

**FRAMING OUR DIRECTION**  
THE SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES  
RESEARCH COUNCIL OF CANADA



Social Sciences and Humanities  
Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en  
sciences humaines du Canada

Canada

[www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca](http://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca)

**WE**

**DEVELOP TALENT  
BUILD KNOWLEDGE**

**QUALITY**

**CONNECTIONS**

**IMPACT**

The **Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada** (SSHRC) is the federal agency that promotes and supports university-based research and training in the humanities and social sciences. Through its programs and policies, the Council enables the highest levels of research excellence in Canada, and facilitates knowledge-sharing and collaboration across research disciplines, universities and all sectors of society.

## OUR VISION

Research in the social sciences and humanities advances knowledge and builds understanding about individuals, groups and societies—what we think, how we live and how we interact with each other and the world around us. Knowledge and understanding inform discussion on critical social, cultural, economic, technological, environmental and wellness issues and provide communities, businesses and governments the foundation for a vibrant and healthy democracy. Through research and training programs, SSHRC fosters the development of talented and creative people who become leaders across the private and public sectors and who are critical to Canada’s success in the globalized 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### The changing context

In 1977, SSHRC was created with a legislative mandate to “a) *promote and assist research and scholarship in the social sciences and humanities; and b) advise the Minister in respect of such matters relating to such research as the Minister may refer to the Council for its consideration.*” During the past thirty years, SSHRC has pursued this mandate in three ways:

- \* by investing through fellowships and research training in Canada’s best and brightest minds to develop the talent needed across society;
- \* by fostering research excellence that advances knowledge and builds understanding about where we have been, where we are and where we might go as individuals, communities, and societies; and
- \* by supporting the partnerships, interactions and knowledge sharing that brings the benefits of research in the social sciences and humanities to the larger society.

In July 2005, SSHRC published a strategic plan for the years 2006-2011. The Council developed this plan following an extensive consultation that explored proposals for both minor and major changes to SSHRC’s strategic objectives, programs and activities. This consultation involved

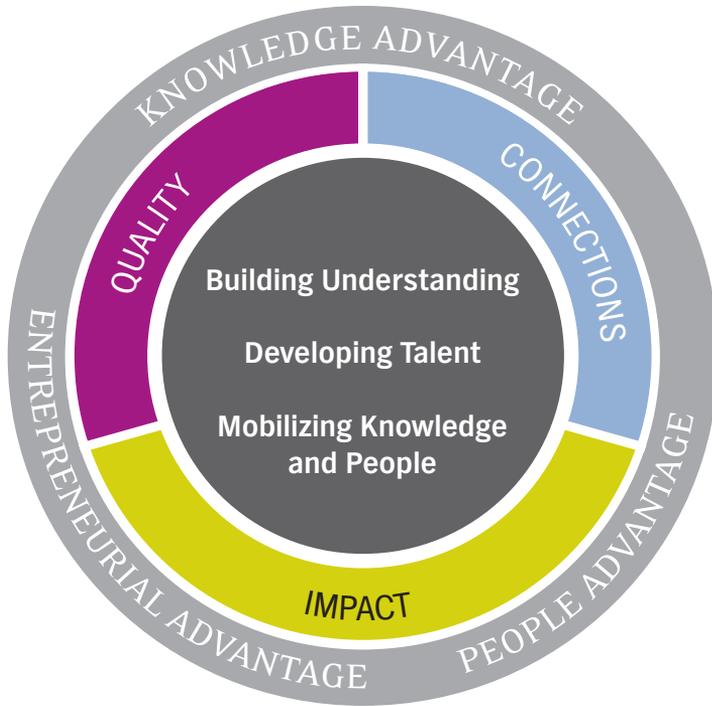
thousands of dedicated and generous individuals on campuses and communities across Canada who took part in open discussions and who wrote briefs to help SSHRC shape the future. Published as *Knowledge Council, Strategic Plan 2006-2011*, the final document distilled the conclusions of the consultation into three key ambitions: quality, connections and impact. These three ambitions now characterize SSHRC's vision:

- \* to enhance the **quality** of, and support for, research and research training in the social sciences and humanities;
- \* to enable **connections** among disciplines, including those in engineering and the natural and health sciences, as well as between research and the larger community, in Canada and in the rest of the world; and
- \* to increase the **impact** of research and research training for the benefit of society.

Since September 2006, SSHRC's new president has engaged the research community and other stakeholders in a dialogue about the changing research and policy environment. A major event in this changing environment was the Government of Canada's new science and technology strategy: *Mobilizing Science and Technology to Canada's Advantage* published on May 17, 2007. The strategy emphasizes three advantages, all of which relate directly to central concerns of the humanities and social sciences: an entrepreneurial advantage that translates knowledge into practical applications; a knowledge advantage that generates new ideas and builds research excellence; and a people advantage that increases and retains the highly skilled individuals that Canada needs to thrive in the new global economy. The strategy is guided by four principles:

- \* promoting world-class excellence,
- \* focusing on priorities,
- \* encouraging partnerships and
- \* enhancing accountability.

The strategy commits Canada to continued G-7 leadership in public-sector research in order to promote Canada's people, knowledge and entrepreneurial advantages. Similarly, the strategy emphasizes the importance of independent expert evaluation to ensure non-partisan transparency in the allocation of public funds. The strategy also calls for improved governance measures, a more integrated approach to the support of research, improved client service, and better accountability of results.



The priorities and principles of the science and technology strategy are directly linked to SSHRC's ambitions of *quality*, *connections* and *impact*, in knowledge creation, the development of talent and knowledge mobilization. In other words, the strategy offers SSHRC an excellent framework within which to enhance the contribution of research and training in the social sciences and humanities to Canada and the world. For these reasons, SSHRC is actively contributing to the implementation of the science and technology strategy within its strategic priorities and will vigorously champion the social sciences and humanities as central to the federal research agenda. Indeed, the successful implementation of Canada's science and technology strategy depends upon a top-quality, comprehensive, and balanced research community.

SSHRC recognizes that strategic planning is a dynamic process that requires ongoing communication. This document reports on our achievements over the past two years, situates our activities and ambitions within the current research and policy environment, and sets out SSHRC's strategic priorities for 2008-2010. These next steps will increase the ability of the social sciences and humanities research community and its partners to contribute together to a better future for Canada and the world.

# PURSUING OUR AMBITION OF QUALITY

The ambition of enhancing the quality of, and the support for, research and research training in the social sciences and humanities emerges from SSHRC's responsibility to foster and support international excellence in these fields in Canada. SSHRC is committed to ensuring a world-class merit review process to select the best ideas and people for research support.

During the past decade, the Government of Canada has recognized the key role research plays in a competitive, global, knowledge-based society and economy. As a result, the federal government has helped create a more research-intensive university environment by supporting world-class research excellence and training through the attraction and retention of outstanding researchers, the use of partnerships and multidisciplinary approaches, and the provision of state-of-the-art infrastructure. Investments in the granting councils, the Canada Foundation for Innovation (CFI), the Canada Research Chairs Program, Canada Graduate Scholarships and the Indirect Costs of Research Program have considerably enhanced the research environment in Canada. For instance, SSHRC's ability to support research on complex topics that transcend the capacity of any one scholar or discipline is now complemented by the support of the CFI for research infrastructure. Moreover, the Canada Research Chairs Program attracts and retains the very best minds, and encourages individuals to address research questions from diverse perspectives and through multiple approaches.

The core activities of post-secondary institutions are being redefined to meet the changing character of knowledge-based economies and societies in the globalizing 21<sup>st</sup> century. Universities are increasingly focusing on their strengths. They are fostering more robust research cultures and enhanced research environments as they become the creative hubs for their surrounding communities. It is increasingly being recognized that teaching and research need to be further integrated to serve society better. Talented, competent graduates are the result of a more active approach to learning, and thus students are seeking to participate in research activities at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. The demand is growing rapidly for highly qualified personnel, who are creative, analytical and articulate, as well as sophisticated in their understanding of individuals, communities and societies in the past and present. To this end, SSHRC supports student involvement in research through graduate fellowships and research assistantships in the projects we fund.

Canadian universities have actively renewed research capacity with the hiring of over 20,000 new faculty between 1998 and 2004; with more than 50 per cent from the social sciences and humanities. These new hires, along with established scholars, are highly qualified and committed to engage in first-class research and teaching to excel at international levels. This is made possible by the significant increase in research investments over the last decade, which has enabled a greater level of intensity of research in the social sciences and humanities in Canada.

The challenge for universities and for SSHRC over the coming decade will be to build on this renewed capacity to meet labour market demands for the best educated and most skilled workforce needed to thrive in a global economy and to fuel labour market growth and productivity. The fastest growing occupations are now for those with the highest levels of education, including 400,000 new jobs for individuals with master's or doctoral degrees between 1990 and 2004 – a growth of 70 per cent. Projections indicate that over the next decade, labour market demands for workers with advanced degrees may only be met with sustained immigration and significant growth in the supply of graduate students, 63 per cent of whom come from the social sciences and humanities. Ensuring a high quality training experience for a greater number of students is contingent upon excellent researchers having the means to provide these students with a competitive research environment. This will be a deciding factor for Canada's future prosperity and quality of life.

Over the past 10 years, new SSHRC programs have been created, often on a pilot basis, without an assessment of the longer-term implications of overall program coherence. Recent evaluations of programs, such as the Joint Initiatives mechanism, have indicated a need to review the design and objectives of certain programs. This need has also been confirmed in discussions between the president and the community. We are developing a framework for the continuous improvement of the SSHRC suite of programs based on the following guiding principles:

- \* a suite of programs, policies and procedures that ensures overall quality, connections and impact of SSHRC funding;
- \* programs designed and deployed in a flexible manner to enable SSHRC to remain nimble in a changing environment;
- \* better client service achieved through a coherent program structure with simplified and harmonized policies and delivery mechanisms;

- \* excellence in the support of research, the development of talent and the support of knowledge mobilization, to be assured through independent expert adjudication;
- \* SSHRC's strategic objectives reflected in the allocation of funds across the portfolio of activities including those focused on areas of priority for Canadians;
- \* tri-council approaches promoted and facilitated where appropriate; and
- \* performance measurement frameworks as an essential component of all program designs.

## Achievements: QUALITY

### 2005-2007

In collaboration with the research community and other partners, SSHRC has increased the quality of research and its support by:

- \* increasing the international participation of experts on our peer-review committees. In 2007, SSHRC's adjudication committees will include scholars from outside Canada, while approximately one half of all expert evaluations of proposals will be undertaken by foreign scholars;
- \* working together with researchers and the Canada Foundation for Innovation (CFI) to improve research infrastructure for the social sciences and humanities research community. In 2007, CFI invested \$25 million in two groundbreaking initiatives that enable Canadian researchers to access a global digital network of research knowledge;
- \* strengthening SSHRC's governance structure to ensure high levels of stewardship, accountability and transparency through the separation of the functions of the chair and president, and through a refocusing of Council discussion to strategic issues; and
- \* implementing the 2007 federal budget allocation of \$11 million in additional funds for research in the fields of management, business and finance, and additional funding for 200 new Canada Graduate Scholarships at the master's and doctoral levels.

## Strategic Priorities: QUALITY

### April 2008 to March 2010

In collaboration with the research community and other partners, SSHRC will support the high quality of, and support for, research and training by:

- \* launching the ongoing examination of our programs, criteria, policies and procedures to ensure strategic investments and the coherence and effectiveness of our activities in support of excellence;
- \* enriching the quality of our peer-review system through further participation by international experts and a Blue Ribbon panel assessment of our review practices;
- \* developing a longer-term strategy for funding in management, business and finance, and identifying opportunities for Canada to be a world leader in these areas;
- \* improving service delivery through enhanced communications and technology, including a more efficient and standards-based grant application system; and
- \* continuing to improve governance measures.

# PURSUING OUR AMBITION OF CONNECTIONS

The enhanced appreciation of both specialization and contextualization in research disciplines is encouraging many scholars to participate within networks of expertise, to draw upon insights and approaches across diverse research fields, and to collaborate with potential users of research in designing and implementing research projects. One result of such efforts has been the rethinking of rigid distinctions, such as those between “solitary” and “team” research, between “disciplinarity” and “interdisciplinarity,” and between “pure” and “applied” research. While such expressions can be useful, they are no longer seen as dichotomous or even mutually exclusive.

The ambition of connections involves the multiple ways in which an increasing number of researchers are taking an interdisciplinary approach to their research topics, and collaborating with other researchers as well as those beyond the campus. In this context, SSHRC is committed to pursuing the ambition of a “connected” research landscape that is both inclusive and dynamic. As more and more researchers across all disciplines emphasize the need to put people in the picture, new strategies for advancing knowledge are reflecting the human dimensions of topics that were once considered to be strictly technological or scientific. In addition, partnerships between researchers and members of the larger society continue to be actively sought. These collaborations bring research strengths to bear on societal challenges and opportunities, and open doors to fresh perspectives, innovative research methods and unique opportunities for knowledge mobilization.

Moreover, Canadian researchers in the social sciences and humanities are becoming more and more connected to the global supply of ideas and talent. International collaboration has been a Canadian strength for many years. Canadians co-publish with foreign researchers more than the global average. In many fields, the number of co-authored publications with foreign researchers has doubled over the past 20 years. Moreover, 31 percent of postdoctoral researchers and 21 percent of doctoral fellows use their fellowships abroad. By working with other countries, we have access to the global pool of knowledge; we develop comparative

perspectives on key social, cultural and economic issues; we bring Canadian knowledge to countries around the globe; and we pool knowledge and resources to address complex global issues. We aim to develop the very best graduates and scholars who are internationally knowledgeable, who are culturally flexible, and who take into account the increasingly interdependent nature of the world.

## Achievements: CONNECTIONS

### 2005-2007

In collaboration with the research community and other partners, SSHRC has fostered better connections by:

- \* enabling and facilitating connections both among researchers and with the larger society. For this purpose, we created a new Partnerships function to enhance, enable and facilitate partnerships between SSHRC, its community and other organizations as well as foster knowledge mobilization;
- \* launching the Strategic Knowledge Clusters program, as a complement to the Network of Centres of Excellence program, to help connect researchers across fields of study, institutions and communities;
- \* identifying a SSHRC Leader at each university across Canada to sustain a structured dialogue on important issues, including research trends, research support, knowledge mobilization, the development and refinement of research policies, and promising ideas for collaboration with other partners;
- \* developing an international strategy and policy to explore best practices in research funding policy and to foster international connections for Canadian researchers. Examples include the International Opportunities Fund, which helps Canadian researchers participate in collaborative research activities and a recent partnership with the International Development Research Centre to co-fund international Community-University Research Alliances; and
- \* pursuing the policy commitments set out in the federal science and technology strategy. The three council presidents and the president of CFI now meet regularly to discuss strategic direction, priorities and opportunities for cooperation and coordination.

## Strategic Priorities: CONNECTIONS

### **April 2008 to March 2010**

In collaboration with the research community and other partners, SSHRC will foster meaningful connections by:

- \* developing and implementing an updated strategy for Canadian and international partnerships;
- \* consolidating, integrating and aligning programs and procedures where appropriate through collaborations with NSERC, CIHR and CFI to facilitate research that crosses agencies mandates (including a focus on the priority areas identified in the federal science and technology strategy); and
- \* improving service delivery.

# PURSUING OUR AMBITION OF IMPACT

While pursuing the ambitions of quality and connections, we are also seeking to increase the impact and benefits of research in the social sciences and humanities. The knowledge-based society and economy calls for increased use of the benefits of research to enhance the quality of life. The challenge is for Canada to prosper and thrive in this competitive environment of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in which research, innovation and talent are the most valuable 'natural resources.' In this changed world, the social sciences and humanities play a pivotal role in contributing to Canada's competitiveness and quality of life.

The social sciences and humanities research community now places a stronger emphasis on demonstrating to Canadians how research in the social sciences and humanities has a major impact on society by advancing knowledge and building understanding about individuals, groups and societies in the past and present. This new emphasis on evaluating impact builds upon the tradition of oral examinations, report cards, thesis defences, and tenure and promotion evaluations.

One key challenge is to conceptualize and assess the multiple ways in which SSHRC's support for research improves and enriches the daily lives of individuals, groups and communities. Addressing this challenge goes beyond the familiar counting of journal articles and books or indicators such as citations; rather, the focus is expanded to encompass outcomes which help to change thinking and behaviour in everyday life. Since the process by which research affects the larger society is often complex and sometimes unpredictable, no single indicator of this impact can capture the full value of the research.

Systematic evidence about the multiple short and long-term benefits of research in the social sciences and humanities will provide a solid foundation for decisions about levels of investment. In other words, our ability to enhance research activities is closely linked with our collective efforts to demonstrate the impact and value of social sciences and humanities research to society. For this reason, we will update our programs and policies to include a more complete accounting of research results.

As we continue to develop and implement a framework to capture the impact of research, SSHRC is also focused on increasing these benefits for the larger society. Working together with our partners, we are beginning to invest in knowledge mobilization efforts that realize the potential of social sciences and humanities research for considerable impact beyond the campus. Universities have a key role to play in recognizing and encouraging researchers to participate in these efforts as valuable scholarly contributions.

## Achievements: IMPACT

### 2005-2007

In collaboration with the research community and other partners, SSHRC has worked towards its ambition of impact and accountability by:

- \* introducing the Knowledge Impact in Society pilot program to help universities enhance the use of research beyond the campus; the eleven demonstration projects underway will also contribute to determining best practices in the field;
- \* launching a special Open-Access Research Journals competition in order to support online publications made available to readers without charge; and
- \* initiating a special call for new approaches to capturing the impacts of research in the social sciences and humanities. The three funded research projects became part of a symposium on the benefits of research involving partners from Canada and the United States at the Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences in Saskatoon in 2007.

## Strategic Priorities: IMPACT

### April 2008 to March 2010

In collaboration with the research community and other partners, SSHRC will further pursue the ambition of increasing impact by:

- \* improving reporting on the results of funded research and training;
- \* funding up to seven research projects on the topic of measuring impacts and hosting a national workshop on this topic in 2008;
- \* developing a knowledge mobilization strategy that involves partnerships between researchers and research users, and new ways to connect the campus and community;
- \* integrating all performance, evaluation and audit activities into program delivery and decision-making; and
- \* celebrating SSHRC's 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary including the profound contributions that social sciences and humanities research has made to Canada and the potential for increased contributions in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In these ways, SSHRC is committed to pursuing the strategic ambitions of **quality**, **connections** and **impact** over the next two years including the policy commitments of the new federal science and technology strategy. We will periodically report on our achievements, and will update our strategic priorities to reflect our progress. We look forward to continuing to work together with the research community and partners in the larger society to increase the contributions of social sciences and humanities research to Canada and to the world. Your comments and suggestions are always welcome.