

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE SUMMARY

JOINT INITIATIVE (JI) PROGRAM MECHANISM

Date: August 1, 2008

Context

SSHRC's Joint Initiative (JI) program mechanism was launched in the 1989-90 fiscal year to encourage government agencies, universities, the private sector, the voluntary sector and community organizations to work with SSHRC in defining and funding programs for research in areas of particular interest to partners and to Canadian society. This management response provides a follow-up to the recommendations outlined in the Final Evaluation Report submitted by R.A. Malatest & Associates on January 22, 2007.

The purpose of the JI evaluation was to assess whether the program mechanism continues to be relevant and whether it is effective in terms of governance, design and delivery. It was also aimed at providing insights into the overall results/impacts of the JI mechanism. The goal of the evaluation includes providing evidence by which decisions regarding the continuation and, indeed, evolution of the JI mechanism may proceed.

Given the generally positive results emerging from the JI Evaluation (summarized below), we may assume that the JI mechanism will continue to operate albeit with some changes from the old practices that will shore up practices to help ensure greater accountability, impacts, and oversight. To this end, we can view the JI Evaluation itself and this management response as providing a tool with which the Partnerships Branch's strategic plan can be informed.

Moreover, the outcomes and observations noted in the evaluation are also useful for SSHRC staff when negotiating new joint initiatives with potential partners with respect to clearly describing the roles and responsibilities of SSHRC, its partner(s), the research community and other involved stakeholders.

Key Findings by Evaluation Issue

Relevance

- **Need for the mechanism:** Support for this type of programming was found to be high to moderate across all stakeholder groups, with partners, students and recipients showing highest levels of support (88, 83 and 77 per cent expressing high support, respectively). Although partners report having similar joint-funding arrangements with other organizations, in 5 of the 8 case studies, partners indicated that their partnership with SSHRC addressed a need for high quality research.
- **Relevance of objectives:** Overall, there is strong support for the objectives of the JI program mechanism, with the exception of the objective of encouraging multi-sectoral consultation and multidisciplinary approaches.

- **Link to similar programs:** The objectives of the JI program mechanism are consistent in varying degrees to comparable international and Canadian programs.

Management, Design and Delivery

- **Program Costs:** The total grants expenditures for the JI program mechanism (excluding INE-JIs) in 2004/05 were \$7.1M¹, or 3.5 per cent of SSHRC's total grants expenditures. Although the actual cost of operating the whole SPJI division in 2004/05 was \$0.8M, the total cost to SSHRC of administering the JI program mechanism² was estimated at \$0.7M, and the cost of administering a single JI program was estimated at \$53,000.³
- **Workload:** Currently, 14 JI programs (11 active - i.e., competitions are being held) are being administered by 6 program officers (4 senior, 2 junior) within the SPJI division. While this level of resources was considered sufficient by program staff to administer program competitions, they were not considered sufficient to consistently meet partner timelines, conduct reviews, or to foster, expand, and pursue new partnership opportunities.
- **Management Framework:** Stakeholders identified a number of impediments to the smooth management of the JI program mechanism - including the need to establish an improved, integrated framework for managing the mechanism and guiding strategic investments at SSHRC, the need for greater capacity (including senior positions), and the need for clearer reporting requirements to assist in management and decision making.

Governance

- **Ambiguity of process:** Although the process to approve new JI programs allows wide latitude to SSHRC management in negotiating and initiating JIs, the extent to which the process has worked in practice is not clear: the four research priority areas under which a program can be developed and launched by SSHRC management are very broad, and the process does not incorporate risk as a formal consideration.
- **Guidelines and competing priorities:** No clear guidelines exist for the preparation, submission and approval of new partnership proposals.
- **Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs):** MOUs were identified as a means to mitigate potential risks (e.g. to SSHRC's reputation, financial and operational risks). However, concerns were raised with the extent to which MOUs were sufficiently vetted. Also, MOU provisions for partner contributions have not always been followed. Challenges include ambiguity as to the ultimate responsibility for billing partners and changes in JI program timelines. Performance measurement and evaluation/review requirements have not been consistently implemented to date. However, a document entitled "Procedures in Establishing and Approving Memoranda of Understanding and Programs with External Funding Contributions", published by staff in 2005 (as part of the MOU routing slip), is expected to address some of the above issues.

¹ Includes partner funds transiting through SSHRC.

² Including costs incurred outside of the SPJI division.

³ This cost is an average across all JIs, some of which cost SSHRC much less than others, such as the JI's managed in Fellowships and in SRG (i.e., the JI with CFI).

Mechanism Results/Impacts

- **Partnerships.** Since 1989, SSHRC has engaged in over 44 JI programs and has partnered with over 32 distinct organizations, the majority of which (72 per cent) are within the federal government. In all but a few cases, JIs were initiated by partner organizations, and 15 out of the 16 partners surveyed reported having similar partnerships with other organizations.
- **Leveraging.** Since 1989, SSHRC and its JI partners have each contributed approximately \$40 million in research funding and fellowship supplements through JI programs. Since only those partner funds that flow through SSHRC are included in this total, it is likely an underestimate of partners' contributions.
- **Multi-disciplinarity.** While researchers from a wide variety of disciplines have participated in JI programs, the majority (55 per cent) of applications represented a single discipline or researcher. Only 6 per cent of funded applicants were from the humanities, confirming that humanities disciplines are underrepresented in JI programs.
- **Capacity Development.** A total of 257 students were supported by the JI programs directly as program recipients.
- **Policy Impacts.** Five out of the 16 partners surveyed stated that the research produced through JI programs had resulted in impacts on specific policy documents or practices, and were able to provide concrete examples of this. In addition, half of the case studies conducted showed evidence (from partners' perspective) of policy impact. Most researchers however were not aware of whether their research had contributed to specific policy documents (55 per cent), had contributed to specific reports or research publications produced by the partner (55 per cent) or had been generally used by the partner (75 per cent).
- **Knowledge Transfer/Mobilization.** Analysis of Final Research Reports for JI funded researchers and for researchers funded under the Standard Research Grants (SRG) program shows that JI funded researchers reported a significantly higher average number of presentations, newspaper/magazine articles, policy and other reports, website content, etc. than SRG funded researchers (4.64 and 1.93 per award respectively). SRG funded researchers reported a higher average number of accepted/published academic articles, book chapters and books than JI funded researchers (2.89 and 1.63 per award respectively). This difference however was not found to be statistically significant.
- **SSHRC's profile.** Although most partners surveyed were familiar with SSHRC and its objectives prior to initiating a joint initiative, participation in a JI program did cause a small change in the degree of familiarity (moderate to very) as well as a small change in partners' assessment of the quality of social sciences and humanities research. Generally, partners surveyed were positive about their relationship with SSHRC.

Summary Table of the Management Response to the Joint Initiative Evaluation

Evaluation Recommendations		Management Response		
Theme	Recommendation	Response	Responsibility Centre	Priority/Deadline
1. Continue to support the JI program mechanism in the context of SSHRC's Strategic Plan	<p>1) defining the mechanism's place in implementing the vision set out in SSHRC's Strategic directions;</p> <p>2) clarifying what is a joint initiative and defining its parameters;</p> <p>3) identifying and ensuring the subsequent selection of highly relevant and engaged partners; and,</p> <p>4) Ensuring the proper human and financial resourcing of the mechanism in light of SSHRC's current and future expectations with regards to this strategic resource.</p>	<p>1) Agreed: SSHRC's program branches are to conduct an analysis of its suite of programs to determine the fit of all Strategic Programs and Joint Initiatives within the Strategic Plan and by building into existing and new JI's mechanisms that help to accomplish the strategic priorities: quality, connections, and impacts.</p> <p>2) Agreed: the plan is to revise the draft protocol that defines Joint Initiatives and clarifies and defines the roles and responsibilities of JI partners with an eye to guide decision making on future partnerships.</p> <p>3) Agreed: Once the role of JIs vis-à-vis the Partnership Branch's Strategic Plan has been established, staff can identify potential partners and sectors to engage for new programming. In this process, staff will also develop criteria by which to</p>	<p>1) Responsibility to prepare the program analysis falls to the VP Partnerships and will involve members of SPJI as well as PPIA, CPE, the Coordination Unit, the new KMB unit, as well as others as needed.</p> <p>2) SPJI, in consultation with the VP Partnerships, PPIA and CPE will lead in revisions to the JI protocol.</p> <p>3) Members of the Partnership Branch, led by the VP Partnerships, and PPIA will be responsible to identify potential new partners (proactively and reactively); the revisions of the criterion for selecting new</p>	<p>1) High - to be completed by the end of the 2008 fiscal year (FY).</p> <p>2) Medium - should be completed by the summer 2008.</p> <p>3) Medium - following program analysis this should be in place by FY 2009-2010.</p> <p>4) Low - this will be based on the outcome of the program analysis and review of SSHRC's strategic priority areas.</p>

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		<p>recommend potential JI partnerships. Staff will also identify prospective JIs themes and partners that show promise for engaging humanities scholars more directly.</p> <p>4) Agreed: The alignment of resources will require a combination of increasing the staff complement managing JIs and reducing the number of Strategic Programs and Joint Initiatives.</p>	<p>partners will be developed by SPJI in consultation with the VP Partnerships, PPIA and CPE.</p> <p>4) The Director of SPJI in consultation with the VP Partnerships will address the issue of human resources in relation to the numbers of active programs.</p>	
2. Enhance Council governance of JIs	<p>Given the identification of a number of tacit objectives of the program, it was proposed that:</p> <p>1) the mechanism’s objectives be examined in the context of recommendation 1; and,</p> <p>2) That particular attention be given to assessing the relevance of the following objective given evaluation findings: “encourage multi-sectoral consultation and promote the development of</p>	<p>1 & 2) Agreed: we will revisit and redefine the objectives of the JI mechanism.</p>	<p>SPJI staff will take the lead in addressing these issues in consultation with the VP Partnerships, CPE and PPIA.</p>	<p>Medium - this should be accomplished as part of the program analysis to be completed by the end of FY 2008-2009.</p>

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	global and multidisciplinary approaches to the study of contemporary issues".			
3. Develop JI program mechanism management and accountability framework	<p>It is recommended that a framework for the management and accountability of the JI program mechanism (including the selection, design, and delivery of JI programs) be developed in the context of recommendation 1. The framework should:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Fit within a larger framework guiding SSHRC's strategic investments - in particular, consideration should be given to creating a separate standing committee of Council to oversee strategic programs; 2) Balance the need for a flexible approach against the risks inherent to this type of investment; and, 3) Provide clarity in roles, responsibilities, and accountabilities in terms of governance, partnership development/maintenance, mechanism and program management, financial 	<p>Agreed: we will ensure risk assessment, results-based management frameworks, and annual performance measurements are included as part of program design and delivery. Staff will also provide regular feedback to the Standing Committee on Research Support regarding risks, RMAFs and performance, which entails refining reporting frameworks to track the evolution of each JI from start to finish. These activities should be extended to include JI partners as a means of informing them of SSHRC's expectations in these areas and their roles and responsibilities. The plan is to revise, finalize and implement the following the draft documents:</p> <p>JI umbrella RMAF developed in 2001 (points 4&5);</p> <p>The decision framework for entering into new JIs along with</p>	<p>Lead responsibility for points 2-5 belong to SPJI in consultation with the VP Partnerships, PPIA, and CPE.</p> <p>Point 1 was addressed by the VP Partnerships but there may be follow up work to accomplish.</p>	<p>1) Completed - this item was already addressed.</p> <p>2-5) High - these activities should begin as soon as possible but may be dependent on the outcomes of the program analysis and the review of SSHRC's priority areas.</p>

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	<p>management, day-to-day operations, follow-up, etc.</p> <p>The framework should also include:</p> <p>4) indicators for tracking and reporting on mechanism activities, outputs and results; and,</p> <p>5) Incorporate relevant evaluation findings in order to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the mechanism.</p>	<p>the form for reporting on potential JIs (point 2); and,</p> <p>The aforementioned JI protocol that outlines roles and responsibilities of the partners (point 3).</p> <p>With respect to point 1 on governance issues, the VP Partnerships Branch asked the Standing Committee on Research Support at its June 2007 meeting if it would be beneficial to strike a new Standing Committee for Partnerships and Strategic Initiatives. The Standing Committee expressed concern that so doing would reduce the likelihood of being able to coordinate activities among the different program branches and divisions. Nonetheless, we will proceed to explore and develop alternate processes and procedures by which Partnerships Branch may ensure that all strategic and Kmb programs are afforded sufficient oversight.</p>		

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4. Revisit ratio of JI programs/staff and desirable number of JIs	It is recommended that the ratio of JI programs to staff, as well as the desirable number of active JIs be revisited in the context of recommendation 1, and that the particular nature of administering JI programs be acknowledged as different from other SSHRC programs and at the same time crucial to the mechanism's ability to achieve its objectives.	Agreed: in concert with the response in recommendation one - to reduce the number of programs managed by SPJI staff - we will specify and expand staff activities in the management of JIs in order to manage workload and staff complement in relation to agreed staff functions; and, to ensure greater coordination among all parties responsible for the smooth functioning of a JI and to ensure that all parties internal and external to SSHRC are aware of their responsibilities.	The Director of SPJI will work with the VP Partnerships to address the relative numbers of programs and related activities for which SPJI officers are responsible.	Medium - this can be addressed following the program analysis and then apply the outcomes of the review of strategic priority areas as well as use regular program attrition and possibly migrate some programs to the KMB unit in FY 2008.
5. Miscellaneous recommendations	<p>1) develop better means of advertising Joint Initiatives to increase numbers of applications</p> <p>2) Better execution of programs. Stakeholders consulted as part of four case studies reported a range of program recommendations including greater tracking of flow of funds between organizations, and streamlining of adjudication processes. In particular, partners emphasized that there had been delays in program administration, in some cases affecting the viability of the program. In some</p>	<p>1) Agreed: SPJI will work with Communications to develop a communications plan for JIs; SPJI staff will also work with the partners to develop specific plans based on needs of each JI. Finally, SSHRC may elect to tap into its Leaders' Network and relations with such organizations as CAURA and the Federation to assist in this area.</p> <p>2) Partial agreement: a document listing Anticipated External Contributions is completed and being</p>	<p>1) SPJI and Communications in developing a standard approach; SPJI, Communications and the JI Partner in developing a more specific approach apropos to the program area and in implementing the communications plans.</p> <p>2) SPJI in consultation with Finance and PPIA on Anticipated external</p>	<p>1) Medium - the communications plan can be ready by Spring of 2008.</p> <p>2) Completed for FY 2007-2008; as an ongoing annual activity, the priority is high.</p> <p>3) Completed - the Notices of Awards for JIs and new MOUs already address these issues; as ongoing</p>

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	<p>cases, this was due to SSHRC staff turnover or complexity of the adjudication process</p> <p>3) Better coordination with researchers to enhance the policy relevance of research. For instance, a greater level of collaboration between policy makers, SSHRC, and researchers was recommended to increase the policy-relevance of research.</p> <p>4) Consistent delivery of final research reports.</p> <p>5) Damage to SSHRC's reputation, operational, and financial risks were identified as the most significant risks facing SSHRC with respect to its partnership programs. MOUs were identified as a means to mitigate potential risks; however, concerns were raised with the extent to which MOUs were sufficiently vetted.</p> <p>6) Performance measurement and evaluation/review requirements</p>	<p>implemented; this will become an annual practice. Delays occur due to complex reasons and are not the fault of any one agency. Staff has been stabilized; will implement principle of assigning a PO to follow JI from beginning to end of its cycle. The recommendation to simplify the adjudication processes is <i>not accepted</i>, for these reasons: this observation came from partner agencies that are comparing peer review selections processes to contract and procurement processes; SSHRC must not risk lowering the standards of quality related to peer-review.</p> <p>3) Agreed: we will develop and implement principles in JIs designed to encourage greater communication between JI Partners and Grantees such as revised NOAs, establishing direct lines of communication between Grantees and JI partners and hold roundtables/workshops to help raise levels of collaboration.</p> <p>4) Agreed: in fact, this practice</p>	<p>Contributions. SPJI Director to ensure PO continuity over time.</p> <p>3) SPJI in collaboration of VP Partnerships and the future KMB Division to provide these sorts of opportunities.</p> <p>4) Director of SPJI is responsible to ensure that all POs complete this task on an annual basis.</p> <p>5) SPJI in collaboration of implicated individuals and work units (e.g., VP Partnerships, PPIA, Finance, Exec. VP, Corp. Sec., etc.)</p> <p>6) SPJI officers working in collaboration with CPE and PPIA as needed.</p>	<p>activity, the priority is high.</p> <p>4) Completed - as an ongoing annual practice, the priority is high.</p> <p>5) High - this should be accomplished by December 2007.</p> <p>6) High - these types of activities are already taking place and will remain an ongoing practice.</p>

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	expressed in MOUs have not been consistently implemented to date.	<p>was established in 2006 as annual goal for all SPJI POs.</p> <p>5) Agreed: review and update MOU routing practice.</p> <p>6) Agreed: ensuring evaluation/review requirements in new JIs is a statutory regulation; we need to ensure that these provisions are feasible and follow up on responsibilities. Include provision for financial resources to support these activities in MOUs</p>		
6. SPJI Director's additional suggestion	Better coordinate communications and collaboration between grantees and partners.	Agreed: the Director of SPJI will ensure that an annual post-mortem meeting between SSHRC and the funding partner takes place to ensure feedback on the program is received.	SPJI Director and Staff; possible involvement of the VP Partnerships with respect to annual feedback sessions with partners.	Medium - the MOU template has been revised to include this as a formal requirement in JI partnerships. Ongoing practice.

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