

# **MANAGEMENT RESPONSE SUMMARY EVALUATION OF THE SSHRC PRIZES AND SPECIAL FELLOWSHIPS**

July 2012

## **Context**

The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council's (SSHRC) prizes and special fellowships are composed of a heterogeneous set of 16 discrete awards: five prizes and 11 special fellowships. The prizes provide SSHRC with an opportunity to raise its profile among the public, private and not-for-profit sectors, as well as the public at large, by celebrating and recognizing the value of research in the social sciences and humanities and rewarding excellence at the various stages of a student or researcher's career. The special fellowships allow SSHRC to fund research by graduate students, postdoctoral researchers and researchers in specialized research areas.

The evaluation was designed to address three key issues:

- Relevance and continued need: To what extent do the prizes and special fellowships address demonstrable needs? Are they appropriate to the federal government and to SSHRC, and are they responsive to the needs of Canadians?
- Design and delivery: To what extent has the design and delivery of the prizes and special fellowships been effective?
- Performance: How successful have the prizes and special fellowships been at achieving their outcomes and objectives? How efficient and effective have they been?

## **Relevance and Continued Need**

Following the assessment of relevance and continued need, it was suggested that SSHRC conduct a design study, the results of which will allow for informed decisions regarding the future of the prizes and special fellowships. This would permit a reconsideration of how the programs should fit into SSHRC's three strategic ambitions. This design study would yield a coherent set of prizes and special fellowships in which all components and funding partners correspond to a revised and updated set of specified needs and criteria that are meaningful in the current social sciences and humanities context.

## **Delivery and Design**

Evaluation evidence indicates that the design elements below warrant focused attention:

- identifying the responsibilities of all parties to the prizes and special fellowships;
- specifying the most viable delivery model or models (e.g., co-delivery by SSHRC and funding partners, sole delivery by either SSHRC or funding partners, or a mixture of delivery models) for the components within the prizes and special fellowships;
- measuring and reporting on the value attached to co-delivery of prizes and special fellowships, where appropriate;
- enhancing the visibility of all involved parties through promotion/celebration;

- achieving the best balance between monetary and other benefits (which most key informants and survey respondents felt were as or more important than the dollar value of the award);
- ensuring that there are effective tools for capturing and monitoring performance information; and
- specifying performance information that should be collected in the future.

## **Performance**

Survey respondents indicated that the prizes and special fellowships programs have had a positive impact on career development/opportunities for recipients. In addition, according to survey respondents, the prizes and special fellowships have increased the visibility of recipients. They have also increased the visibility of SSHRC; however, it was noted that, in the future, more could be done in this area. It does not appear that the prizes and special fellowships have increased the visibility of funding partners. Again, this is an area of program improvement that should be considered in the redesign of the suite of activities. The evaluation report suggests that, in the future, as part of the proposed redesign study, a performance measurement strategy should be developed, including a plan for monitoring and evaluating compliance.

## **Results and Success**

Given that validated outcomes and indicators for the prizes and special fellowships have not been clearly established, assessing results and outcomes was difficult. Regardless of this obstacle, the following insights related to potential outcomes did emerge:

- One potential outcome that emerged in the key informant interviews was related to visibility. Most informants felt that the most important method through which benefits of the programs could be increased would be through better/more celebrations.
- Survey participants identified the perception that special fellowships have contributed to the successful development of partnerships and/or communities of practice in the targeted research field.
- Both key informants and survey respondents indicated that the prizes and special fellowships contributed positively to career development, opportunities and recognition.

## **Conclusions**

Considering the circumstances under which the evaluation was conducted, and the heterogeneous nature of the suite of prizes and special fellowships, the evaluation was satisfactory. The results of the report were useful and confirmed expectations for the programs.

Overall, there is an agreement with the analysis and recommendations made in the evaluation.

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Evaluation Recommendations		Program Management Response		
Theme or category of recommendation	Recommendation	Response	Responsibility	Priority/Timeline
1. SSHRC should undertake a redesign study of the prizes and special fellowships.	The redesign study would include, but not be limited to:	<p>Agreed. SSHRC has decided to make a distinction between its prizes on the one hand and its special fellowships on the other hand. Using, as much as possible, the present evaluation, as well as the environmental scan of prizes, SSHRC will further identify the needs to which the funding opportunities in the present prizes and special fellowships suite should respond.</p> <p>This will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>establishing criteria for redesign of / inclusion among the new prizes and special fellowships suites, assessing existing awards against these criteria, identifying irrelevant elements or gaps, and taking into account SSHRC's emerging overall strategy regarding joint initiatives;</li> <li>documenting the related policy direction and priorities and making this documentation accessible to all those interested; and</li> <li>providing further guidance to partners and staff in the form of generic, adaptable memoranda of understanding and terms of</li> </ul>	<p>The accountability centre will be determined during the redesign phase of SSHRC's suite of prizes and special fellowships.</p> <p>Consultation with: Evaluation Division; Communications Division; Finance; Partnerships Portfolio; Corporate Strategy and Performance; Research Portfolio</p>	<p>High</p> <p>Summer 2012.</p>
	1.a. Identifying the current and near-future strategic needs for social sciences and humanities research from SSHRC's perspective			
	1.b. Establishing criteria for redesign and/or inclusion of new prizes or special fellowships in line with identified needs, assessing the existing 16 awards against those criteria, and identifying any irrelevant elements or gaps in the current suite			
	1.c. Documenting its policy direction and priorities for prizes and special fellowships for its own benefit and the benefit of the communities of interest and stakeholders, including funding partners; further guidance should be			

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	provided by developing memoranda of understanding for all awards within the prizes and special fellowships suite for which there are funding partners, as well as developing terms of reference or other documents that provide additional administrative guidance	reference.		
<b>2. With the results of the redesign study in hand, SSHRC should establish guidelines, policies and procedures to permit a more flexible treatment of prizes and special fellowships across its program architecture.</b>	2. With the results of the redesign study in hand, SSHRC should establish guidelines, policies and procedures to permit a more flexible treatment of prizes and special fellowships across its program architecture to ensure an appropriate and strategically oriented inclusion of prizes and special fellowships and to enhance synergies among the individual prizes/fellowships	<b>Agreed.</b> The redesigned suites of prizes and special fellowships will permit SSHRC to treat both in a more flexible manner across SSHRC's program architecture with more appropriate strategic alignment, which will enhance the synergy of individual awards in the prizes and fellowships suites.	Research Training Portfolio; Corporate Strategy and Performance  Consultation with: Communications Division; Partnerships Portfolio; Research Portfolio	<b>High</b>  Spring 2013.

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3. Following the redesign, SSHRC should also develop a performance measurement and evaluation strategy.	3. Following the redesign, SSHRC should also develop a performance measurement and evaluation strategy with clear objectives and performance targets, and ensure that reporting requirements for the prizes and special fellowships are specified, implemented and monitored	Agreed. SSHRC will develop performance measurement and evaluation strategies for both its prizes and special fellowships suites. These will have clear objectives and performance targets, accompanied by appropriate reporting requirements to facilitate implementation and monitoring.	Additional responsibilities to be determined during the redesign phase.  Corporate Strategy and Performance; Evaluation Division  Consultation with: Communications Division; Partnerships Portfolio; Research Portfolio	High  Fall 2013.