

Evaluation of NSERC's College and Community Innovation Program (CCI) & SSHRC's Community and College Social Innovation Fund (CCSIF)

ABOUT THE FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

The College and Community Innovation program is administered by NSERC in collaboration with the Canadian Institutes of Health and Research and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

CCI aims to increase the economic development of Canadian communities and create new skilled jobs by increasing the capacity of colleges to undertake research and development (R&D) activities and projects in partnership with the private sector, particularly small and medium enterprises (SMEs). CCI also aims to contribute to local and regional innovation by fostering the commercialization, technology transfer, adaptation and/or adoption of new products, services, and technologies.

The CCI provides funding for Canadian colleges through seven different grants but only three were examined in this evaluation :

- Technology Access Centre Grants (TAC),
- Applied Research and Development Grants (ARD), with two possible funding levels (ARD2 and ARD3), and
- Industrial Research Chairs for Colleges Grants (IRCC)

CCSIF aims to foster social innovation in Canada by connecting the talent, expertise and capabilities of individuals within Canadian colleges with the research needs of local community organizations. It is anticipated that funded projects will develop new or existing ideas and solutions to mitigate social challenges, as well as products, initiatives, processes, or programs that have a positive impact on society. In 2017, the federal government decided that the CCSIF would be placed within the larger CCI program.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT & KEY OUTCOMES ACHIEVED

1. CCI and CCSIF Program Design and Delivery

Stakeholder relationships with granting agencies appear to be very positive. Aspects that could be improved include:

- Greater opportunities for funding projects in the SSH or health-related disciplines.
- Increased recognition for the importance of in-kind contributions from R&D partners.
- Greater consideration of the issues surrounding the current mechanism for faculty release time.
- Shorter turnaround time to review grant applications.
- Increase the proportion of grant funds that can be used for indirect costs and eligible expenses.
- Changes to the reporting requirements for certain CCI program grants.

3. Enriched Curriculum & Experiential Learning for College Students

The CCI program and the CCSIF Fund:

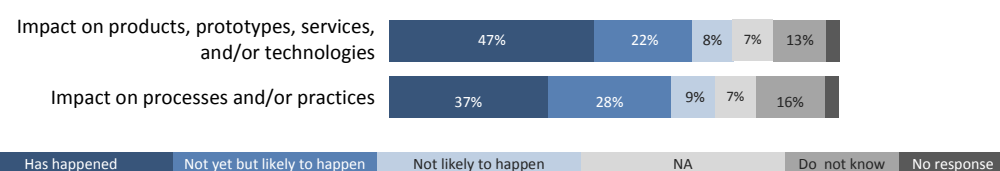
- Improve the content of courses: integration of examples, case studies, and research findings into course content; updating teaching materials in terms of analytical techniques and protocols.
- Provide students with opportunities for hands-on training (i.e., working in a laboratory); and making project reports mandatory course readings.
- Support faculty knowledge gaining through direct participation in R&D or through faculty sharing information amongst each other.

4. Supporting Business Innovation and Economic Development

Regardless of the grant and the type of involvement of the partners and TAC clients, the overall consensus from project leads, TAC directors, Chairholders, partners, and TAC clients is that the projects:

- Address the needs of the partners or TAC client companies.
- Achieve their expected outcomes, with the level of perception of the achievement of outcomes increasing over time.
- Increase overall R&D capacity at their organization.
- Result in new products, services, and/or technologies, as well as the improvement of existing ones.
- Lead to increased revenues and a larger workforce (reported by 29% of surveyed TAC clients, who had completed an applied R&D or technical and business service project).

About two-thirds of TAC clients surveyed indicated the following outcomes had been or would be achieved:



ABOUT THE EVALUATION

The evaluation of the CCI program covers the period of 2010-11 to 2016-17, while the evaluation of SSHRC's CCSIF examines the period between 2014-2015 and 2016-2017.

Evaluating the extent to which the CCI program and the CCSIF achieved their objectives and expected outcomes required multiple lines of inquiry, including:

- a literature review,
- document reviews,
- administrative data reviews,
- cost-efficiency analyses,
- case studies, and
- key informant interviews.

Additional lines of inquiry were also used as part of the evaluation of the CCI program, including:

- an online survey with TAC clients,
- interviews with TAC directors working at colleges that were not selected to be a case study, and
- a file review.

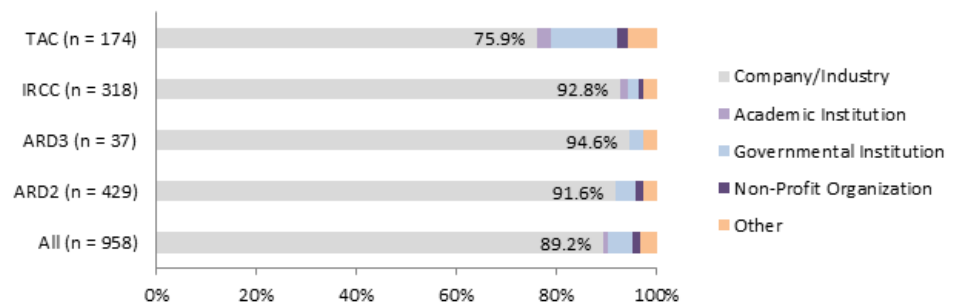
Most of the CCSIF-funded projects were not completed at the time of data collection. It was, therefore, difficult to measure the actual achievement of objectives and outcomes for the projects. Additionally, societal impacts and benefits of Social Sciences and Humanities R&D often take many years to occur, which increased the difficulty of measuring the impact of the CCSIF-funded projects during this evaluation. Using multiple lines of evidence, the evaluation was able to extract qualitative outcome information from the CCSIF-funded projects.

2. Enhancing R&D Capacity at Canadian Colleges

The CCI program and the CCSIF Fund:

- Enhance the capacity of colleges to engage in applied R&D and to adapt their R&D focus in order to suit the needs of organizations both inside and outside of their community.
- Place colleges in an advantageous position to partner with organizations on a short-term basis with a targeted focus (e.g., a project to develop a specific product or service).
- Strengthen the recognition and reputation of the colleges, along with the experts that work within them.
- Foster partnerships with community organizations and SMEs.
- Enhance Knowledge Mobilization to partners, communities, & other potential users (e.g., through formal and informal meetings with partners during a project, partner websites, and workshops with end-users).

Partners involved in a TAC, IRCC, or ARD grant by organization type and grant (2010-11 to 2016-17)



5. Supporting Social Innovation and Community Development

CCSIF provides an important opportunity for colleges to address social innovation. Many of the funded projects were not completed at the time of the evaluation.

- Two key factors related to the concept of social innovation differentiate the CCSIF-funded projects from the majority of projects funded through the CCI program. Results of these projects are expected to:
 - 1) **be used to initiate social change** at the local, regional, provincial, or national level.
 - 2) **be broadly communicated** to ensure that other organizations, communities, and/or society at large may benefit from their findings, products, and/or services.
- Dissemination strategies include, but are not limited to: websites, blogs, data portals, short videos, plain language reports (i.e., non-academic papers), conference presentations, and academic publications.
- Funded projects focused on supporting social innovation and community development, and resulted in the development of new products and/or services for the partner(s), or in the improvement or enhancement of existing products and/or services within the college and/or of those offered by their partner(s).

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Continue funding the CCI program, which supports innovation and bridges the research capacity of colleges and SMEs.
2. Conduct discussions with eligible institutions about the challenges experienced around faculty release to help identify possible alternative mechanisms.
3. Review and consider updating the mechanism supporting the indirect costs of research.
4. Examine reporting requirements to ensure that the information collected is useful, accessible, and comparable, and also to reduce the reporting burden.
5. Consider a follow-up study to further examine the 2015 CCSIF projects and assess the extent to which the program achieved its expected outcomes.