Evaluation of the College and Community Innovation Program Response
Management Response

Context

The objective of the College and Community Innovation (CCI) Program is to increase innovation at the community and/or regional level by enabling Canadian colleges to increase their capacity to work with local companies, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). It supports applied research and collaborations that facilitate commercialization, as well as technology transfer, adaptation and adoption of new technologies.

The CCI Program is managed by NSERC in collaboration with the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). The permanent College and Community Innovation (CCI) program was officially launched in 2008-09. Initially, the CCI program only included the Innovation Enhancement (IE) grant. Later on, the following additional grant types were added:

- The Applied Research and Development (ARD) grant;
- The Applied Research Tools and Instruments (ARTI) grant;
- Technology Access Centre (TAC) grant;
- The Industrial Research Chairs for Colleges (IRCC) grant; and
- The College University Idea to Innovation (CU-I2I) grant.

Considering the fact that the permanent CCI program is relatively new, the evaluation focused on the early grants (competitions 2008, 2009) of the most mature program component, the Innovation Enhancement (IE) grant.

Management Response

NSERC is pleased with the overall positive results of this evaluation. The findings of this evaluation demonstrate that the CCI program is on track to achieve its expected immediate and intermediate outcomes. The findings of this study show that the CCI program is meeting its objectives to increase innovation at the community and/or regional level by enabling Canadian colleges to increase their capacity to work with local companies, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and provide high quality training opportunities for students. Moreover, the program is aligned with current government and Council priorities and there is a clear continuing need among SMEs for this type of assistance.

Recommendation #1: Continue funding the CCI program IE grants.

Management Response: Given the objective of the IE grants, to increase innovation at the community and/or regional level by enabling Canadian colleges to increase their capacity to work with local companies, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and the demonstrated need for colleges that are only beginning to build their applied research capacities, NSERC management understands the critical importance of this grant. As a result, the CCI program will continue to fund the IE grants.

NSERC, in consultation with CCI stakeholders, will explore the possibility of having current IE Grant holders apply for a subsequent IE Grant in a closely related area. One issue to consider would be budget availability. In a context where approximately three quarters of the CCI budget currently supports IE awards, only 39 of the close to 100 eligible colleges have received a Five-Year IE Grant. As a result, providing an option for renewal of IE grants could limit the opportunities available for colleges applying for their first IE grant. If an option for renewal of the grant were to be made available, revised policy parameters should be considered. For instance, increased commitments and contributions from the company partners may be required (which would likely reduce the demand for IE grant renewals).

Aside from the option of renewal, other CCI funding opportunities exist for the colleges to maintain their applied research programs. The CCI program is comprised of a number of grant types that can help with the sustainability needs of the colleges. For instance, colleges that have increased their applied research capacities and have developed strong partnerships with their regional company partners may be well positioned to sustain parts of their applied research activities through a TAC grant. Colleges can also apply for multi-year funding through an ARD, CU-I2I, or an IRCC grant.

Recommendation #2: Establish a mechanism to encourage the sharing of best/most promising practices and lessons learned among colleges.

*Management Response***:** NSERC has historically provided in-person workshops to college representatives to provide training on grant application preparation, grants management and the promotion of best practices. These workshops have been provided to colleges that have received invitations to submit a full Innovation Enhancement (IE) or Technology Access Centre (TAC) application and to colleges that have received a Five-Year IE grant. Colleges that have received a Five-Year IE grant are invited to NSERC for a full day workshop where they receive presentations from the NSERC staff on NSERC's reporting and grant management requirements. At the same time it is recognized that while NSERC staff do have the expertise to provide training on how to manage a grant, the appropriate expertise to share best/most promising practices for the efficient and optimal day-to-day running of a leading edge applied research college program must come from the colleges themselves. In this regard, NSERC has supported and encouraged collaboration between colleges to share best practices – in FY 2011-12 NSERC supported a project by ACCC to collect and share best practices for partnership agreements. NSERC regularly participates in workshops organized by key college groups (e.g., ACCC, Polytechnics Canada, L'Association pour la recherche au collégial, Réseau Transtech, CONII). Areas where colleges hold key expertise to share would include best practices for governance, internal financial management systems, hiring, administrative support, treatment of intellectual property, collective agreement issues, company client engagement, SME marketing/outreach, client costing structures, approaches to reporting, etc. In order to facilitate mechanisms for the sharing of best practices, NSERC staff will continue to work with the college associations to investigate methods for the sharing of best practices. In the past year NSERC facilitated interactions among chairs and award holders of Industrial Research Chairs for Colleges. These Chair grants are new for colleges and a discussion group allows those involved to share best practices and discuss emerging issues. Other mechanisms for sharing best practices include regular meetings amongst IE grant holders, presentations by colleges with mature applied research programs to those that are less experienced, forums at the annual applied research symposiums, and the creation of a best practices booklet to be made available through a common portal.

<u>Recommendation #3:</u> Continue to make improvements to grantee reporting templates and the completeness and accuracy of information on partner organizations.

    a) Review and revise (where necessary) IE Grant progress reporting templates and provide guidance to colleges on CCI Program expectations regarding interpretation of indicators and level of detail required.

    b) Continue to improve the completeness and accuracy of information on partner organizations in the Council's administrative database.

*Management Response***:** NSERC will work with the CCI reporting templates with the goal of adding clarity, re-evaluating the appropriateness of the parameters, and simplifying where possible. Components in the progress report that were previously open to interpretation will be clarified so that colleges are better able to report back in a consistent manner. Furthermore, NSERC will explore reducing or eliminating sections of the report that are onerous on the colleges, such as the requirement of lengthy free form narratives.

(a) NSERC staff will organize meetings with the appropriate college associations and NSERC's program evaluation team to discuss the reporting parameters that are required in the future. College Associations typically request data from the CCI program in order to make funding recommendations to government. As a result, the progress reports must also take into account their requirements. Similarly, NSERC's program evaluation team needs data for their own reporting requirements, while program staff need to include reporting parameters in order to gage how effectively the program is being delivered, meeting its objectives, and whether or not changes to existing program policy are needed. All progress report template elements that are deemed to be essential will be kept. However, elements that can be enhanced, removed or simplified without compromising the measurement of essential program parameters, will be taken under consideration for change.

(b) NSERC will devote resources to improve the completeness and accuracy of information on partner organizations in the Council's administrative database. NSERC will also work to implement procedures, practices, and outreach to encourage all colleges and company partner organizations to provide complete reports on a timely and ongoing basis as mentioned above.

Management Response - Action Plan

Recommendation	Agree/ Disagree	Action	Responsibility	Timeline
Recommendation #1: Continue funding the CCI program IE grants.	Agree	Continue funding the CCI program IE grants.	NSERC staff	Ongoing
Recommendation #2: Establish a mechanism to encourage the sharing of best/most promising practices and lessons learned among colleges.	Agree	NSERC staff will continue to investigate with the college associations cost-effective methods for the sharing of best-practices among the colleges.	NSERC staff	May 2013
Recommendation #3: Continue to make improvements to grantee reporting templates and the completeness and accuracy of information on partner organizations.				
a) Review and revise (where necessary) IE Grant progress reporting templates and provide guidance to colleges on CCI Program expectations regarding interpretation of indicators and level of detail required.	Agree	NSERC staff will organize meetings with college associations to investigate reporting parameters that are required in the future. Simplification of reporting requirements will be investigated.	NSERC staff	June 2013
b) Continue to improve the completeness and accuracy of information on partner organizations in the Council's administrative database.	Agree	NSERC will devote resources to improve the completeness and accuracy of information on partner organizations. NSERC will also work with college stakeholders to identify procedures to encourage timely reporting by all grant recipients.	NSERC staff	December 2013