whether all criteria have been met.
- b. The Awards Committee members will communicate via email their decision to the Graduate School (gradschool@mcw.edu) who will in turn email the decision to the applicant, their Program Director, and the Department Administrator.

#### **Disbursement Process:**

- a. Departments are encouraged to prepay airfare and/or conference registration fees when applicable. Department Administrators can access funds from the Travel Award Cost Center for prepaid fees. If these expenses exceed the award amount, the student must coordinate with their mentor and Department Administrator to determine alternative payment methods for the amount exceeding the award amount. If these expenses are less than the award amount, the funds left from the student’s award will be available for reimbursement of other expenses accrued to attend the conference. Departments may use funds from the Travel Award Cost Center prior to Travel Fund application acceptance to prepay airfare and registration fees. If the application is subsequently not accepted or the student does not travel, the Business Manager will contact the Department Administrator and the student to determine who is responsible for refunding the Travel Award Cost Center.
- b. Department Administrators may use the Travel Award Cost Center funds to prepay airfare and registration fees for students who do not have accepted abstracts. These students must complete and submit the completed Travel Fund application to their Department Administrator and the Graduate School. If, upon review, funds have been used without a submitted application, the Business Manager will contact the Department Administrator and the student to submit an application immediately. To access funds prior to abstract acceptance, Department Administrators must verify the accuracy of the Travel Fund application, particularly the type of meeting attended (regional, national, international). Funds can only be used up to the cap assigned; use of funds exceeding the

cap must be refunded to the Travel Award Cost Center. Student noncompliance may result in fund reimbursement to the Travel Award Cost Center from the student.

- c. Any student using funds without a completed application submission (Travel Fund application, first-author abstract, proof of abstract acceptance, volunteer service, and presentation) as well as their Department Administrator will be contacted by the Business Manager to submit any missing application elements. If the student fails to submit the necessary documents, the student and/or Department Administrator must refund the Travel Award Cost Center from alternative sources for the funds used.
- d. For reimbursement of expenses (hotel, taxis, meals, etc.), students must submit proper documentation to their Department Administrator. If a hotel room is shared, separate bills should be obtained for each person. Shared transportation costs should be divided equally, and rental cars should be avoided. Travel Award Cost Center funds may be used to reimburse students for qualifying expenses, but funds used are not to exceed the award amount for all prepaid and reimbursed expenses.
- e. For reimbursement of expenses, students must apply for the Travel Fund by the aforementioned deadline. Any late applications will be denied.

**Award Amount:**

- a. The award amount for the Travel Fund will be assessed annually and modified at the end of each calendar year if necessary for the next calendar year. The GSA Travel Award Committee, in collaboration with the Business Manager and relevant advisors, will determine an appropriate award amount based on the funds available and the number of awardees from the previous year. The committee will make a recommendation to the GRC, which will vote on the award amount for the next calendar year.

**Accountability:**

- a. At the end of each calendar year, the Business Manager will determine the amount of unused funds. Unused funds will be retained for the Graduate Student Conference Education Fund for the following calendar year.
- b. The Graduate School Business Manager will audit the reports described above to be certain all expenditures were appropriate and will prepare a summary report for the Graduate School Dean, GSA President, GSA Treasurer, and GSA Travel Award Committee detailing who received funds, what meeting was attended, and what funds, if any, went unspent.
- c. Any GSA travel funds disbursed outside of the guidelines provided here must be reimbursed from other funds (*e.g.*, departmental or mentor's funds).
- d. Travel Fund summary statements for the prior calendar year will be reviewed with GRC at the February GSA meeting each year.