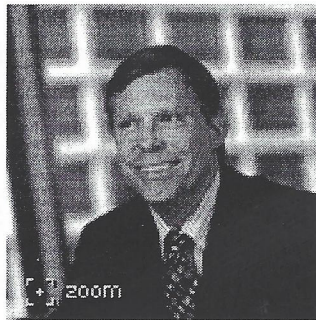


SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES COUNCIL OF CANADA

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION IN CANADA: A BRIEF HISTORY

By Chad Gaffield

President, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC)



Message from the president

As Canadians, we are now writing the fourth chapter in the story of a remarkably successful society. It's about a country that grew from humble origins to global prominence through public investments that developed talent and advanced knowledge. How the current chapter will end remains unclear. Will Canada continue to succeed as a society in the coming decades?

Canadians wrote the first chapter in the 19th century. At that time, we established public schools, paid for by taxes, to support the development of a strong civil society in a rural economy.

In the second chapter, we expanded public universities. This enabled Canada's successful transition to an urban, industrial society by the mid-20th century.

In the third chapter, Canadians began creating a significant research community which helped create the sophisticated "made-in-Canada" civil society that met the challenges of the late-20th-century, post-industrial world.

Each of these chapters involved failures and successes. Overall, though, consistently rising public investment in developing talent and advancing knowledge explain why the story of Canada remains one of the most remarkable of the past two centuries.

Canada's fourth chapter has started well. During the past decade, significant federal investments in research have helped Canadians come to grips with the new questions of the early 21st century. How can Canada prosper in the global, knowledge-based economy? How can we meet the social, cultural, and political challenges of new technologies, new ethical debates, and new patterns of work and family life? What role should Canada play on the world stage? The complexity of these questions reflects how rapidly the world is changing, and how foolhardy it would be to rely on the answers of previous decades.

Given our story so far, it is no surprise that Canadians are renewing and creatively changing their commitment to the advancement of knowledge and the development of talent. This is no better illustrated than by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), the federal agency created in 1977 to build understanding of people—individuals, communities, and societies in the past and present—in order to help create a better future.

SSHRC's contribution to Canada's fourth chapter is to maximize the impact of new and existing knowledge on Canadians' quality of life. Guided by a new strategic plan, the Council is updating and expanding its programs to enhance connections among researchers and between the university and the larger society.

One program, already much imitated abroad, supports dozens of projects that connect researchers with local communities to tackle urgent problems affecting everyday life. Another enables major research teams to address complex questions that cut across disciplines. A third enables Canadian researchers to join global research projects that focus on key issues common to many societies. SSHRC's newest program creates a critical mass of expertise by linking researchers in different institutions to create fertile knowledge networks. In each case, the result is a whole greater than the sum of its parts.

These programs show how SSHRC is deploying new strategies to advance knowledge and develop talent in an ever-changing world. SSHRC promotes "discipline-based interdisciplinarity"—meaning that true interdisciplinary research involves researchers deepening their special expertise, but always in the context of broader human knowledge.

This is why SSHRC supports research on complex topics that transcend the scope of any one scholar or discipline. The support of the Canada Foundation for Innovation (CFI) to create research data bases for the social sciences and humanities superbly complements this more holistic approach. As well, the Canada Research Chairs Program attracts and retains some of the world's most creative thinkers—researchers who address questions from diverse perspectives and through multiple approaches.

As we write this fourth chapter, there are also profound changes in how we develop talent; for example, rejection of the teaching-research dichotomy. We no longer see the competent graduate as someone who has imbibed a received body of knowledge, but rather as someone who has learned to construct knowledge. For this reason, SSHRC invests more than ever in students' involvement in research, both as fellowship holders and as research assistants.

The new strategies for advancing knowledge also reflect increased recognition of the human dimensions of topics once considered to be the province of technology and "hard" science—the world of machines and molecules. More and more, we emphasize the need to put people in

the picture. If research is going to enhance our quality of life and prosperity in a competitive global environment, the human sciences must play a central role in Canada's science and technology policies. That is why SSHRC also collaborates with NSERC, CIHR, and the CFI to support innovative research that is attuned to both the insights of scholars and the needs of Canadian society.

At some point, our children and grandchildren will look back on our efforts to renew and increase Canada's long-standing investment in knowledge and talent as a public good. We must ensure they will recognize SSHRC for having contributed to the writing of a happy ending to the fourth chapter of Canada's story as a successful society.

Better understanding of how we can best share this planet cannot guarantee a peaceful and prosperous future. But what else is more promising?

For more information, visit the [Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada](#).

[Read about SSHRC investments in action.](#)