

Grinnell Prize FAQs

On the Prize Background

History of the Grinnell Prize

The Grinnell College Innovator for Social Justice Prize, or the Grinnell Prize, directly reflects Grinnell's historic mission to educate men and women "who are prepared in life and work to use their knowledge and their abilities to serve the common good."

Grinnell was founded in 1846 by a group of transplanted New Englanders with strong Congregational beliefs who were dedicated to social reform. They organized as the Trustees of Iowa College — originally in Davenport, Iowa. In 1859 the trustees moved the College to newly settled Grinnell, Iowa, where their abolitionist sentiments were more welcome. At the time, Grinnell was an important stop on the Underground Railroad that secretly transported slaves to freedom.

Grinnell's social consciousness blossomed during Franklin D. Roosevelt's presidency, when graduates Harry Hopkins 1912, Chester Davis 1911, Paul Appleby 1913, Hallie Ferguson Flanagan 1911, and Florence Stewart Kerr 1912 became influential New Deal administrators.

Today, Grinnell's commitment to social justice continues through a strong philosophy of self governance and personal responsibility, as well as programs and initiatives that encourage students to learn about the world beyond the campus and effect positive social change.

Grinnell College students may specifically explore their civic aspirations through a campus-wide ecosystem of service and social innovation opportunities. For example, students may volunteer in the local community, participate in a community based learning class or social innovation challenge, take on a service learning work-study job, identify a study abroad opportunity that includes a service component, join a service or advocacy focused student group, coordinate a political activity, lead an alternative break trip, or serve as a mentor to other students on campus. It is our hope that through intentional exploration and reflection, all of our students graduate with a civic focus that is meaningfully integrated into their personal and professional life.

With the creation of the Grinnell Prize, the College extended its educational mission beyond the campus and alumni community to individuals anywhere who believe innovative social justice programs create a better world.

Through student internships and staff fellowships, student and staff members have the opportunity to work with the Prize winners and their

organizations. Explore the [Past Winners](#) pages to learn more about these opportunities and Grinnellians' experiences working with these outstanding individuals and organizations.

On the Nomination Process

How are social innovation and social justice defined?

The College does not have a single definition of social justice or social innovation in recognition that there are many ways to define social justice. Because of this there are also many ways to understand social innovation. Both of these terms are broadly interpreted. You should work with your nominee to define the justice issues they are addressing. Additionally it is important for you to articulate clearly how the nominee's approach to change-making is innovative.

May I submit a nomination in a language other than English?

At this time, no. While we welcome nominees from all over the world, the College requires that nominations and any subsequent materials be submitted in English.

May I submit my nomination by email or fax?

No. All nominations must be submitted online

May I revise a submitted nomination essay?

Due to the volume of nominations received, nomination essays cannot be revised once they have been submitted. The College recommends that you draft and review your essay offline, and then copy and paste the essay into the online form when you are ready to submit the nomination. If an individual is nominated more than once by the same nominator, we will only consider the first submission.

I'm not sure whether my nominee meets all the criteria. May I speak with someone at the College before submitting a nomination?

Due to the volume of nominations received, the College cannot provide personal consultations with nominators regarding a nomination's content. However we are able to answer questions regarding a nominee's eligibility. Please review the nomination instructions, which will assist you in focusing your nomination essay and outlining the nomination criteria. If there is any doubt, proceed to nominate the individual.

My response to a nomination essay question is longer than 1750 words. Is that a problem?

You will not be able to submit your nomination if the response to an essay question is longer than 1750 words. Please edit the essay to conform with the 1750-word limit. To be competitive, the nomination essay should be focused and concise.

Are there any restrictions on who may nominate a Grinnell Prize candidate?

Members of the Selection Committee and the Grinnell Prize program staff may not submit a nomination. Also, individuals may not nominate themselves (no self-nominations). There are no other restrictions. This means the nominator can be a relative, a board member of the individual's organization, or affiliated with the College (e.g., a student). Ideally, the nominator should be someone who is well acquainted with the nominee's work and can attest to the nominee's qualifications. Nominators should be available for possible follow-up questions throughout the selection process.

I nominated someone for a previous Grinnell Prize. May I nominate the same person for this year's Grinnell Prize?

Yes, so long as your nominee meets the current nomination year's eligibility criteria for the Grinnell Prize. Please note that the criteria may be slightly different from year to year.

I was nominated for a past Grinnell Prize. May I be re-nominated?

Yes, absolutely, so long as you meet the current criteria.

May I nominate more than one individual in a single nomination?

Yes, you may nominate up to two individuals who are working collaboratively on an innovative effort. Each of the individuals must independently meet the Prize criteria and eligibility, and an effort should be made to elaborate on the collaborative or synergistic aspect of their relationship.

May I submit more than one nomination per Grinnell Prize nomination period?

Yes, you may submit as many nominations as there are individuals that meet the criteria and eligibility requirements; however, each nomination is limited to two individuals.

May I collaborate with others to nominate an individual (or team of two individuals)?

Yes, of course! On the nomination submission form, however, please enter the contact information of the person that will be the main contact with the College.

In submitting my nomination, may I collaborate with the individual or individuals (up to two) being nominated?

Yes! The College strongly encourages nominators to collaborate with their nominee(s) to put forth a strong, well-informed nomination.

Must I inform the individual that I have nominated him or her for the Grinnell Prize?

Yes! Each nomination must include a letter of consent from each nominee as described in the nomination criteria.

Will I be notified if my nominee is chosen to continue with the selection process?

Nominees selected as finalists are contacted by Prize staff and are asked to submit supplemental materials. At this time, nominators are also informed of their nominee's selection as a semi-finalist.

What additional information will the College request if an individual is contacted to continue with the selection process?

Curriculum vitae or resume, letters of recommendation, photos or videos, news articles, letters of reference, as well as organizational and policy documents may be requested if a nominee is selected as a Prize finalist. It is the nominee's responsibility to provide the information the College is requesting. Failure to provide the requested information will automatically disqualify the nominee from further consideration.

May I submit supplemental information along with my nomination?

No. Additional information will not be reviewed. If your nominee is chosen as a finalist, the College will request specific supplemental information at that time.

May I include hyperlinks or references to other documents in the nomination essay?

No. Nomination essays should be concise and self-contained (thoughtfully addressing each question).

Does the nominee have to be associated with a non-profit organization?

No, the nominee can be associated with a for-profit organization or a governmental entity, and, in fact, need not be associated with any organization. While it is often the case that a nominee's innovative work is done with the support and within the framework of an organization (often founded by the nominee), the Grinnell Prize is intended to recognize an outstanding individual, not an organization. For example, a visual artist, independent of any organization, can be a social justice innovator by exposing a societal problem in a creative way, thereby affecting the perception or opinion of other individuals and resulting in societal change.

May I nominate an individual who works with a faith-based organization?

Yes. The individual's innovation or organization, however, should not include proselytization or substantial lobbying.

I am interested in nominating two individuals for the Prize (they are partners). However, one of the partners died earlier this year. Should I nominate both individuals or should I nominate only the partner that is still alive?

The Prize cannot be awarded posthumously (one of the criteria is that the winner must be able to attend the award ceremony and symposium events on campus). Please nominate the other person individually.

On Criteria/Eligibility

What is an innovative contribution?

The innovation aspect of the Prize is an important criterion. The College seeks individuals who are creative problem solvers. The innovation can be a product; it can be a process; it can be a novel use of old or new technology; it can create new opportunities; it can be a market-based solution; it can lead to a more sustainable or just solution to an existing problem. When considering innovation, a nominee might think about the following questions:

- Is the individual pioneering a certain method or technique to solve a problem?

- Is the idea original?
- Is an old method being used in new ways?
- Is the approach more comprehensive than others working in the same field?
- Does it disrupt the status quo or create systemic change?

The Prize Selection Committee will examine whether a contribution is innovative in the context of the individual's approach, chosen field, and geographical location. A competitive nomination will articulate how the nominee is innovative and distinguishable from others doing similar work.

Nominations will be evaluated according the following scale for innovation:

Most innovative: very original process or product and/or very creative in context or application

Innovative: modestly original process or product and/or modestly creative in context or application

Slightly innovative: marginally original process or product and/or marginally creative in context or application

Not innovative: no original process or product and no creativity in context or application

What is social impact?

Social impact is the effect actions have on the well-being of a community. A competitive nomination will articulate and provide concrete evidence of the nominee's impact in the community in which they are working. The Prize is meant to recognize accomplishments to date, but it also recognizes the promise of more to come. Therefore, the Prize Selection Committee is looking for a proven record of results without excluding ongoing or newly launched initiatives.

When considering innovation, a nominee might think about the following questions:

- Are there proven or measureable results?
- How can the nominee's impact be described in terms of quantity? (e.g., number of people, villages, cities, countries affected)
- How can the nominee's impact be described in terms of quality? (e.g., effect on underserved, vulnerable, or disadvantaged population)
- How does the nominee define success or determine whether their innovation is making a difference?

Nominations will be evaluated according the following scale for impact:

Most impact: Very strong demonstrated impact and/or tremendous potential for future impact

Significant impact: Significant demonstrated impact and/or likely significant future impact

Slight impact: Slight demonstrated impact and/or slight possibility for future impact

No impact: No demonstrated impact and no potential for future impact

What is a systemic solution?

Nominees should be visionaries whose work pushes beyond temporary or superficial solutions to address root causes of a complex, chronic issue. When considering innovation, a nominee might think about the following questions:

- How does the nominee create coordinated, sustainable and scalable change?
- Does the work reduce inequalities or improve policy, accessibility, awareness or resource flows?
- Does the solution give agency to those most directly impacted by the problem?

Nominations will be evaluated according the following scale for systemic solution:

Most Systemic: Strategy clearly addresses systemic factors that make the need an issue and offers solutions related to symptomatic needs

Systemic: Strategy has reasonable plans to addresses systemic factors and has started doing so, but primarily focuses on symptoms created by the issue

Slightly Systemic: Strategy may identify some of the systemic reasons for the issue, but only addresses symptomatic issues

Not Systemic: Strategy addresses only symptoms related to the issue

To see examples of innovative, impactful and systemic solutions created by previous Prize winners, please visit the [past winners page](#).

May I nominate an individual for a less recent innovation?

While less recent innovations will be considered, the College would also be interested in whether the individual continues to innovate.

Why does the Grinnell Prize recognize relatively "unknown" innovators?

Innovators are bringing about positive change in every community, but many are not recognized outside of their immediate community or field. These unrecognized innovators would benefit most from the Grinnell Prize. Telling the stories of these innovators will highlight what is possible and inspire others to effect positive social change.

My nominee is well known and recognized in his or her community or field. Is my nominee still eligible?

Yes. All successful nominees should have some level of recognition within their community or field. The College is looking for innovators who may be well known and respected within their immediate community or field, but not with the wider public. If you are uncertain whether your potential nominee is well known outside his or her community or field, please proceed to submit a nomination.

My nominee has previously received a major award. Is he or she eligible?

Because the Prize program targets innovators who are not recognized outside of their immediate community or field, candidates receiving significant awards for their innovation will be evaluated to determine the impact of those awards on their broader public recognition. If, since the receipt of a major award, the candidate contributes a new innovation unrelated to the award, the nominator should proceed to submit a nomination emphasizing the nominee's most recent innovation.

My nominee may not be available for follow-up inquiries after the nomination is submitted. Will this affect the nominee's chances of winning?

It is the nominee's responsibility to provide the information the College is requesting. Failure to provide the requested information will automatically disqualify the nominee from further consideration.

The individual I am thinking of nominating has a contractual (or other financial) relationship with the College. May I nominate this individual for the Prize?

Proceed to nominate the individual. Conflict of interest concerns will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Due to the volume of nominations received, the College cannot provide pre-nomination, individual determinations on conflict of interest concerns or otherwise offer personal consultations on possible nominations.

Additional Resources:

The following links may be helpful as you articulate the work of your nominee.

Innovation:

“Defining Social Innovation” (Stanford University):

<https://www.gsb.stanford.edu/faculty-research/centers-initiatives/csi/defining-social-innovation>

SOCIAL INNOVATION THEORY AND RESEARCH A Guide for Researchers (TEPSIE):

https://iupe.files.wordpress.com/2015/11/tepsie-research_report_final_web.pdf

Impact:

“What is Social Impact?” (Ross School of Business, University of Michigan)

<http://socialimpact.umich.edu/about/what-is-social-impact/>

“How Do We Define Effective Impact of Research Knowledge?” (KMbeing)

<https://kmbeing.com/2014/07/05/how-do-we-define-effective-impact-of-research-knowledge/>

Systems thinking, systems change:

“Beyond Organizational Scale: How Social Entrepreneurs Create Systems Change” (Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship)

http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Schwab_Foundation_Systems_Report_2017.pdf

“Systemic Change” (Social Change Northern Ireland)

<https://socialinnovationni.org/systemic-change-2/>