

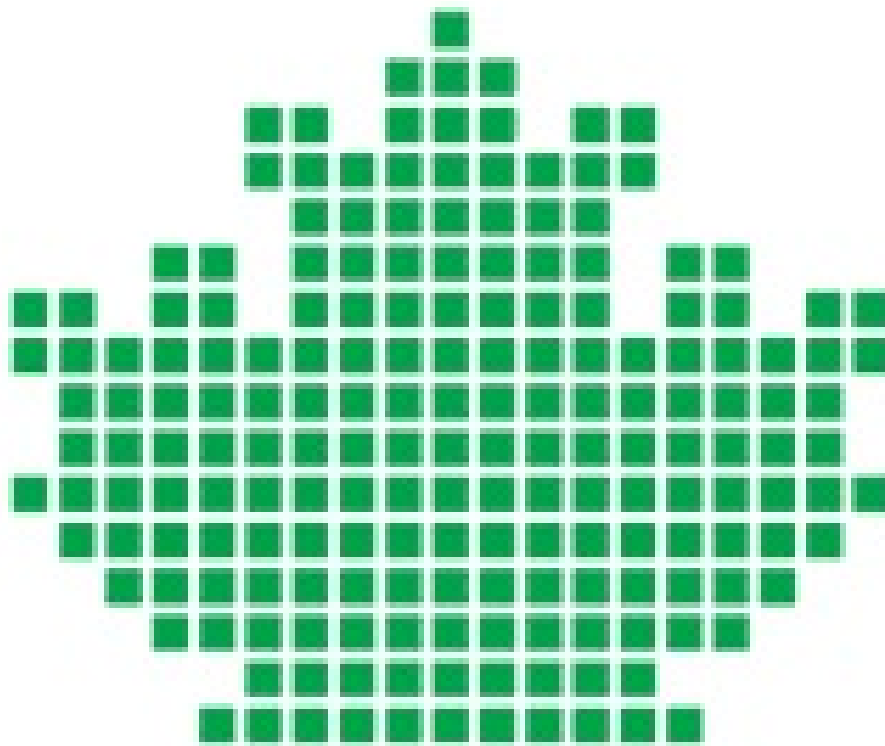
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CSDH Response to Investing in Canada's Future: Strengthening the Foundations of Canadian Research

by Caroline Winter | 19 March 2018 | English, Observations and Responses, Responses | 0 comments



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This response to [Canada's Fundamental Science Review](#) was written by the [Canadian Society for Digital Humanities](#) / Société canadienne des humanités numériques.

We welcome the opportunity to submit a response to the *Investing in Canada's Future* report. We were glad of the government and advisory panel's outreach in the year leading up to the report, and the opportunities to respond through organizations such as the Federation and Social Sciences and Humanities and others in the months that followed the report's publication. This particular response paper represents the views of the Canadian Society for Digital Humanities / Société canadienne des humanités numériques membership. We are a multidisciplinary group of researchers who bring the power of computation to answer Humanities, and increasingly Social Science, research questions. However, we share research interests and concerns with the natural science disciplines represented in the report, including those of governance, evaluation, infrastructure, and early career researcher support. In what follows, we have mapped our member responses onto the categories in *Investing in Canada's Future* executive summary's section 4 Findings and Recommendations in Brief.

Both in Canada and abroad the previous year has demonstrated that the problems that Humanities research solves, from those stemming from xenophobia to flagging democratic engagement, are more pressing than ever. A central concern raised by Anglophone members of CSDH/SCHN was with the report's focus on the term *science* rather than on the term *research*. While recognizing that, particularly in a Francophone context, the terms may be used interchangeably, there has been some concern that in contexts beyond academia the term *science* may be misconstrued to mean non-Humanities research. While Canada's research leadership has been threatened recently,^[1] the report and its recommendations represent an opportunity to improve Canada's international research standing.

1. Broad Oversight, Rigorous Evaluation

Our membership expressed gratification at finding that the concerns of researchers in the Humanities, Sciences, and Social Sciences as expressed in the report are shared, and therefore might reasonably be more explicitly coordinated (R5.2). Our members have been unanimous in their praise for the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). This praise was not limited to SSHRC's support of innovative research in the Humanities and Social Sciences, but also extended to the streamlining of their programs. Several members were particularly keen to recommend the expertise developed at SSHRC to the National Advisory Council on Research and Innovation and Four Agency Coordinating Board, should these two bodies be developed.

We welcome the creation of a Chief Science Advisor for Canada and the selection of Dr. Mona Nemer, whose background in the arts and sciences and in research administration at the University of Ottawa admirably suits her to represent research interests across the disciplines represented by the tri-councils. There has been some concern, however, that beyond academia and government the meaning of the term *science* is generally confined to physical and life sciences. We see our research needs as a community well represented in Chief Science Advisor's mandate, but would welcome a strengthening of the research-focused language, as it relates her position, to communicate to the public the value and leadership of Canada's Humanities and Social Science researchers, the largest group of researchers represented by any of the three tri-councils. As the *Investing in Canada's Future* report argues, "cognitive competencies required by the next generation, the relevance of business education and economics, growth in the Canadian services sector, the importance of enriching culture and society, the pressing need for cross-cultural understanding in a globalized world, the importance of evidence-based public policy, and the fraying of the social fabric abroad and even here in our remarkably civil and pluralistic society" will require the mobilization of Humanities and Social Science research results (84). We would be glad to have the research into these key areas made more explicitly visible both to government and the public as the Social Sciences and Humanities develop solutions to these important contemporary challenges.

2. The Four Agencies: Strengthened Core, Better Coordination

The membership was glad of SSHRC's ongoing and successful oversight of the Canada Research Chair

(CRC) program. Although we certainly welcome the report's recommendation that SSHRC's funding be increased to 20% from 15%, we would be glad to see the SSHRC continue to administer the Research Support Fund program and other programs, because of the advantage of their strength in these administrative areas (R5.1). Members also expressed their support of the autonomy of Canadian Foundation for Innovation (CFI) and the tri-councils. They would, however, certainly be glad to see opportunities for each council to learn from the strengths of the others, particularly if those opportunities were structures to avoid the communications and operations challenges that might arise from cross-disciplinary governance (R4.11).

In support of the ongoing commitment to equity, diversity, and innovation in research (including methodological diversity), we urge equal representation from the tri-councils in the formation of the National Advisory Council on Research and Innovation and Four Agency Coordinating Board, should the government pursue the development of governing bodies responsible for harmonization and coordination (R4.3). The recommendation that programs such as the Canada First Research Excellence Fund and Canada Excellence Research Chairs move away from narrow Science, Technology and Innovation Council priorities, to foster Canada's research strength across disciplines, is certainly welcome. The report's focus on the uneven distribution of CRCs lead some to express hope for a review of the CRC allocation system at the university level, to ensure that the distribution of CRCs across faculties and disciplines match the 40-40-20 ratios allocated to the tri-councils (R5.5, section 5.1.2).

The early career researchers we spoke to would welcome the type of career tracking suggested in the report. None of our members suggested that early career researchers are at a disadvantage when they apply to SSHRC for research funding (R5.6). Our membership was glad of the recommendation for continued and growing support for novel research approaches including collaborative and multidisciplinary research as a way of supporting earlier career researchers, who, in our discipline, often work in teams with scholars in a variety of career stages. The focus on high-risk high-reward research was also welcome, as it helps discourage the pressure on early career researchers facing tenure reviews to adopt conservative research programs (R6.6).

3. Strategic Clarity and a Multi-Year Plan for Renewal

Our membership was unanimous in its acclaim for the recommendation that the government return to previous levels of support for independent investigator-led research (R6.1, R5.9). While there is certainly room for partnerships with government or the private sector, investigator-led basic research has a better track record for the development of new knowledge and sustained innovation with multi-sector application.

Furthermore, considering their positions as Digital Humanities scholars, as well as Humanities scholars, members were pleased to see their needs, including access to infrastructure and support for collaborative research, reflected in the report. Our membership is, in general, in greater need of specialized infrastructure than some of our other colleagues in the Humanities and Social Sciences, and so welcomed the CFI-related recommendations (R7). A further alignment of the timing of research and infrastructure grant results would expedite research development and ensure ongoing research momentum. We would welcome a review of CFI's matching ratio, to ensure appropriate infrastructure access in provinces that do not have the ready means to contribute 40% to successful CFI applications. We would also welcome the infrastructure and funds to maintain and preserve the datasets and other digital output of our funded research projects.

Conclusion

In sum, the Canadian Society for Digital Humanities / Société canadienne des humanités numériques membership has welcomed *Investing in Canada's Future: Strengthening the Foundations of Canadian Research*, as, in broad strokes, it represents the needs and challenges we share with researchers in the

natural sciences. Our membership has particularly welcomed the report's conclusions on independent investigator-led research, infrastructure funding, and innovation through support for both diversity and for early career researchers. We would welcome initiatives that would help SSHRC communicate its effective governance and funding allocation strategies with the other tri-councils, and support for the autonomy that helped SSHRC develop those strategies. Furthermore, in light of the increasing importance of fundamental Humanities and Social Science research for economic, education, service, civil, and international relations sectors, we will be glad of a continued strengthening of the foundation of Canadian research across sectors.

[1] Council of Canadian Academies, 2016. *Preliminary Data Update on Canadian Research Performance and International Reputation*. Ottawa (ON): Council of Canadian Academies.

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