

Evaluation of Awards to Scholarly Publications

About the funding opportunity and the evaluation

- ASP's primary objective is to support the dissemination of Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) research by funding the publication of high-quality scholarly monographs, books and other long-form publications.
- ASP currently offers approximately 180 Publication Grants and five Translation Grants each year for a total annual contribution of \$1.5M dollars.
- This evaluation covered a period of 2008-17 for performance-related questions, 2008-19 for relevance questions, and 2014-19 for cost-efficiency.
- Program relevance and performance were identified as priority areas for evaluation, including how the design of ASP contributes to its performance.
- This was a joint evaluation of two funding initiatives: Aid to Scholarly Journals (ASJ) and Awards to Scholarly Publications (ASP). Two reports were produced. This summary presents highlights from the ASP report.

Question:

1. Is there a need for the federal government to provide direct financial support to journals and publishers in the scholarly publishing sector to increase dissemination of Canadian SSH research results?
2. Do ASJ and ASP objectives align with federal roles and priorities?
3. What contribution has ASJ/ASP funding made to quantity, quality and dissemination of published Canadian SSH research?
4. Are ASJ/ASP delivered in a cost-efficient manner?
5. Are there viable alternative approaches SSHRC should consider to increase dissemination of original Canadian research results in the social sciences and humanities?

Conclusion

Relevance

- ASP is relevant to SSH researchers. However, its relevance is highly concentrated in specific areas of the SSH research community
- ASP is also highly relevant to Canadian scholarly publishers. In particular, ASP makes an important contribution to a subset of university presses.
- Alignment is evident between ASP and specific SSHRC priorities, for example support for first-time authors and research on Canadian topics.

Performance

- ASP is achieving its primary intended objective to support research dissemination, by contributing to the amount of SSH research published
- ASP's support enables scholarly publishers to invest in manuscripts of high scholarly value but low cost-recovery potential.
- ASP has no mechanism to contribute directly or substantively to the quality of published research, although it upholds a consistent standard for peer review.

Cost Efficiency

ASP's cost-efficiency ratio is high with operating costs at 22¢ per \$1 in grant funds awarded. This is due to the funding delivery mechanism. Improving ASP's cost efficiency in a substantial way would require changes to the delivery mechanism.

Recommendation

1. **Continue to offer support for long-form publishing of Canadian SSH research.** The funding fills a niche not addressed by other funding, is relevant to Canadian researchers, and provides capacity for the publication of research that is important for SSH and Canada.
2. **Develop more fully articulated and concrete objectives for ASP.** ASP's objectives are broad and ambitious for its small size and the concentrated relevance of the funding for SSH research. A set of more concrete objectives are needed for program management and SSHRC to situate and guide the funding opportunity
3. **Identify options to update ASP's funding mechanism.** SSHRC is currently working collaboratively with FHSS and the Association of Canadian University Presses (ACUP) to develop Open Access (OA) capacity in scholarly book publishing and to increase minority language participation in ASP. In concert with those efforts, SSHRC should explore alternate delivery mechanisms for ASP to improve cost efficiency and performance.
4. **Update ASPs program logic model or theory of change model.** A program logic model or theory of change should be drafted for ASP. The findings reported above provide the basis for an empirically based change model. This would be useful as a baseline for development going forward.

Alternatives: Both strengths and weaknesses were reported for ASP's funding model. As examples: the current model avoids incentivizing quantity over quality, and offers flexibility in use of funds, which is important given the diversity in SSH books and in the publishing sector. However, the process delays publication of manuscripts and provides minimal flexibility for SSHRC to target funding to priority areas or where relevance is most concentrated. Although ASP's funding model is resource intensive for the multiple parties involved, including authors and publishers, it has advantages to be considered if alternative delivery mechanisms are explored.

