

Evaluation of Research-based Knowledge Culture - Management Response and Action Plan

The Impact Awards, a funding opportunity provided under the Research-Based Knowledge Culture (RBKC) sub-program, are a suite of five awards designed to build on and sustain Canada's Research-Based Knowledge Culture. The awards each recognize one outstanding Social Science and Humanities (SSH) researcher or student per year, by celebrating their achievements in research, research training, knowledge mobilization and outreach activities. The funding opportunity was launched 2013, following the 2012-2013 renewal of SSHRC's Program Alignment Architecture and the re-design of SSHRC's Prizes and Special Fellowships funding opportunity. With the exception of the Gold Medal, which existed under the old program architecture, all Impact Awards were designed and first awarded in 2013-14.

SSHRC prizes were last evaluated in 2011-12 (under their former name "Prizes and Special Fellowships"), and were thus scheduled to be evaluated in 2016-17. The present evaluation fulfills this accountability requirement for the Research-based Knowledge Culture sub-program, and in particular for its main component, the Impact Awards funding opportunity. In doing so it meets the requirements outlined in the Treasury Board Secretariat's Policy on Results, and its associated directives and standards.

The evaluation used multiple lines of evidence to address three broad issues: relevance, performance, and design and delivery of the Awards. In particular, the evaluation focused on three topic areas: (1) The extent to which design and delivery elements have contributed to visibility and participation in this funding opportunity, as well as perceived barriers to participation; (2) The effectiveness of the branding of this suite of awards, and the perceived visibility and prestige of the Awards among researchers and institutions; and (3) The extent to which the Impact Award funding opportunity is achieving its immediate outcomes, given that it is too early in the lifecycle of the funding opportunity to examine long-term outcomes. Data was collected, analyzed and synthesized across the following lines of evidence: key informant interviews, achievement report data from award winners, an administrative data review (including financial data), a program file review (nomination packages and award social media coverage), a document review, and an environmental scan of comparable national and international awards.

The evaluation confirmed that the Impact Awards fulfill a distinct and important purpose within the Canadian funding landscape: that of highlighting and rewarding achievements in Canadian social sciences and humanities research, and in particular, of supporting the mobilization and dissemination of impactful knowledge through society. This role is well-aligned with the federal government's priorities to support excellence in science, as well as with SSHRC's first strategic outcome and current organizational priorities.

The evaluation report made the following recommendations:

1. Encourage small institutions to nominate. Small institutions are the only institutional group that has demonstrably nominated fewer researchers, and that has shown a decline in nominations over the three-year period under review.
2. Clarify key concepts. The clarification of certain terms is likely to facilitate and encourage the submission of nominations.
3. Improve branding and promotion of the Impact Awards.
4. Monitor participation and success on an ongoing basis. Identified or perceived barriers to access within the program should be monitored going forward. Groups that should be afforded particular attention include Francophone and small institutions.

The recommendations made in the evaluation are very useful and highlighted key areas that SSHRC will continue to monitor. Specifically, SSHRC will monitor Francophone and small institutions' participation and success rates in forthcoming Impact Awards competitions, with a view to addressing any identified or perceived barriers to access within the program. Due to the early and tentative nature of the evaluation's findings, given the recency of the funding opportunity and the limited number of awardees, we will continue to engage with our key partners to improve its efficacy, design and delivery.

The attached action plan provides specific information on the management response to the recommendations contained in the evaluation report.

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EVALUATION OF RESEARCH-BASED KNOWLEDGE CULTURE: MANAGEMENT RESPONSE ACTION PLAN (MRAP)

Recommendation	Management Response	Action	Responsibility	Priority / Target Date
<p>Recommendation 1:</p> <p>Encourage small institutions to nominate. Small institutions are the only institutional group that has demonstrably nominated fewer researchers, and that has shown a decline in nominations over the three-year period under review. Suggestions from stakeholders to encourage/facilitate nominations include (a) decreasing page limits for certain nomination packages, and (b) allowing electronic submission, in particular for letters of support (e.g., to reduce the time required to gather hard-copy signatures, especially from co-nominators at other institutions or organizations).</p>	Agreed.	<p>To facilitate and encourage the submission of nominations, SSHRC will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review its funding opportunity description and processes to ensure that excellence from a diversity of institutional settings is well supported within the Impact Awards; • Decrease the page limits for all award nomination packages; • Allow nominating institutions to submit scanned letters of support as part of their nomination package; • Develop an engagement plan to encourage participation and seek feedback to further reduce barriers to participation. 	Research Training Portfolio	<p>Priority: High</p> <p>Target: February 2018</p>
<p>Recommendation 2:</p> <p>Clarify key concepts. The clarification of certain terms is likely to facilitate and encourage the submission of nominations. This includes:</p> <p>a) Describing “impact” (to make it clear, for example, how humanities researchers can demonstrate impact of their work)</p>	Agreed.	<p>To facilitate and encourage the submission of nominations, SSHRC will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review how the concept of “Impact” can be clarified in the funding opportunity description, while at the same time ensuring that its scope is broad enough to encompass the various ways “impact” can present itself in across SSHRC research areas and disciplines. 	Research Training Portfolio	<p>Priority: Medium</p> <p>Target: February 2018</p>
<p>b) Clarifying what is contained in a promotion plan, to improve the consistency and quality of these. This guidance could also include suggestions on how to design promotion plans that enable sustainable visibility over time.</p>	Agreed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In consultation with program stakeholders, review program design elements related to the promotional plan. Following the outcome of the review, a decision on next steps will be made. 	Communications	<p>Priority: Medium</p> <p>Target: February 2019</p>
<p>c) Distinguishing between award categories, especially Partnership and Connection awards. This could take the form of a review of adjudication criteria; of adding select distinctive features to awards; of modified</p>	Agreed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In consultation with program stakeholders, review program design elements related to the award categories. Following the outcome of the review, a decision on next steps will be made. 	Research Training Portfolio	<p>Priority: Medium</p>

Recommendation	Management Response	Action	Responsibility	Priority / Target Date
language in the Awards' public branding, and of providing examples of eligible / successful candidates to nominating institutions.				Target: February 2019
<p>Recommendation 3:</p> <p>Improve branding and promotion of the Impact Awards. Branding and visibility of the Awards and SSHRC should be strengthened. Recommendations from stakeholders to this effect include (a) improving the visibility of the ceremony, either by organising a stand-alone event or by diversifying and increasing attendance; (b) leveraging other events to bring in award winners; and (c) hosting or supporting events in winners' home towns.</p>	Agreed.	<p>It was acknowledged that the visibility of the Impact Awards will likely strengthen over time if the branding is maintained. However, to strengthen the branding of the Awards in the short-term, SSHRC will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistently leverage opportunities at Congress, ACFAS and other events to promote the award; • Highlight past Impact Award winners through SSHRC's communications channels, showcasing their expertise; • Encourage institutions to organize local Impact Award celebrations and leverage SSHRC's networks to elicit the participation of potential stakeholders in Impact Awards-related outreach activities, when appropriate; • Explore feasibility of organizing outreach activities at which prize winners can promote their research. 	Communications Division	<p>Priority: Low</p> <p>Target: June 2018</p>
<p>Recommendation 4:</p> <p>Monitor participation and success on an ongoing basis. Identified or perceived barriers to access within the program should be monitored going forward. Groups that should be afforded particular attention include Francophone and small institutions.</p>	Agreed.	<p>SSHRC will continue to monitor participation and success of institutions, and will include the monitoring any of the identified or perceived barriers in these efforts going forward, with particular focus on Francophone and small institutions. Specifically, SSHRC will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create tailored reports to regularly monitor Francophone and small institutions' participation and success, as well as other aspects, including those linked to equity and diversity. 	Research Training Portfolio	<p>Priority: High</p> <p>Target: February 2018</p>