



Management Response to the 2013 Review of Relevance and Effectiveness of the Networks of Centres of Excellence (NCE) Program

Context

The Networks of Centres of Excellence (NCE) program was launched in 1989 with the goal to mobilize Canada's research talent in the academic, private and public sectors and apply it to the task of developing the economy and improving the quality of life of Canadians.

A review of relevance and effectiveness of the NCE program was completed in June to meet the coverage requirements of Treasury Board's Policy on Evaluation and the requirements of Section 42.1 of the Financial Administration Act. The review of the NCE program covers the five-year period following the last evaluation, from fiscal year 2007-2008 to the end of fiscal year 2011-2012. This review examines the relevance and performance of the NCE program including 15 of 20 networks funded during the study period, including the three new networks launched in 2009. The networks funded under the NCE-Knowledge Mobilization initiative were not included in this evaluation given it is early in the funding cycle of this initiative (the first competition was held in 2011) and the pilot initiative, originally called the NCE New Initiatives (NCE-NI), was evaluated in 2009.

The NCE Steering committee commissioned Performance Management Network Inc. (PMN Inc.) to conduct the review. A final report addressing the main issues of this evaluation was submitted to NCE Steering in June 2013. The response from NCE Management to the evaluation recommendations and the proposed action plan are detailed below.

Note that in addition to this review, a joint summative evaluation of the NCE and Business-Led Networks of Centres of Excellence (BL-NCE), which will include NSERC's Strategic Network Grants (SNG) program as well as CIHR and SSHRC networks as comparators, is scheduled to commence in the 2013-2014 fiscal year. The rationale for the timing of the joint summative evaluation (so soon after the review) is threefold. First, fiscal year 2013-14 is the optimum year to collect data from participants in NCE and BL-NCE networks that are nearing the end of a funding cycle. Second, the NCE Management is seeking an extension to the program's Terms and Conditions which are set to expire in September 2013. The information collected during joint summative evaluation will provide additional data/findings regarding partnerships to inform decision-making regarding the third "partner-led" funding cycle when updating the program Terms and Conditions. Finally, the joint evaluation will be completed late in 2013-2014, which will better align the timing of future evaluations of NCE Secretariat programs.

NCE Management Response

Overall comments:

NCE Management agrees with the conclusions of this report and the recommendations therein. This review was based on multiple sources of evidence, such as document reviews, interviews, file reviews, administrative data and surveys of NCEs and comparable networks (BL-NCE, SNG, CIHR and SSHRC networks). While file reviews covered all networks funded during the period covered by the evaluation, there were a limited number of networks that could be used in these direct comparisons given it is early in the funding cycle of the BL-NCE networks (funded in March 2009). Only three NCE networks that had started during at the same period (March 2009) could be used to compare with the BL-NCEs.

Overall, Management recognizes the amount of work invested in this review by PMN Inc. for the detailed analysis and review of all source of evidence provided. The evaluation report provides a sound and accurate summary and analysis of the information available given the scope of the review.

NCE Management agrees with the overarching conclusion that the program is relevant, is performing well against its objectives, is delivered efficiently, and that the model should be maintained, but with some improvements in its performance monitoring and reporting system.

Detailed responses to each recommendation are provided below and an action plan is presented in the following table.

Recommendations:

Recommendation 1

The NCE program is a relevant, effective and efficient model to fund network research and should therefore be considered for continued support at the federal level. The NCE program is addressing a continued need for a network approach to funding research, development and innovation, knowledge transfer and technology exploitation and is making progress towards the achievement of expected outcomes. The findings of the review support the validity and further funding of the program model. The findings also support the involvement of the federal government in funding of the program model as such funding enhances the scope and nature of the funded networks.

Management Response: Agreed

Management agrees with this recommendation. This review was carried out after implementing changes to the delivery of the NCE program by changing the funding cycle from seven years to five years and demonstrates that the program continues to deliver on its objectives and expected outcomes. A joint summative evaluation of the NCE, BL-NCE and SNG programs will be completed in 2013-14 which will provide additional data and findings to better inform the renewal of the NCE program Terms and Conditions. The joint summative evaluation planned for 2013-14 will also allow future evaluation cycles to be in phase with other comparable programs. Since the Terms and Conditions currently expire in September 2013, Management will seek a one-year extension supported by the findings of this review of relevance and effectiveness.

Proposed Action

NCE Management will ask for Ministerial approval of a one-year extension to the program Terms and Conditions. The NCE Secretariat will plan for the joint summative evaluation in 2013-14. The findings of the joint summative evaluation findings will be used to inform the update to the NCE Terms and Conditions.

Recommendation 2

The joint summative evaluation of the NCE and BL-NCE programs, planned for the 2013-14 fiscal year, should further explore the differences between the partnerships formed under the programs and possibly whether there is a gender imbalance among HQP in funded networks. The review found that there were differences in the results of the NCE program versus the BL-NCE and other networks (including comparable NSERC and CIHR networks) pertaining to partners; however, the evidence was limited to survey results involving participants from networks at an early stage of maturity. Further evidence is required to truly assess the unique aspects of each program in terms of the partnerships formed and their resulting benefits. While the review noted that women appear to be underrepresented among HQP at the graduate level

in funded networks, further data collection and analysis would be required to gain a more complete understanding of the extent (e.g., variations by degree, discipline) and the reasons behind this issue.

Management Response: Agreed

Management agrees with this recommendation and the need to explore differences in partnerships between the NCE and BL-NCE programs. Information regarding differences in the partnerships in these programs will be important to inform the update to the NCE program Terms and Conditions and serve to better define the third “partner-led” funding cycle. With regard to the possible gender imbalance identified in the report, the representation of gender varies greatly by discipline. Information on the discipline of HQP would be required to be able to ascertain if a gender imbalance actually exists in NCE funded networks.

Proposed Action

1 – NCE management will ensure that the design and framework of the joint summative evaluation will further explore the differences in partnerships between the NCE and comparable programs. The inclusion of the potential gender balance issue in HQP of NCE funded networks will be explored during the design of the joint summative evaluation. In addition, the effects of networks on HQP (outcomes of HQP training, employment and career outcomes of former HQP, and eventual career paths of network HQP) should be further explored in context with the overall design of the joint summative evaluation.

2 – Based on the outcome of the joint summative evaluation in 2013-14, NCE management will request the NCE Secretariat to review its Performance Measurement System to ensure that data needed for the future evaluation are provided or an alternate methodology is developed to capture data on the gender distribution by discipline.

Recommendation 3

Ensure that reliable contact information to researchers, partners and HQP who will be surveyed as part of the joint summative evaluation is available. There were some performance measurement concerns identified during this review. It is not expected that existing performance measurement systems can be modified to address concerns identified prior to the summative evaluation. To mitigate gaps in performance information, it will be critical to ensure that reliable contact information for partners, researchers and HQP be available in order to gather missing information through primary data collection techniques. While it may not be feasible to expect the networks to gather this information on an ongoing basis, mechanisms are required to ensure that the information can be obtained.

Management Response: Agreed

Management agrees with this recommendation and will ask NCE Secretariat to ensure that contacts for partners obtained from the networks in their annual report are accurate. Researcher contact information is obtained from the databases of the granting agencies. The Secretariat will work with the agencies to ensure the consistency of the data from the agencies and the NCE Secretariat database. For HQP, it is not always possible to include contact information in the annual reports due to need for student consent prior to including any student contact information. Only those students that have consented to disclosure of their contact information may be included in the NCE database. Other contact information (e.g. partners) must be obtained directly from the network. Increased collaboration with the network to verify the accuracy of the contact information is needed.

Proposed Action

NCE Management will request that the NCE Secretariat work in collaboration with the granting agencies and the network administrative centres to increase the ongoing accuracy of the contact information.

For the 2013-14 joint summative evaluation, the NCE Secretariat will contact the networks implicated in the upcoming evaluation to validate that the information on file at the NCE Secretariat for HQP and partners is as accurate as possible.

Contacts

For further information on the Program Management Response, please contact Stephanie Michaud, Deputy Director, NCE and BL-NCE Programs. For information on the evaluation, please contact: Susan Morris, Director, Evaluation, NSERC and SSHRC.

NCE Program Review 2013 - Management Response (Summary)

Recommendations	Agree/ Disagree	Proposed Actions	Responsibility	Timeline
1. The NCE program is a relevant, effective and efficient model to fund network research and should therefore be considered for continued support at the federal level.	Agree	NCE Management will ask for Ministerial approval of a one-year extension to the program Terms and Conditions. The NCE Secretariat will plan for the joint summative evaluation in 2013-14. The findings of the joint summative evaluation findings will be used to inform the update to the NCE Terms and Conditions.	NCE Secretariat	June 2013 July 2013
2. The joint summative evaluation of the NCE and BL-NCE programs, planned for the 2013-14 fiscal year, should further explore the differences between the partnerships formed under the programs and possibly whether there is a gender imbalance among HQP in funded networks.	Agree	1 – NCE management will ensure that the design and framework of the joint summative evaluation will further explore the differences in partnerships between the NCE and comparable programs. The inclusion of the potential gender balance issue in HQP of NCE funded networks will be explored during the design of the joint summative evaluation. In addition, the effects of networks on HQP (outcomes of HQP training, employment and career outcomes of former HQP, and eventual career paths of network HQP) should be further explored in context with the overall design of the joint summative evaluation.	NCE Secretariat	July 2013

		2 – Based on the outcome of the joint summative evaluation in 2013-14, NCE management will request the NCE Secretariat to review its Performance Measurement System to ensure that data needed for the future evaluation are provided or an alternate methodology is developed to capture data on the gender distribution by discipline.		March 2015
3. Ensure that reliable contact information to researchers, partners and HQP who will be surveyed as part of the joint summative evaluation is available.	Agree	NCE Management will request that the NCE Secretariat work in collaboration with the granting agencies and the network administrative centres to increase the ongoing accuracy of the contact information. For the 2013-14 joint summative evaluation, the NCE Secretariat will contact the networks implicated in the upcoming evaluation to validate that the information on file at the NCE Secretariat for HQP and partners is as accurate as possible.	NCE Secretariat	September 2013