

Key Findings

Independent Third-Party Evaluation of the Innovation Fund, the University Research Development Fund, and the College Research Development Fund

In 2002, the CFI asked BearingPoint (formerly KPMG Consulting) to evaluate the Innovation Fund, the University Research Development Fund and the College Research Development Fund. The CFI wanted to know whether these funds were well designed and managed, whether they had an impact on Canada's research capacity and whether the research made possible by these Funds was generating benefits to Canada.

The **Innovation Fund**, by far CFI's largest program, enables eligible institutions, either alone or in a group, to strengthen their research infrastructure in priority areas as identified in their strategic research development plan. The fund promotes multidisciplinary and inter-institutional approaches, and enables Canadian researchers to tackle groundbreaking projects.

The **University Research Development Fund** was a fund designed to strengthen the research infrastructure of smaller universities whereas the **College Research Development Fund** was designed to help Canadian colleges, institutes, and their affiliated research centres develop and strengthen their research infrastructure in areas identified in their strategic research plans. Since 2001, institutions that were eligible for these two funds submit proposals to the Innovation Fund.

The evaluation looked at contributions approved by CFI between 1998 and early 2002. The main sources of information were a review of CFI progress reports, documents, and files; interviews with representatives of committees that reviewed applications; interviews with representatives of the granting councils, the provinces and industry; case studies of specific projects; and benchmarking to other programs worldwide.

The results of the evaluation are very positive and show that these programs are meeting their objectives of building Canada's capacity for innovation, and thus improving Canada's economic and social well-being. Key findings of the report include:

- The programs have transformed the quality of infrastructure. Where more than half of the infrastructure in the case studies was poor or fair prior to the awards (and none was world-class), 90% of case study respondents now rate it as excellent or world-class in the disciplines affected by the awards.
- The projects enabled by the CFI have contributed significantly to the creation of national and (especially) regional "knowledge clusters".
- The projects have had an exceptionally strong positive impact on the nature of research that is carried out: more cutting-edge research, conducted faster, with more multidisciplinary, and with substantially more collaboration.
- Smaller institutions in particular reported increased visibility and credibility both nationally and internationally as a result.

- The majority of projects enabled by the CFI have increased the ability to attract researchers, postdoctoral fellows, and students.
- Although it is too early to attempt a meaningful quantitative investigation of the social and economic impacts of the CFI for Canada, every indication is that these projects will eventually be very significant in these areas.
- A review of infrastructure support programs in other countries showed not only that the CFI contains all elements considered important in other countries and programs, but also that it is very well-regarded by the international community and even envied in some quarters.
- There is every reason to think the projects, once operational, are being effectively and efficiently used and shared.
- The programs were well-designed and are well-delivered, with very few problems being reported in any area.
- Participation from researchers in the social sciences and humanities is still low.
- There is every indication that ongoing need for infrastructure investment remains high, and may even increase as social sciences and humanities researchers begin to participate more.
- Both implementing the projects and finding financial resources for operations and maintenance has been problematical in many institutions.
- Maintaining long-term sustainability of the programs will require institutions to convince their provincial partners (and others) to continue to supply matching funds given that CFI contributes a maximum of 40% of total project costs.

Significant Quotes from the Report¹:

“The overall findings are extremely positive. These programs have had a major impact on the Canadian research environment at a time when they were sorely-needed, and at a time when international interest in making similar infrastructure investments is exceptionally high.”

“Overall, in fact, there are many reasons to believe that the community has willingly embraced the “CFI culture”, not only (of course) in terms of a focus on research excellence, but also in terms of sharing, collaborating, and using innovation to achieve socio-economic benefits. This is by no means a given in S&T programs, and is a very positive sign for the future.”

“The programs have been outstandingly successful in leveraging matching funds from partner organizations, primarily the provinces (many of which have for the first time created infrastructure-specific funds), but also the institutions and—to a more limited extent—the private sector.”

May 2003

¹ BearingPoint—Evaluation of the Innovation Fund, University Research Development Fund, and College Research Development Fund: Final Report, May 2003.