Agents of Change Awards

Elsevier Materials Today



Location

Global

Target group

Researchers and professionals in the material sciences community

Budget

$15,000 a year (2023, 2025, 2026)

SDGs

SDG 10 (target 10.2)

Synposis

Recognize initiatives that focus on intersectionality and encourage systemic change within the materials science research community.

Program description

The 2024 Elsevier Gender Report highlighted the slow yet steady increase of female researchers in materials science, currently at 32% globally. Despite progress, significant disparities persist.

The Materials Today Agents of Change Awards annually recognize and support initiatives that are taking practical steps to encourage an actively inclusive materials science research community. Each year, two $10,000 grants are awarded to individuals or teams making impactful strides in this area. With support from the Elsevier Foundation, the awards were expanded in 2023 to include a dedicated ceremony and networking dinner.

Goals

- Recognize grassroots, department-level, or broader initiatives within the materials science community.
- Drive greater inclusion and prioritize sustainable plans for long-term success.

Activities and milestones

- Refreshed criteria and guidelines to attract more highquality nominations.
- The 2025 Awards ceremony took place at the Elsevier Materials Today Conference (June 23-26, Sitges, Spain), ensuring high visibility and networking opportunities.
- During the conference, 2023 Award winner Dr. Vishal Chaudhary presented his insights from an alumni perspective. Dr. Chaudhary launched the Happy Mental Health Club to address mental health stigma in academia; organized online sessions, awareness programs, conferences and workshops to recognize and respond to mental health issues, emphasizing early intervention; and linked his research on environmental factors to mental health with the goal of developing biosensors for real-time stress monitoring.

Looking ahead

Winners of the next award cycle will be announced in 2026, selected by a panel of six judges, including past winners and distinguished scientists.

"We are deeply honored to receive this award. This recognition underscores our commitment to supporting Indigenous youth through hands-on STEM experiences and mentorship, fostering their voices and perspectives in the future of biobased materials innovation."

Orlando Rojas
Canada Excellence Research Chair in Bioproducts, The University of British Columbia

2025 winners



Thriving Together – Indigenous Outreach Program for Biobased Innovation, led by Kelley Oh and Orlando Rojas at The University of British Columbia. The program engages Indigenous high school students in Canada through immersive STEM experiences, amplifies Indigenous knowledge systems, and builds pathways for youth to explore careers in biobased innovation.

By partnering with community, government, and industry, "Thriving Together" is fostering broader participation in science while honoring different approaches to knowledge.



BME UNITE Future Faculty Program, led by Dr. Elizabeth Cosgriff-Hernandez at The University of Texas at Austin. The program strengthens the academic pipeline in biomedical engineering by supporting postdoctoral scholars through mentorship, community-building, and professional development. Since 2021, it has helped over 50 fellows transition into faculty roles.

By creating a sustainable model grounded in collaboration, "BME UNITE" exemplifies how inclusive academic practices can create long-term impact.