

# **EVALUATION OF RESEARCH- BASED KNOWLEDGE CULTURE**

## **Final Evaluation Report**

Prepared by Universalia and SSHRC's Evaluation Division

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## List of Acronyms

AMIS	Awards Management Information System
CAD	Canadian Dollar
EAC	Evaluation Advisory Committee
FAA	Financial Administration Act
KSG	Knowledge Synthesis Grants
NSERC	Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada
RBKC	Research-Based Knowledge Culture
RTP	Research Training Portfolio
SSH	Social Sciences and Humanities
SSHRC	Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada
STI	Science, Technology, and Innovation

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

#### *Introduction, Scope, and Methodology*

This report presents the results of an evaluation of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council's (SSHRC) Research-Based Knowledge Culture (RBKC) sub-program and in particular for its main component, the Impact Awards funding opportunity. The evaluation was conducted to meet the coverage requirements of the Treasury Board *Policy on Results* (2016) and the requirements of the *Financial Administration Act*.

The evaluation used multiple lines of evidence to address three broad issues: relevance, performance, and design and delivery of the Awards. Data were collected, analysed 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 Impact Awards 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. Four of the Awards were launched in 2013 and provide \$50,000 each, whereas the pre-existing Gold Medal, which was integrated into the suite of Impact Awards in 2013, provides \$100,000. This evaluation covers three competition cycles (2013-2015). The main limitation of this evaluation was the limited availability of data, given the recent implementation of the Awards. This in particular impeded the ability to conduct meaningful statistical tests due to small sample sizes. In an effort to mitigate this, all award winners to date were invited to participate in the evaluation, and alternative/expanded data sources (e.g. Gold Medal data for 2003-2012) were included where relevant.

#### *Findings*

**Relevance.** The Impact Awards fulfill a distinct and important purpose within the Canadian funding landscape: that of highlighting and rewarding achievements in Canadian SSH research, and in particular, of supporting the mobilization and dissemination of impactful SSH 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. Although small modifications to individual awards have been suggested by some stakeholders to increase their individual distinctiveness and value-add, the Awards have functioned well as a coherent suite. A recent drop in the number of nominations does not threaten the relevance of the Impact Awards.

**Performance.** Based on the limited data to date, the Awards have been successful in supporting recipients with knowledge mobilization activities and extension of research. Winners, on average, reported producing 28.4 research outputs and executing 5.1 knowledge mobilization activities. The Awards have also been successful in supporting the development of individual and institutional research capacity, with 71.4% of achievement report respondents (5 out of 7) using award funds to train students, and 85.71% (6 out of 7) engaging in new collaborations within and beyond their own institutions.

Although the Awards are already perceived by stakeholders and awardees to be prestigious at this stage of their life cycle, they have had only limited success in raising the long-term visibility of award winners and SSHRC. This is partly because SSHRC and most winners (except in the Talent category for young researchers) are already well-known. Twitter data indicates that the boost in attention winners enjoy after the award ceremony fades within days. The effect is similar for SSHRC, but more sustained for winning institutions.

The Awards' ratio of administrative to program costs is high due to the small value of the award funds, which reduces economies of scale. However, the cost efficiency ratios compare favourably to the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC) Prizes funding opportunity.

**Design and Delivery.** The Impact Awards have largely been delivered as planned and to stakeholders' satisfaction. The exceptions are the visibility of the award ceremony, which many stakeholders think could be improved, and the implementation of achievement and financial reporting mechanisms, which remains weak. The under-spending and/or under-reporting of Award funds are particular concerns.

In terms of access, stakeholders did not identify barriers with respect to award criteria, rules or nomination processes. Interview data highlighted a perception among stakeholders that certain demographic groups may have a lower chance of winning an award. In particular, small institutions and French-speaking institutions have not won any awards to date, despite nominating candidates in each competition year. The limited data to date did not permit statistical confirmation of these trends, and these should be closely monitored in the future.

**Conclusion.** Overall, three years into their existence, the Impact Awards are respected and appreciated by stakeholders, are successfully recognising excellence and impact, and are enriching the Canadian SSH funding landscape. Although this evaluation could not explore intermediate and long-term outcomes given the recency of the Awards, it shows that they are achieving their immediate outcomes: many new research-mobilization activities, research outputs, research training activities and research collaborations can be attributed to the Awards. Moreover, the Awards' prestige and efficacy is likely to increase over time as they become better-known and established. Key issues of concern going forward include the mixed effectiveness of the Awards' branding, the under-spending/under-reporting of funds, and the lack of success of small and Francophone institutions.

### *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. 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).
2. **Clarify key concepts.** The clarification of certain terms is likely to facilitate and encourage the submission of nominations. This includes:
  - a. Describing "impact" (to make it clear, for example, how humanities researchers can demonstrate impact of their work)
  - 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.
  - 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 language in the Awards' public branding, and of providing examples of eligible / successful candidates to nominating institutions.<sup>1</sup>
3. **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.

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<sup>1</sup> The profiles of past winners are also publicly available on the Impact Awards' website. This could be explicitly referenced as a resource in nomination package instructions.

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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.

### 1 Introduction

This is the **final evaluation report** for the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council's (SSHRC) Research-Based Knowledge Culture (RBKC). Under the Canadian *Financial Administration Act* (FAA) (1985, 42.1, p.1), "every department shall conduct a review every five years of the relevance and effectiveness of each ongoing program for which it is responsible." SSHRC prizes were last evaluated in 2011-2012 (under their former name "Prizes and Special Fellowships"), and are thus scheduled to be evaluated in 2016-2017. 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.<sup>2</sup> In doing so it meets the requirements outlined in the Treasury Board Secretariat's *Policy on Results*, and its associated directives and standards.

### 2 Program Profile

This section provides an overview of SSHRC's Connection Program, under which the Impact Award funding opportunity is provided. The contents of this section have been adapted from SSHRC's website and the Connection Program Performance Measurement Strategy.

#### 2.1 SSHRC's Connection Program

The Connection Program is one of three SSHRC programs contributing to SSHRC's overarching Strategic Outcome of making or maintaining Canada as a "world leader in Social Science and Humanities (SSH) research and research training." The Connection Program focuses on connecting researchers to other researchers and to non-academic audiences to facilitate the multidirectional flow of SSH knowledge. Specific objectives include:

- facilitate the multidirectional flow of social sciences and humanities knowledge among researchers and between the campus and the larger community, in order to enhance intellectual, cultural, social and economic influence, benefit, and impact;
- increasing the accessibility and use of SSH research knowledge among academic and non-academic audiences;
- supporting the building of reciprocal relationships among SSH researchers, and between those in a position to either co-create or use research knowledge;
- supporting the development of SSH research networks and tools designed to facilitate scholarly work, and making these networks and tools accessible to non-academic audiences.

#### 2.2 The Research-Based Knowledge Culture sub-program and the Impact Awards

The Research-Based Knowledge Culture sub-program aims to develop and sustain a research-based knowledge culture in the Canadian SSH "by honouring and bringing recognition to researchers, graduate students and postdoctoral fellows whose originality and outstanding research contribution to research have enriched Canadian society; by supporting brokering activities aimed at building capacity in other sectors to engage in social sciences and humanities research activities; and by promoting the use of research knowledge, to the benefit of Canadian society" (SSHRC *Report on Plans and Priorities 2016-2017*). The **Impact Awards** are a suite of five awards designed to build on and sustain Canada's Research-Based Knowledge Culture. The awards recognize outstanding SSH researchers and students by celebrating their achievements in research, research training, knowledge mobilization and outreach

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<sup>2</sup> In 2012-2013, SSHRC's "Prizes and Special Fellowships" funding opportunity was ended and the Impact Awards were introduced as a new funding opportunity (incorporating the already existing 'Gold Medal'). Four "Prizes and Special Fellowships" last evaluated in 2011-2012 were eliminated, and the rest were kept as supplements to SSHRC grants or as joint or special initiatives. These special fellowships are not covered in this evaluation because they have distinct objectives from the Impact Awards. They are next scheduled to be evaluated in conjunction with the SSHRC Doctoral and Postdoctoral Fellowships funding opportunity.



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activities funded partially or entirely by SSHRC. The funding opportunity's overall goal is to promote and extend the work being honoured, and to celebrate the research achievements of the recipient. Specifically, the Impact Awards funding opportunity has the following five objectives:

- celebrate achievement in research and research training by showcasing results, outcomes, and impact in the social sciences and humanities;
- build on and sustain the work of Canada's significant research achievements;
- promote research achievements of the recipient's work being honoured;
- mobilize research knowledge with the potential to create intellectual, cultural, social and economic influence, benefit and impact; and
- recognize and promote research training

The Impact Awards 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. Table 1 provides a summary description of the five prizes that make up the Impact Awards suite.

**Table 1. The Five Annual Impact Awards.**

Name	Awarded to ...	Amount per Award per year
<b>Gold Medal</b>	SSHRC's highest research honour. Awarded to an individual who has significantly advanced understanding in their field of SSH and who has inspired students and colleagues alike through their dedication, originality of research and leadership.	\$100,000
<b>Talent Award</b>	An individual who 1) holds a SSHRC doctoral or postdoctoral fellowship or scholarship, 2) has maintained a record of academic excellence, 3) demonstrates talent for research and knowledge mobilization, and 4) has demonstrated leadership potential within and/or outside the academic sector.	\$50,000
<b>Insight Award</b>	An individual whose research project 1) was partially or completely funded by SSHRC, 2) has significantly contributed to knowledge and understanding about people, societies and the world, and 3) has led to demonstrable impact within and/or beyond the academic community.	\$50,000
<b>Connection Award</b>	An individual whose SSHRC-funded project has facilitated the flow and exchange of research knowledge within and/or beyond the academic community, has engaged the campus and/or wider community, and has generated intellectual, cultural, social and/or economic impacts.	\$50,000
<b>Partnership Award</b>	A formal SSHRC-funded partnership that has advanced research, training or knowledge mobilization and demonstrated impact and influence within and/or beyond the SSH research community.	\$50,000
<b>TOTAL per year</b>		<b>\$300,000 CAD<sup>3</sup></b>

<sup>3</sup> Expenditures for this funding opportunity are administered by the Research Training Portfolio (RTP).

### *Nomination and Adjudication Process*

Nominees for Impact Awards must be citizens or permanent residents, hold or have held SSHRC funding pertinent to the award category, and maintain research activity and affiliation with an institution eligible to administer SSHRC funds. Individuals must be nominated by their institution, and restrictions exist on concurrent or consecutive nominations.<sup>4</sup>

After nominations are received in April, Impact Awards are adjudicated by a multidisciplinary SSHRC Awards Jury. Jury members are recruited from Canada and abroad, and span the private, not-for-profit and academic sectors. The Jury evaluates nominations according to three primary weighted selection criteria<sup>5</sup>:

- 1) Challenge (ambition and importance, including originality and significance of research) - 15%
- 2) Achievement (impacts and outcomes) - 75%
- 3) Capability (strategy for promotion of research and achievements) - 10%

Following adjudication, finalists are announced in October (with the exception of the Gold Medal, for which there is no shortlist), and winners are announced at an Award Ceremony in November.

## 3 Evaluation Methodology

This section presents a brief overview of the methodology followed in the conduct of this evaluation, including the evaluation questions identified, and the data collected and analyzed to answer them.

### 3.1 Evaluation Background and Scope

The present evaluation was subject to tight timelines and resources. This was due to (a) the small size of the Impact Awards in expenditure terms (CAD \$300,000 per year); (b) the recency of the program; and (c) information gathered in the design phase of the evaluation, which indicated a high level of consensus around the perceived need and low risk for the program. Within that context, the evaluation was scoped as follows:

- The Research-Based Knowledge Culture sub-program encompasses both the Impact Awards funding opportunity and the Knowledge Synthesis Grants (KSG) funding opportunity. However, the KSG are not evaluated here, principally because they are a recent, small, finite funding opportunity that addresses specific future challenge areas.
- The evaluation encompasses the first three competition cycles since the founding of the Impact Awards, namely 2013, 2014, and 2015. This corresponds to 15 awards/winners representing 10 institutions, and 215 nominees representing 42 institutions. This sample was used as a basis for evaluation design decisions, and for data collection purposes.
- No literature review was conducted for this evaluation, and the number of documents reviewed was kept at a manageable level. Documents to review were carefully targeted to answer evaluation questions that could not be sufficiently covered by other lines of evidence.
- Jury members were not interviewed. The evaluation relied instead on “policy discussion summaries” for each competition cycle (one summary per cycle). These documents summarise feedback from jurors on design and effectiveness of the Impact Awards.

The evaluation addressed the following five issues:

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<sup>4</sup> Institutions can only nominate one researcher per award per year (i.e. can nominate up to five researchers a year, one per award). A given researcher can be nominated in two consecutive years for any two different awards; and can be nominated in two consecutive years for the same award, but must then wait two years before being nominated again for the same award.

<sup>5</sup> Sub-criteria used to adjudicate Challenge, Achievement and Capability vary for each award to reflect their unique characteristics and eligibility criteria.

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- Issue 1: Continued need for the Funding Opportunity
- Issue 2: Alignment with Federal Government and SSHRC Priorities, Roles and Responsibilities
- Issue 3: Effectiveness of the Funding Opportunity (achievement of expected outcomes)
- Issue 4: Demonstration of Efficiency and Economy
- Issue 5: Design, Delivery

The complete set of evaluation questions is summarised in the evaluation matrix (see Appendix B).

In addition, the EAC identified **three topic areas** in particular as priorities:

- The extent to which design and delivery elements have contributed to visibility and participation in this funding opportunity, including institutional processes for selecting and nominating candidates for Impact Awards, as well as perceived barriers to participation.
- The effectiveness of the branding of this suite of awards, and the perceived visibility and prestige of the Awards among researchers and institutions, given the recent redesign and implementation of the Impact Award funding opportunity.
- 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. Immediate outcomes include promotion of research (i.e., execution of promotion plan), allocation of award funds to research, training and knowledge mobilization activities, and institutional engagement with respect to recognizing and promoting Canadian SSH research/researchers.

### 3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

Data for this evaluation were collected from six lines of evidence, as outlined in Table 2. As data collection proceeded, qualitative and quantitative information from each line of evidence was captured in an analytical matrix, organized by evaluation question and indicator. After data collection, the SSHRC Evaluation Division analysed the data and summarised findings from each line of evidence into three technical reports, organized by evaluation question and indicator.

**Table 2. Evaluation Data Sources.**

Technical Report	Line of Evidence	Description	Key Issues addressed
1	Key Informant Interviews	28 interviews with three primary stakeholder groups: 12 out of 15 award winners (7 male, 5 female); 14 representatives of nominating institutions (7 successful, 4 unsuccessful, 3 non-nominating); and 2 group interviews (SSHRC program staff, SSHRC communications staff, 7 respondents in total).	3, 5
	Achievement Report Survey	Survey sent to all 15 Award Winners about research, promotion, and knowledge mobilization activities; expenditures; and short-term outcomes of the award. 7 out of 15 award winners responded (46.67%).	3, 5
2	Administrative Data Review	Review of (a) Award and Nominee Data (from the Awards Management Information System, AMIS), e.g. gender, language, size and region of nominating institution; (b) Statements of Accounts (how award funds are spent); <sup>6</sup> and	1, 3, 4

<sup>6</sup> Information on fund expenditures from the Statements of Accounts was limited, as no awards from 2013 to 2015 have been completed. To address this, the analysis also examined fund expenditures for Gold Medal recipients from 2003 to 2012.

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		(c) Financial Records (administrative expenditures).	
	<b>Program File Review</b>	Review of Impact Awards documentation, including award nomination packages, media reports, social media data, and policy discussion summaries (yearly jury member feedback on design and effectiveness of the Impact Awards).	5
3	<b>Document Review</b>	Review of 26 documents from SSHRC and the federal government (e.g., SSHRC performance measurement strategy and reporting; SSHRC evaluation plan, past evaluations and management responses; SSHRC Report on Plans and Priorities 2016-2017; SSHRC Strategic Plan to 2020; 1985 SSHRC Act; 2015 Throne Speech; 2016 Federal Budget; ministerial mandates and publications; etc).	1, 2
	<b>Environmental Scan</b>	Comparative analysis of Impact Awards' size and type with comparable national/international awards in SSH and other fields, based on the 2011 environmental scan of SSH awards and prizes, and updated with data for 2012-2016.	1

Issue 1: Continued need for the Funding Opportunity; Issue 2: Alignment with Federal Government and SSHRC Priorities, Roles and Responsibilities; Issue 3: Effectiveness of the Funding Opportunity (achievement of expected outcomes); Issue 4: Demonstration of Efficiency and Economy; Issue 5: Design and Delivery.

### 3.3 Challenges, Limitations, and Mitigation Strategies

As with all evaluations, this one faced several challenges and/or limitations, some identified during the development of the evaluation design, others encountered during data collection and analysis.

The **primary limitation** of this evaluation is the limited nature of the available data. Since the Impact Awards were launched in 2013, data were only available for 15 awardees at the time of the evaluation. Moreover, this data is partly incomplete, either due to program features (none of the Awards have so far been completed, meaning information on fund expenditures is limited), or due to low response rates, such as for the Achievement Report (7 out of 15 responses submitted). This lack of data both limits the insights that can be gained from present estimates (especially numerical estimates and their statistical significance), and more generally prevents an assessment of long-term outcomes at this time.

The mitigation strategy for this limitation consists, on the one hand, in an acknowledgement of the early and tentative nature of some of the findings; and, on the other hand, in inviting all fifteen awardees to participate (12 were interviewed), and in conducting at least three interviews with each category of institutions (non-nominating, successful, unsuccessful). Moreover, in cases where data was not available for the above three cycles, data was sought from other sources, such as the 2016 competition cycle for twitter data, and the 2003-2012 Gold Medal competition cycles for statements of accounts (i.e. award expenditure data).

A **secondary limitation** of this evaluation is the self-reported nature of many lines of evidence (survey, interviews). Since stakeholders may have an interest in the prolongation/extension of the award program, this may create a positive bias in their reported views of the Awards. Mitigation strategies include the triangulation of information from multiple sources, including non-self-reported lines of evidence (e.g., twitter analysis), and self-reported data from non-nominating institutions. All but one of the evaluation sub-questions draw on more than one data source.

## 4 Evaluation Findings

### 4.1 Relevance

#### ISSUE 1 - Continued Need for the Funding Opportunity

**FINDING 1:** *There is a strong continued need for this funding opportunity because the Impact Awards fulfill a distinct and important purpose: that of highlighting and rewarding achievements in Canadian SSH research, and in particular, of supporting the mobilization and dissemination of impactful SSH knowledge.*

All key informants agreed that it is important to provide awards to recognize achievements in Canadian SSH research. The use of awards to celebrate academic achievements is supported by the environmental scan of comparable awards, which found that such awards exist in Canada in other fields (e.g., Canadian Institutes of Health Research's Gold Leaf Prizes), and exist in SSH outside Canada (e.g., the Humanities Aronui Medal, New Zealand, the Awards from The Research Council of Norway).

Key informants also agreed that the Impact Awards are distinct from other awards and prizes available to Canadian SSH researchers. Although the environmental scan and interviews revealed a set of Canadian SSH funding opportunities that are comparable to the Impact Awards in terms of objectives, scope and value, none entirely overlap with the Impact Awards. Specifically, many of these other opportunities are either, a) restricted to sub-sets of Canadian researchers (e.g. the "Association francophone pour le savoir" (Acfas) suite of prizes), b) are not restricted to research in SSH disciplines (e.g. Governor General's Innovation Awards, Killam Prize), c) come in the form of a fellowship and not as an award (e.g. Trudeau Foundation Research Fellowships), or, d) do not explicitly focus on impact and dissemination beyond academic audiences (e.g. Molson Prize). Several stakeholders felt that their emphasis on impact and on celebrating achievement (rather than on funding research) sets the Impact Awards apart from other funding opportunities. Indeed, to date, only one Impact Award was awarded to a researcher who had previously won a Molson Prize or a Trudeau Fellowship.

As an overall suite focusing on Canada, SSH, impact and knowledgemobilization, the Impact Awards occupy a distinct place in the funding landscape.

**FINDING 2:** *Additional clarification of certain awards would further increase their individual distinctiveness and fit in the Canadian SSH funding landscape.*

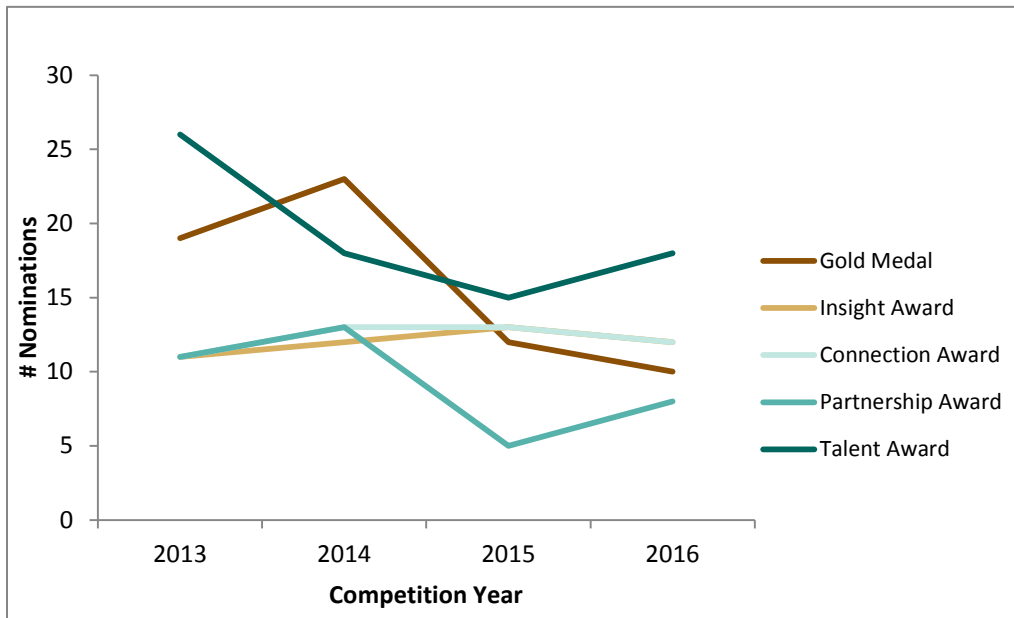
Interviewees generally felt that the current suite of Impact Awards is comprehensive and appropriate. However, some perceived gaps and areas of overlap were noted. Jury members and several interviewees perceived overlap between the terminology and adjudication criteria of the Insight, Connection and Partnership award categories. This overlap may cause confusion for nominating institutions, and may have contributed to fewer nominations in these award categories. Stakeholders agreed that further clarifying the award criteria, and further differentiating between the Insight, Connection and Partnership awards would be useful.

By contrast, the Talent award attracted the most nominations. However, four interviewees expressed a concern regarding the fact that the award groups graduate students and post-doctoral researchers. These groups are usually perceived differently by institutions, with post-doctoral researchers being expected to have more publications and experience. Given these differences, the interviewees suggested that it might make sense to recognize the two groups separately (e.g. splitting the Talent award into two awards, or alternating between graduate students and postdoctoral researchers on a yearly basis).

**FINDING 3:** *Although there were on average 25% fewer nominations in 2015 and 2016 than in 2013 and 2014, there is presently no indication that this tentative trend threatens the relevance of the Impact Awards.*

A decline in the number of award nominations was observed between 2013 and 2015, as illustrated in Figure 1. The decline was starkest from 2014 to 2015; was driven largely by declining nominations for the Gold Medal and Partnership Award; and was particularly steep for small institutions (67%).<sup>7</sup>

Figure 1: Nominations per Award, 2013-2016



Source: Nomination Packages 2013 to 2015

The reasons for this decline are not entirely clear. Analysis shows that the award rule limiting more than two consecutive nominations of individuals for a given award is not a leading cause of this decline. One hypothesis is that institutions that nominated unsuccessfully in one competition cycle may have been subsequently discouraged by their initial loss. Institutions that were not successful in 2013 and 2014 indeed nominated less in 2015. The difference is statistically significant, but overall the sample is too limited to determine whether this is a real trend or an artifact.

Overall, except for the Partnership Award in 2015, at least 10 nominations were received for each award in every competition cycle.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, historical Gold Medal data shows that the number of nominations received pre-Impact Awards (on average 13.1 per year, 2003-2012) is in line with the nominations received for the Medal since its inclusion in the Impact Awards suite (on average 13.5 nominations per year, 2013-2016). There is no indication that the quality of finalists and winners has declined over time, suggesting that the declining number of nominations does not presently threaten the relevance of the Impact Awards.<sup>9</sup>

## ISSUE 2 - Alignment with Federal Government and SSHRC Priorities, Roles, and Responsibilities

**FINDING 4:** *The provision of Impact Awards funding is an appropriate role for the federal government.*

The promotion of research is an appropriate role for the federal government. Two group interviews conducted with SSHRC communication and program staff indicated that the provision of the Impact

<sup>7</sup> Other groups of institutions (language, region) do not show a decline, once size is controlled for.

<sup>8</sup> Lower numbers of nominations for the Partnership Award may be due to the relative uniqueness of this award format (even internationally), as identified by the environmental scan. Whilst this may explain the lower absolute number of nominations for this award as opposed to other Impact Awards, it does not explain the decline in nominations after 2014.

<sup>9</sup> Although beyond the time scope of this evaluation, it is worth noting that the number of nominations stabilised in the 2016 competition cycle, and constituted a (small) increase over 2015.

Awards is consistent with the SSHRC mandate to “promote and assist research and scholarship” in the SSH (1985 SSHRC Act, 4.1.a). Further support to the federal role in this area is due to (a) the current mandate (2016) of Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada; (b) the fact that research and innovation, especially when widely disseminated and mobilised, yield positive externalities for Canadian society; and (c) the fact that Canadian SSH research would likely suffer if the federal government diminished its involvement in the field, since the government accounts for 24% of gross expenditure in SSH research in Canada (higher education institutions 60%, provinces 8%).<sup>10</sup>

**FINDING 5: Federal government priorities support the need for a Research-Based Knowledge Culture and of Awards celebrating and promoting impact, knowledge-dissemination, and training.**

The document review of federal priorities did not find a specific mention of honouring and recognizing research achievements as a means of promoting science. Nonetheless, the evidence gathered indicates a moderate to strong alignment of the Awards with federal government priorities.

Each Impact Award objective is supported by sub-elements of federal priorities, and in general by the federal government’s intention to continue to support researchers who push the frontiers of knowledge and help develop impactful solutions for Canadian society. However federal priorities are broader in scope than the Awards, as they include supporting 'innovators' and 'entrepreneurs' from the private sector in addition to scholars.<sup>11</sup> Interviewees also noted that the Impact Awards do not address sub-priorities of women, minority, and equity groups in science. Similarly, supporting youth in science is not an explicit objective of the Awards, although the Talent Award and the emphasis on training are broadly oriented towards this priority.

**FINDING 6: Impact Award objectives are strongly consistent with SSHRC priorities, and support several objectives of the SSHRC Connection Program.**

The objectives of the Impact Awards are consistent with the SSHRC strategic outcomes and organizational priorities for Financial Years 2013/2014 - 2015/2016. The Impact Awards primarily align with the first objective of the Connection program around facilitating multidirectional flow of SSH knowledge in order to enhance intellectual, cultural, social and economic influence; benefit; and impact. Consistent with this objective, Impact Awards fit under select outcomes of the SSHRC Connection Program logic model. Specifically, The Impact Awards are expected to contribute directly to outcomes 3b, 4b, and 5a of the Connection Program Logic Model (see Appendix A). It is also expected that by recognizing researchers for the impact of their research, the Impact Awards will promote uptake and use of research results among other researchers; thus also contributing to outcomes 4a and 5b.

SSHRC communications and program staff agreed that the Awards are well aligned with SSHRC’s organizational priorities from 2013-14 to 2015-16 (especially priority 1, “to promote and support excellence in SSH research and talent development”), as well as with the revised organisational priorities for 2016-17 and beyond (especially priority 3, “connect SSH research with Canadians”).

## 4.2 Performance

### **ISSUE 3 - Effectiveness of the Funding Opportunity (achievement of intended outcomes)**

**FINDING 7: The Impact Awards have successfully supported recipients in knowledge mobilization activities and extension of awarded research. However, the effectiveness of the Impact Awards in this realm is limited by the one-off nature of most knowledge mobilization activities, the rapidly declining levels of attention to winners over time, and the under-spending/under-reporting of award funds.**

<sup>10</sup> Data from the 2015 Gross Domestic Expenditures and Development in Canada (GERD), the Provinces and Territories.

<sup>11</sup> SSHRC’s *Report on Plans and Priorities 2016-17* brings attention to the importance of linking with other sectors in SSH research, and part of SSHRC’s strategy in this regard is to “hold two major symposia on future challenge areas to attract academic, business, and public and private sector leaders.”

### Knowledge mobilization

All respondents engaged in the promotion of research achievements. Achievement reports for 7 awardees shows that, on average, awardees participated in 5.1 types of knowledge mobilization activities (e.g. workshops, interviews, social media, etc).

There is strong evidence that most knowledge promotion activities are a direct result of the Impact Awards. Many of these activities (e.g. media interviews, social media posts, award ceremonies, receptions) were directly linked to the award, and happened in the wake of the announcements. Activities either resulted from awardees' promotion plans (a part of the nomination packages), or from unexpected opportunities that arose out of the attention surrounding the award. Encouragingly, the average number of knowledge mobilization activities awardees participated in (5.1) was almost equivalent to the average number proposed in promotion plans (5.4).

SSHRC's statement of account data shows that 70-90% of reported expenditures of award funds are spent on travel and salaries (the latter mostly for students). This suggests the Awards are supporting research promotion and extension activities. However, since most of the funds are under-spent in the initial years after the receipt of the award, and since social media data suggests attention to award winners drops after a few weeks, the Awards may not currently be maximally effective at knowledge mobilization. Whilst the evaluation did not collect data on the timing of knowledge mobilization and extension activities, many examples provided in the achievement reports and interviews are one-off events. The extent to which knowledge mobilization was sustained over time is unclear.

Further, the data collected for this evaluation captured knowledge mobilization activities, but not knowledge mobilization outcomes (i.e. the extent to which research is better known in society and/or has been extended), largely because it is still very early to look at longer-term outcomes. However, interviewed awardees indicated that promotion activities generated publicity for themselves and their institution, and helped promote their research and research area among academic communities and the general public. Partly due to the recent implementation of the Impact Awards, the interviews did not probe for how long-lasting this increased publicity/awareness was.

### *Extension of awarded research*

Through the knowledge mobilization activities identified above, awardees reported producing an average of 28.4 research outputs. These included presentations, journal articles, creation of online content (e.g., videos), book chapters, and reports.

**FINDING 8: *The Impact Awards have been successful in supporting the development of both individual and institutional research capacity and collaboration in the SSH research area recognized by the award.***

According to achievement report data, the Awards led most awardees to strengthen research capacity by mentoring / funding students as research assistants (5 out of 7 respondents), and to engage in new national and international collaborations (5 out of 7 respondents) within their own institution, with other institutions, and with government, industry and the not-for-profit sector.

Gold Medal statement of account data (2003-2012) shows that around a fifth of award funds are usually spent on student salaries, further indicating that awards are supporting student training and employment opportunities. The evaluation did not collect data on the quality or outcomes of the training and collaborations, and did not consult trained students or new collaborators.

**FINDING 9: *The extent to which the Impact Awards raise the long-term visibility and recognition of Canadian SSH researchers is strongest for young researchers, nationally, and among peers, but weak among the general public, internationally, and for well-established researchers. This may change as the Awards become established.***



An analysis of daily twitter mentions of awardees shows that awardees receive a short-term boost of attention following the announcement, but that twitter mentions return to pre-announcement levels within a few days.<sup>12</sup> An analysis of average daily twitter mentions of winning institutions' usernames shows that although the *volume* of overall tweets did not increase following the announcement of winners, the *content* of tweets changed, with an increasing number of tweets about these institutions that also mention the SSHRC Impact Awards. This trend continued and was amplified in the weeks following the award announcement. This suggests the Awards produce at least a medium-term rise in visibility and recognition for institutions (but not necessarily for individual awardees).

Awardees generally felt that the Impact Awards helped to increase their visibility, in particular at a national level, and among academic peers. Four interviewed awardees (33.3%) and four institutional representatives (28.6%) felt that awards helped increase national recognition "to a great extent", with one winner noting, "this is the most influential item on my CV." It was noted that the Talent Award may be particularly helpful in raising the profile of young researchers.<sup>13</sup> However, fewer respondents<sup>14</sup> believed the Awards raised researchers' international recognition. Two main explanations were advanced for the limited impact of the Awards on recipients' recognition (national or international): (1) the award suite remains very young and is still gaining in visibility, and (2) most winners are likely to be already known to their peers and to have well-established research / professional networks prior to receiving the award (indeed, they are likely to have previously received other prizes, grants, scholarships, etc).<sup>15</sup>

**FINDING 10: *The Impact Awards are considered prestigious. However, they generate limited additional visibility for SSHRC, which is more widely known than the Awards themselves.***

Most interviewed key informants described the Impact Awards as very prestigious, and predicted that the prestige of the award would further develop over time through tradition. This perceived prestige was attributed to the small number of awards given annually and the perceived excellence of researchers recognized by the Awards.

Most key informants also felt that the Awards had increased SSHRC's visibility at least "to some extent". However, several indicated that SSHRC was already well-known in academic circles. Some SSHRC staff suggested the Awards may help to shift perceptions of SSHRC from being merely a sponsor of research to an agency that seeks to promote and disseminate research with a positive impact on society. However, the evaluation did not capture perception data about SSHRC (e.g. from institutional representatives) that could confirm whether SSHRC's image is evolving in this way.

Twitter data analysis revealed that the overall boost in SSHRC's visibility is short-lived: tweets about SSHRC spike the day of the winners' announcement, but ebb out within four days. Moreover, SSHRC tweets about the Awards tend to be re-tweeted less than other SSHRC tweets, even in the period surrounding the winners' announcements.

Several key informants suggested that there is room for the Awards to increase SSHRC visibility further, by better engaging stakeholders (government, media, institutions), by increasing the visibility of the award ceremony, and by encouraging the more sustained promotion of awardees by their own institutions and through other means.

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<sup>12</sup> The evaluation did not systematically analyse data on the origins of twitter traffic, other than noting that usually a small share (less than 20%) came from awardees' universities and their affiliates.

<sup>13</sup> However, interviewed Talent Award winners (i.e. young researchers) did not have significantly different views of perceived impact of the Awards on national or international recognition than interviewed winners of other awards.

<sup>14</sup> Only three out of 12 award winners interviewed felt that international recognition was impacted "to a great extent". Of these, 2/3 felt that this recognition was attributable in part to their area of research and international networks that were in place prior to receiving an Impact Award.

<sup>15</sup> This explanation is likely reinforced by certain design features of the Impact Awards, since a researcher needs to be well-known enough within their institution to be nominated, and since their existing level of recognition is an adjudication criteria (e.g. 'International Stature' for Gold Medal).

**ISSUE 4 - Demonstration of Efficiency and Economy**

**FINDING 11:** *Although the Awards' ratio of administrative to program costs is high due to their small monetary value, their efficiency compares favourably to Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC) awards when administrative costs per award or nomination are used as a comparator.*

According to the Evaluation Division's standard method of assessing cost-efficiency, the Impact Awards are not cost-efficient compared to other SSHRC funding opportunities or NSERC's equivalent to the Impact Awards: the average administrative expenditure per \$1 of award expenditure is 36.4 cents, relative to 15.2 cents for NSERC.

However, this measure of cost-efficiency was designed for granting programs and is arguably not suitable for awards programs, whose program activities are broader than the grant funds disbursed (e.g. the award ceremony, which should be considered a program cost rather than a grant expenditure). When compared to NSERC's awards, the Impact Awards' relative operating expenditures are driven up by their much smaller monetary value. However, the Impact Awards compare favourably to NSERC's awards in terms of administrative cost *per award administered*, as well as *per nomination received*. This information is summarised in Table 4, which compares all ways of assessing cost-efficiency.

**Table 3. Comparing Administrative Expenditures for the Impact Awards and NSERC Awards.**

Administrative expenditure per...	\$1 of grant expenditure	Award administered	Nomination received
SSHRC	36.4 cents	\$21,843	\$515.16
NSERC	15.2 cents	\$30,417	\$646.10

An additional partial indicator of the cost-efficient manner in which the funding opportunity is delivered is the relative stability of administrative expenditures over the three years of the review period, with a variance/growth of less than 5%.

4.3 Design and Delivery

**ISSUE 5 - Design and Delivery**

**FINDING 12:** *The Impact Awards have largely been delivered as planned and to stakeholders' satisfaction. The exceptions are performance and financial reporting mechanisms, which remain weakly implemented.*

Interviewees were asked to rate their satisfaction with three key program delivery mechanisms. In each case, over 50% of interviewees were "very satisfied" with the mechanisms, and not one expressed strong dissatisfaction. Appraisals of program delivery mechanisms did not differ significantly among winning, nominating, and non-nominating institutions. The mechanisms are:

1. **The institutional selection process**, i.e. how institutions select who they nominate. Though the precise process varies by institution, it appears that the program successfully transmitted to institutions the idea that demonstration of impact is crucial in order to submit competitive nominations, as 50% of respondents held the belief that evidence of research 'impact' is weighted heavily at their institution as a key criterion to decide who to nominate for the Impact Awards (along with previous SSHRC funding, number of research outputs, and area / field of research).
2. **The clarity of the selection criteria:** a majority of stakeholders (70%) reported being 'very satisfied' with the clarity of the selection criteria.

- 3. The clarity of the nomination process:** a majority of stakeholders (60%) reported being 'very satisfied' with the clarity of the nomination process. However, three key informants and SSHRC program staff noted that its thoroughness made it resource-intensive, both for SSHRC and especially for small institutions. The stabilization of the nomination deadline was commended, and small improvements to the process were suggested.<sup>16</sup>

Key areas for improvement to delivery methods identified by at least one interviewee included, (a) clarifying tenure options for the Talent Award, (b) clarifying what should go into promotion plans given the wide variance in their quality and content, (c) offering recognition to successful co-nominees in the Partnership Award category, and (d) offering an online option for document submission (e.g., letters of support). Two institutional representatives from unsuccessful institutions also suggested it may be helpful to obtain feedback on unsuccessful nominations.

Suggestions for improvement to design features included working to better engage stakeholders (e.g., government, media, and institutions), and to encourage more sustained promotion of awarded researchers.

Although there is an overarching level of satisfaction with the aforementioned delivery mechanisms, achievement and financial reporting mechanisms for the Awards remain weakly implemented.

- Achievement reports are not yet mandatory and eight out of fifteen awardees have not completed one to date. The reporting instrument was piloted through this evaluation, and feedback from the seven respondents signalled satisfaction with the length of the instrument, and offered the suggestion to allow for more open-ended and flexible response options.
- All award winners to date have requested extensions for spending their prize money. As such, only 44% of funds disbursed in the 2013 competition have been spent/ accounted for at the time of this evaluation (Fall, 2016), and expenditures from more recent competition years (2014-2016) have not yet been reported. Data from previous Gold Medal winners (2003-2012) indicates that such under-spending or under-reporting of expenditures is a general trend, as 39% of these funds remain unspent/unreported.

These figures should likely not be interpreted as a sign that the award value is too high. The environmental scan of comparable awards showed that the Impact Awards' monetary value is in line with that of comparable SSH prizes, and smaller than Canadian awards in the natural and health sciences. Moreover, a majority of interviewees considered the award value appropriate and a positive aspect of the Impact Awards, and select stakeholders (one institutional representative and several jurors) who suggested revisions called for higher, not lower, values. Overall, under-spending and/or under-reporting thus remains an unresolved issue.<sup>17</sup>

**FINDING 13:** *Interview data suggested a perception among stakeholders that small institutions and Francophone institutions may have a lower chance of winning an award relative to large, Anglophone institutions. Although small and Francophone institutions have not won any awards to date, the limited sample did not allow for statistical confirmation of these trends, which should be closely monitored in the future.*

An analysis of nominees' likelihood of winning by personal characteristic did not identify any statistically significant differences related to nominees' language, discipline, or gender.<sup>18</sup> There were

<sup>16</sup> A fourth mechanism – the adjudication process itself – was not reviewed for its efficacy and efficiency. However, the evaluation did take into account jury members' views of other design and delivery aspects (as reported in annual juror policy discussion papers).

<sup>17</sup> Two main solutions present themselves: enforcing a more rigorous spending and reporting schedule, or relaxing the reporting requirements. Some prestigious comparable international awards do not track or constrain the use of award funds (Nobel Prizes, MacArthur fellowships).

<sup>18</sup> Indeed, the gender of award winners closely matches the latest available data on the gender of SSH academic staff in Canada (40% female). Data from 2009, drawn from Council of Canadian Academies (2012). Strengthening Canada's Research Capacity: The Gender Dimension. Ottawa.

likewise no statistically significant differences in nominees from the types of institutions that win more awards than others. However, the absence of statistically significant findings is likely due to the small sample sizes (especially within subgroups). It does not necessarily indicate the absence of barriers, particularly as certain subgroups (e.g., small institutions and Francophone institutions) have not won any awards to date.

Interviewees in particular felt that potential barriers to being nominated/winning may exist for (a) members of an equity group (seen as a systemic access issue in academia, not specific to the Impact Awards);<sup>19</sup> (b) Francophone researchers (due to a feeling among nominating institutions that the Jury is mostly Anglophone);<sup>20</sup> (c) researchers in the humanities (due to a sense that 'impact' is easier to demonstrate in the social sciences);<sup>21</sup> and (d) researchers at small institutions.

Although there have not been any Francophone winners to date, this is not due to a lack of nominations from Francophone institutions: 44% of Francophone institutions (8 out of 18) nominated at least once, compared to 45% of Anglophone institutions (28 out of 62) and 55% of bilingual institutions (6 out of 11).

While being from a small institution does not seem to affect nominees' chances of winning, it does appear to affect an institution's decision to nominate. All large institutions have nominated at least one individual between 2013 and 2015, compared to two-thirds of medium-sized institutions, and only one quarter of small institutions. According to interviewees, small institutions have more limited capacity to support the nomination process and to disseminate / promote work nationally and internationally. However, these barriers were not described as unique to the Impact Awards; rather, interviewees felt that these barriers exist with respect to funding applications in general.<sup>22</sup>

**FINDING 14: *Nomination criteria and processes were not perceived as barriers to the Awards by stakeholders. However, many stakeholders felt that more could be done around mechanisms to promote the visibility of winners (e.g., the Award Ceremony).***

The main barrier to access identified by non-nominating institutions to date involves their own capacity issues (e.g., lack of staff to prepare nomination packages) and lack of internal promotion / awareness (e.g. from Deans) of the Awards. However, all interviewed representatives of non-nominating institutions noted they would consider nominating in coming years.

Other design features, such as the nomination package, the eligibility criteria, limitations on consecutive re-nominations, and promotional requirements, were not seen as factors discouraging nominations. However, some improvements were suggested for the nomination package, including (a) clarification of the term 'impact', in order to potentially facilitate nomination from the humanities; (b) shorter page limits for some sections of the nomination package; (c) guidance for nominating institutions on promotion plans; and (d) an electronic submission option for nominations (especially for letters of support).

Responses were more mixed regarding the design features' impact on visibility. Although the award ceremony and the announcement of finalists were perceived by 100% of awardees as positively affecting the Awards' visibility, nearly half of award winners (45.5%) felt that the ceremony in particular could be improved. Ideas included holding a dedicated event (the ceremony is currently

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<sup>19</sup> Data on equity group membership cannot be collected in nomination packages because these packages are prepared by institutions, not awardees themselves.

<sup>20</sup> This perception is not accurate inasmuch as an analysis of past jury's linguistic composition reveals a fair balance between Anglophones, Francophones, and bilingual members. However, nominating institutions do not usually know the composition of the Jury, since jurors' identities are only revealed after nominations close.

<sup>21</sup> No difference in the frequency or type of barriers identified by interviewees was observed as a function of the region, size, or award status (wins, losses, no nominations) of their institution.

<sup>22</sup> One possible explanation for the overall smaller number of nominations from small institutions is that these institutions have fewer SSH faculty members that could be nominated. The data across all institutions (not just small ones) shows a strong correlation between institutions' number of faculty members and their number of Impact Award nominations ( $R^2 = 0.8056$ ).

folded into another event); encouraging a larger and more diverse attendance (with particular efforts to involve the media); and holding local ceremonies outside of Ottawa.

One awardee, two institutional representatives and some SSHRC staff noted that it might help to raise the visibility of the Awards and encourage nominations if the identity of the prestigious, high quality jury was highlighted (rather than as presently anonymised) early in the process. Two other institutional representatives, however, valued anonymity, and 75% of respondents did not think it affected visibility.

Finally, most respondents deemed the award value appropriate to entice participation and ensure visibility. Some stakeholders, however (and jurors in particular) felt that a higher value, especially for the Gold Medal, might further entice participation.

## 5 Conclusions

In conclusion, based on the experiences and data from the first three competition cycles of the Impact Awards, it can be said that:

1. Three years into their existence, the Impact Awards are respected and have attracted high-calibre nominations and winners. They are successfully recognising excellence and impact and enriching the Canadian SSH funding landscape. Although select stakeholders have suggested small modifications to individual awards, the Awards have functioned well as a coherent suite.
2. Existing evidence suggests that the Impact Awards are achieving their immediate outcomes, including the execution of promotion plans (5.1 executed knowledge-mobilization activities vs. 5.4 promised), the allocation of award funds to travel and research (including the training and employment of young researchers), and new research collaborations. Most of these outcomes can be attributed directly or indirectly to the receipt of an award. The awards have also had unexpected benefits, such as unanticipated media appearances for winners.
3. Given the young age of the funding opportunity, the evaluation did not explore intermediate and long-term outcomes, such as awareness of awarded research among peers and the public, or skills acquired by trained researchers. More systematic collection of Achievement Report data will be useful in order to estimate these impacts and outcomes going forward.
4. The effectiveness of the branding of the Awards remains mixed. Multiple respondents across all stakeholder groups felt that more could be done to maximise the effectiveness of the Award ceremony and the subsequent institutional promotion of winners. Twitter data suggest that the visibility of winners, and the corresponding effectiveness of the Awards in terms of knowledge-mobilization, is strongly limited in time. By contrast, institutions do seem to benefit from successful nominations, as they are increasingly linked to the Impact Awards on social media over the medium-term.
5. Design and delivery elements of the Awards have generally been well-received, without major complaints about nomination and selection procedures. The delivery of the Awards has also been managed within reasonable cost, although the thoroughness of the process makes it both time and resource-intensive.
6. Interviewees identified a number of perceived potential barriers to being nominated for and winning awards, most prominently institution size (small) and language (French). However, the data remains too limited to date to identify statistically significant differences in the likelihood of winning. This will have to be closely monitored in the future to pre-empt groups from being under-represented and submitting fewer nominations.
7. The under-spending/under-reporting of SSHRC award funds remains an unresolved issue, which precedes this iteration of the Impact Awards and may limit their effectiveness.
8. The awards' impact is likely to increase over time. This is not only the case with respect to their prestige and visibility, which will be enhanced by tradition and the stature of past winners, but also with respect to their clarity, identity, and accessibility. The character and

distinctiveness of each individual award is likely to become crisper as each round of winners provides institutions with concrete examples of the kinds of research achievements sought.

## 6 Recommendations

Based on its findings, this evaluation proposes 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. Recommendations from stakeholders to this effect include (a) shorter page limits for certain nomination packages, and (b) electronic submission mechanisms (e.g. letters of support).

**2. Clarify key concepts.** The clarification of certain terms is likely to facilitate and encourage the submission of nominations. This includes:

- a. Describing “impact” (to make it clear, for example, how humanities researchers can demonstrate impact of their work)
- 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.
- 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 language in the Awards' public branding, and of providing examples of eligible / successful candidates to nominating institutions.<sup>23</sup>

**3. Improve branding and promotion of the Impact Awards.** The evaluation suggests that the branding and visibility of the Awards – both for themselves and for 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.

**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 are Francophone and small institutions.

In addition to the above recommendations, it is worth explaining briefly why this evaluation is not putting forward as recommendations some of the more prominent or frequent suggestions made by stakeholders. These include:

- **Providing recognition of research partners / co-nominees:** two awardees suggested that it would be appropriate to recognize research partners in addition to the principal investigator for the Partnership award. This concern was brought to the attention of SSHRC's Research Training Portfolio (RTP) in 2014, and following consultations it was determined that SSHRC'S administrative processes currently allow for the identification of only one principal investigator for a given grant nomination, meaning that that only one project director can be nominated for the Partnership Award. In light of this, RTP reworded the Partnership Award's description prior to the launch of the 2015 Impact Awards competition. The communications team has also since strived to ensure that the contributions of other parties / individuals involved in the

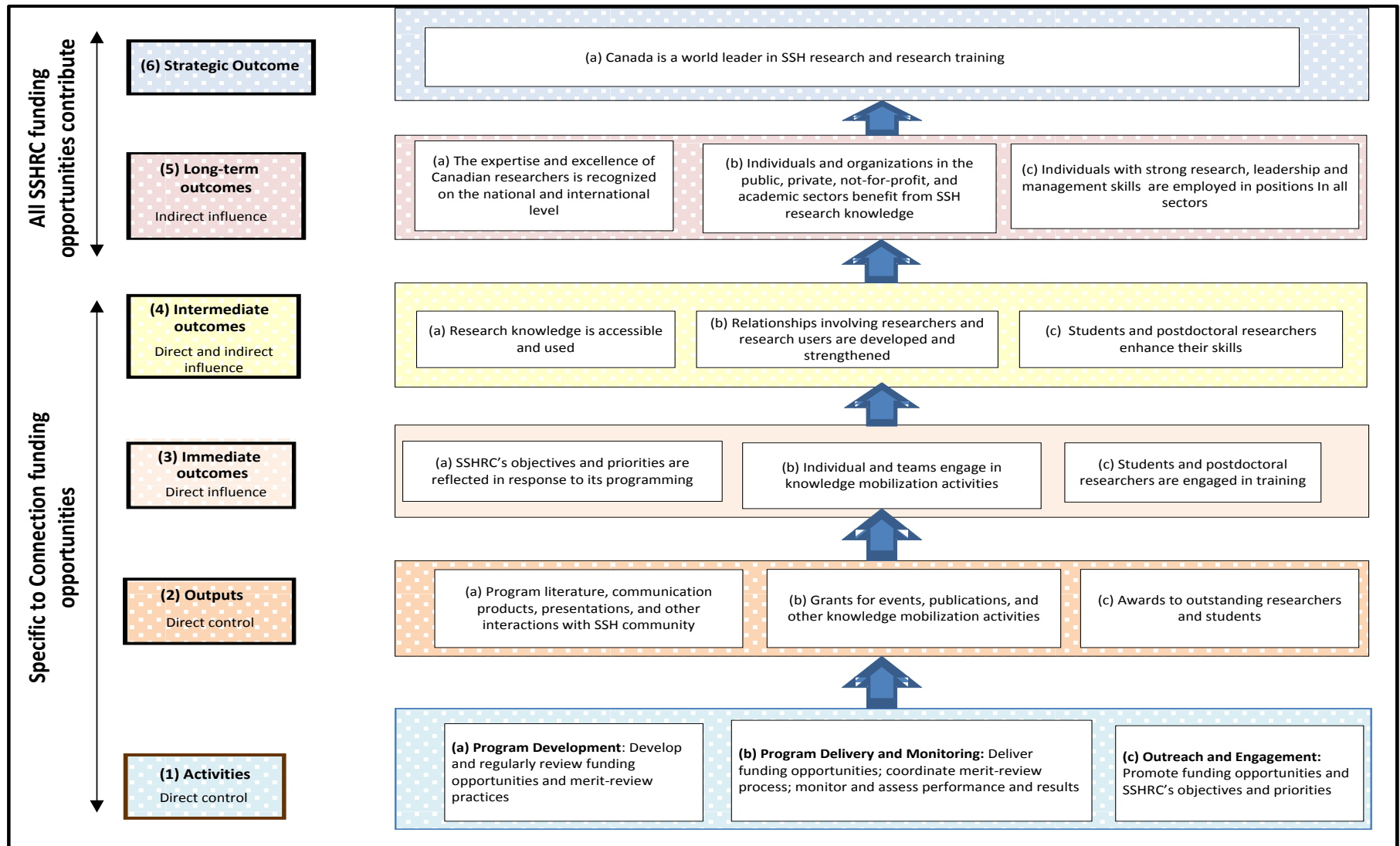
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<sup>23</sup> The profiles of past winners are also publicly available on the Impact Awards' website. This could be explicitly referenced as a resource in nomination package instructions.

partnership are accurately represented and recognized in Impact Awards promotional activities/material.

- **Changing the structure of the Award Suite or of individual awards:** different lines of evidence hint, with varying strengths, at a series of desirable tweaks to given awards: creating two Talent awards, differentiating the Connection award from Trudeau fellowships, further distinguishing the Insight, Connection, and Partnership awards. Whilst the evaluation does recommend clarifying certain overlaps (recommendation #2), no recommendation was included with regards to actually modifying an award. This is because (a) the categories of the Impact Awards were originally put into place to promote SSHRC's branding and still strongly reflect organizational priorities, and (b) because changes to the structure of the Awards so early on in their existence would negatively impact SSHRC's branding and perceived prestige of the Awards, which according to several KIs strongly depends on history and tradition.
- **Publicly releasing the identity of jury members before nominations close:** at least four interviewees across all various stakeholder groups suggested that publicly releasing the identity of jury members at an early stage may enhance the visibility and prominence of the Awards, in line with the high calibre of the jury in past years. However, the absence of consensus on the issue and the majority feeling (3/4 of interviewees) that the anonymity of jurors did not affect the visibility of the Awards did not justify a recommendation. Moreover, SSHRC Program Staff commented that releasing the jury composition earlier would generate a large administrative constraint in terms of moving the timelines so that jury composition is settled before the beginning of the competition.

Appendix A - Connection Program Logic Model





## Appendix B - Evaluation Matrix

Issues and Evaluation Questions	Indicators	Sources of Data					
		Document/ Literature Review	Interviews with institutional reps	Achievement report	Interviews with SSHRC Staff	Interviews with Award recipients	File Review
<b>Relevance</b>							
<b>Issue 1: Continued Need for the Funding Opportunity</b>							
<b>Question 1</b> To what extent is there a continued need for the Impact Awards funding opportunity?	1.1 Assessment of the need for Impact Awards in the current Canadian research context (trends in overall awards in the SSH, number of nominations received, perceptions of stakeholders)	X	X		X	X	X
	1.2 Proportion of funds spent each year and number of extensions requested, by award and size of institution	X				X	X
	1.3 Design characteristics of Impact Awards (e.g., value of award, eligibility criteria, duration) in comparison to other SSH prizes and comparable agency prizes (NSERC/CIHR)	X	X		X	X	
<b>Issue 2: Alignment with Federal Government and SSHRC Priorities, Roles and Responsibilities</b>							
<b>Question 2</b> 2.a To what extent are the Impact Award objectives consistent with federal government priorities? 2.b. To what extent are the Impact Award objectives consistent with SSHRC priorities?	2.a.1 Degree of alignment with federal government priorities	X			X		
	2.b.1 Degree of alignment with SSHRC's priorities	X			X		
<b>Question 3</b> Is the provision of Impact Awards funding an appropriate role for the federal government?	3.1 Evidence that the funding opportunity is consistent with federal roles and responsibilities	X			X		
<b>Performance (effectiveness, efficiency and economy)</b>							
<b>Issue 3: Effectiveness of the Funding Opportunity</b>							
<b>Question 4</b> To what extent has the	4.1 Number and type(s) of activities undertaken by award holders and institutions to promote and extend research		X	X		X	

## Research-Based Knowledge Culture Evaluation

Issues and Evaluation Questions	Indicators	Sources of Data					
		Document/ Literature Review	Interviews with institutional reps	Achievement report	Interviews with SSHRC Staff	Interviews with Award recipients	File Review
Impact Awards funding opportunity been successful in achieving its intended outcomes? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Research capacity is strengthened</li> <li>Research knowledge is mobilized</li> <li>Research achievements are promoted</li> <li>Research knowledge is accessible and used</li> <li>Increased awareness and visibility of SSHRC-funded research</li> </ul>	4.2 Evidence that institutions have developed or strengthened research capacity in the SSH research area recognized by the award (i.e., number of new research grants, number of students trained, number/type of activities undertaken by students, etc.)		X	X		X	
	4.3 Number of new and ongoing collaborations in the SSH research area recognized by the award.		X	X		X	
	4.4 Number and type(s) of knowledge mobilization activities in the SSH research area recognized by the award.		X	X		X	
	4.5 Evidence of recognition of expertise and excellence of Canadian SSH researchers (twitter mentions, website hits, uptake and attendance at institutional promotion events)		X		X		X
	4.6 Perceptions of national and international recognition of awarded SSH researchers		X			X	
	4.7.a) Evidence of visibility of SSHRC and knowledge of awards (i.e., perceptions of stakeholders and institutions, social media metrics)	X	X		X	X	X
	4.7.b) Evidence of perceived prestige of awards (stakeholder perceptions, social media metrics, tenure and promotion criteria within institutions)	X	X		X	X	
<b>Issue 4: Demonstration of Efficiency and Economy</b>							
<b>Question 5</b> To what extent is the Impact Awards funding opportunity delivered in a cost-efficient manner?	5.1 Ratio of administrative costs to total program expenditures, compared to NSERC prizes as a benchmark						X
	5.2 Perceptions of current delivery mechanisms (both program delivery and communications delivery), efficiency, and potential areas for improvement		X		X	X	X
<b>Design and Delivery</b>							
<b>Issue 5: Design and Delivery</b>							
<b>Question 6</b> To what extent has the Impact Awards funding opportunity been effectively delivered as planned? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Uptake at institutions</li> </ul>	6.1 Description of current tools and procedures for capturing performance information (institutional monitoring, reporting) that could enable SSHRC to report on outcomes.		X	X	X		
	6.2 Opinions on alternative delivery methods for Impact Awards		X		X	X	
	6.3 Description of institutional selection criteria and nomination process, by award and size of institution		X			X	
	6.4 Perceptions of barriers to access (nomination process, adjudication process), by		X			X	

## Research-Based Knowledge Culture Evaluation

Issues and Evaluation Questions	Indicators	Sources of Data						
		Document/ Literature Review	Interviews with institutional reps	Achievement report	Interviews with SSHRC Staff	Interviews with Award recipients	File Review	SSHRC Admin Data
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Institutional selection process</li> <li>Clarity of nomination criteria and process</li> <li>Barriers to access</li> </ul>	institution size, language (of nominee, of the institution, and of the nomination package), and region							
<p><b>Question 7</b> To what extent have design features of the Impact Awards been effective in promoting visibility and participation in these funding opportunities?</p>	7.1 Impact of design features on institutional willingness to participate in funding opportunity (paper nomination package, eligibility criteria, award value, limits on re-nomination of candidates)		X		X	X		
	7.2 Perceived impact of design features on visibility of awards (effectiveness of award ceremony, promotion of jury members, award value, selection/announcement of finalists)		X		X	X		

## Appendix C - List of Findings

### RELEVANCE

FINDING 1: *There is a strong continued need for this funding opportunity because the Impact Awards fulfill a distinct and important purpose: that of highlighting and rewarding achievements in Canadian SSH research, and in particular, of supporting the mobilization and dissemination of impactful SSH knowledge through society.*

FINDING 2: *Additional clarification of certain awards would further increase their individual distinctiveness and fit in the Canadian SSH funding landscape.*

FINDING 3: *Although there were on average 25% fewer nominations in 2015 and 2016 than in 2013 and 2014, there is presently no indication that this tentative trend threatens the relevance of the Impact Awards.*

FINDING 4: *The provision of Impact Awards funding is an appropriate role for the federal government.*

FINDING 5: *Federal government priorities support the need for a Research-Based Knowledge Culture and of Awards celebrating and promoting impact, knowledge-dissemination, and training.*

FINDING 6: *Impact Award objectives are strongly consistent with SSHRC priorities, and support several outcomes of the SSHRC Connection Program.*

### PERFORMANCE

FINDING 7: *The Impact Awards have been successful in engaging recipients in knowledge mobilization and knowledge extension activities. However, the effectiveness of the Impact Awards in this realm is limited by the one-off nature of most knowledge mobilization activities, the rapidly declining levels of attention to winners over time, and the under-spending/under-reporting of award funds.*

FINDING 8: *The Impact Awards have been successful in supporting the development of both individual and institutional research capacity and collaboration in the SSH research area recognized by the award.*

FINDING 9: *The extent to which the Impact Awards raise the long-term visibility and recognition of Canadian SSH researchers is strongest for young researchers, nationally, and among peers, but weak among the general public, internationally, and for well-established researchers. This may change as the Awards become older and more established.*

FINDING 10: *The Impact Awards are considered prestigious. However, they generate limited additional visibility for SSHRC, which is more widely known than the Awards themselves.*

FINDING 11: *Although the Awards' ratio of administrative to program costs is high due to their small monetary value, their efficiency compares favourably to Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC) awards when administrative costs per award or nomination are used as a comparator.*

### DESIGN AND DELIVERY

FINDING 12: *The Impact Awards have largely been delivered as planned and to stakeholders' satisfaction. The exceptions are performance and financial reporting mechanisms, which remain weakly implemented.*

FINDING 13: *Data about winners and stakeholders' perceptions suggest that the Award's may disadvantage certain subgroups' chances of winning; small institutions and French institutions in particular have won no awards to date. However, the limited data to date did not allow for statistical confirmation of these trends, which should be closely monitored in the future.*

FINDING 14: *Stakeholders made various modest recommendations to improve the delivery methods and design features of the Awards.*

FINDING 15: *Nomination criteria and processes were not perceived as a barrier to the Awards by stakeholders interested. However, many stakeholders felt that more could be done around mechanisms to promote the visibility of winners (e.g., the Award Ceremony).*

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