



Research funders face a delicate balancing act amid limited resources and multiplying priorities

News Release

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Research funding agencies around the world are testing creative approaches to address urgent needs while laying the foundation for discoveries that will meet the unpredictable demands of the future. According to a new expert panel report from the Council of Canadian Academies (CCA), Canada can bolster its research capacity by reducing administrative burdens, experimenting with funding approaches, and cultivating a robust, resilient, and diverse scientific workforce.

“In the past year we have seen the power and promise of transformative research and the ability of researchers and funding organizations to pivot in times of crisis,” said Shirley M. Tilghman, PhD, O.C., FRS, Chair of the Expert Panel. “But the pandemic has also exacerbated existing inequalities within the research community and highlighted the challenge funders face in attempting to balance immediate needs with preserving support for fundamental, curiosity-driven research. This report highlights many practices used internationally to address these and other issues.”

The Panel found that segmenting awards by career stage can help reduce barriers for early career researchers and improve support for researchers across their careers, while longer duration grants and support for collaboration benefit high-risk and interdisciplinary research. Experimentation with alternative funding practices, such as short pre-applications and partial lotteries, may also allow funders to reduce burdens on grant applicants and reviewers.

Funding agencies also play an important role in increasing diversity in the professoriate and attracting and retaining research talent. Promising practices to support equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) in the research community include explicit diversity targets, dedicated funding programs, equality charters, and initiatives to reduce bias in peer review.

“Funding agencies serve a vital function by channeling public investments into new discoveries and research to address pressing societal needs,” said Eric M. Meslin, PhD, FRSC, FCAHS, President and CEO of the CCA. “We anticipate that this report will help to inform their decisions when considering how to structure their funding programs and maximize their impact.”

The Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC) asked the CCA for an evidence-based, independent assessment that examines successful international practices for funding natural sciences and engineering (NSE) research and how these could be applied in Canada. *Powering Discovery* explores funding practices that could improve support for researchers across their careers, enhance EDI, and support interdisciplinary and high-risk



research. It also sheds light on novel approaches for increasing funding efficiency and promoting and measuring impact.

Visit www.cca-reports.ca to download the report.

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About the Council of Canadian Academies

The CCA is a not-for-profit organization that undertakes independent, evidence-based expert panel assessments to inform public policy development in Canada. The CCA was founded by three independent organizations that represent some of the finest minds in Canada — the Royal Society of Canada, the Canadian Academy of Engineering, and the Canadian Academy of Health Sciences. Their Fellows and senior decision-makers sit on CCA's Board of Directors and Scientific Advisory Committee, and they are a key source of membership for expert panels. The CCA's founding Academies also provide key guidance and input throughout the assessment process, including expert panel nominations and dissemination processes. For more information about the CCA or its assessments, please visit www.cca-reports.ca.

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