



FOSTERING TALENT, BUILDING CONNECTIONS

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Returning for its second instalment in *International Innovation*, SSHRC's President reveals how partnerships are a cornerstone of its success. Aware that there is always room for improvement, the Council assesses its policies to improve the research landscape and lives of people everywhere

What key strategies are being implemented by SSHRC to improve the coordination of programmes, activities and policies in Canada?

Our major initiative has been to simplify, consolidate and update the ways in which we fund research and research training by developing a new Program Architecture suited to the changing world of research in the early 21st Century. Following consultations with researchers, postsecondary institutions and partner organisations, SSHRC reduced significantly the number of funding opportunities, increased their flexibility and aligned their objectives under three new umbrella programmes: Talent, Insight and Connection.

The multiple objectives of this new approach launched in 2010 were to enable the humanities and social sciences research community to maximise its contributions by:

- Emphasising impacts through new merit-review criteria that consider a broader range of research contributions, as well the likelihood of influence on critical social, cultural, economic, technological and environmental issues
- Encouraging broader participation in merit review by experts from many sectors
- Fostering partnerships across institutions and sectors that encourage a collaborative approach to designing and conducting research
- Implementing a flexible, responsive framework for funding research in priority areas
- Providing support for emerging scholars
- Revising reporting requirements for completed grants that focus on outputs, results and impacts
- Offering flexible programming and a more responsive competition cycle through three new umbrella programmes, each providing a limited number of funding opportunities designed to allow applicants to choose the opportunity best suited to the nature and objectives of their project

Taken together, these changes are designed to embrace the changing world of research in the early 21st Century and we are committed to building on them in the spirit of continuous improvement. In the same way, SSHRC has promoted collaboration with Canada's other research funding agencies, the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council, the Canadian Institutes for Health Research and the Canada Foundation for Innovation. By working shoulder-to-shoulder, we are collectively supporting global

excellence across the entire research landscape for the benefit of Canada and the world.

Could you outline the main goals of the Insight, Talent and Connection programmes?

Through its three umbrella programmes of Talent, Insight and Connection, SSHRC develops talented leaders; enables the highest levels of research excellence in Canada; and facilitates knowledge-sharing and collaboration across research disciplines, postsecondary institutions and all sectors of society.

Specifically, the Talent programme promotes the acquisition of research skills, and assists in the training of highly qualified personnel in the social sciences and humanities. It also mobilises social sciences and humanities knowledge that has the potential to lead to intellectual, cultural, social and economic influence, benefit and impact. Through scholarships and fellowships, students and researchers may undertake original research, publish findings, develop and expand personal research networks, broaden their teaching experience, and prepare to become competitive in national research grants competitions. The Talent programme reflects a number of changes that respond to the needs and opportunities to prepare Canadian students for the globalisation of research and increased competitiveness.

The Insight programme helps to build knowledge and understanding about people, societies and the world by supporting research excellence in all subject areas eligible for funding from SSHRC. Funding is provided for individuals and small teams (through Insight Grants and Insight Development Grants), as well as formal partnerships (through Partnership Grants and Partnership Development Grants).

Finally, the Connection programme — which includes Partnership Grants, Partnership Development Grants and Connection Grants — links academia, industry, government and communities in Canada and around the world in the development and use of social sciences and humanities research. This programme funds workshops, conferences, publications and partnerships that help research knowledge flow across all sectors of society and that maximise its cultural, social and economic impact.

Community engagement is an important part of SSHRC's work. With which communities do you work and to what end?

Not that long ago, the relationship between the campus and the surrounding community was often still described by the medieval metaphor of town-and-gown, or the 19th Century notion of the Ivory Tower. But SSHRC has been actively contributing to a new model of campus-community connections in which porous boundaries

encourage flows of knowledge and ideas, partnerships and collaborations, to the benefit of students, professors and those in the wider community. SSHRC supports research collaborations involving the private, public and non-profit sectors, especially through our Partnership funding opportunities that support the Talent, Insight and Connection programmes. These collaborations characteristically involve the co-creation of research questions as well as the collective implementation of research strategies in the spirit of engaged scholarship. The results benefit both campuses and communities by advancing knowledge and understanding, contributing to the development of highly qualified personnel and producing innovations that help all research partners.

Engagement is also one of the important ways that SSHRC works to continuously improve our programmes, policies and activities. SSHRC fosters interchange with and among key audiences on university and college campuses, in communities and across public, private and NGOs, to enhance informed decision making about our operations and to consult on possible next steps.

SSHRC is funding research into prosthetic voices and virtual bodies in the sonic landscape. Could you tell us a little more about this interesting project and its potential outcomes and applications?

One of the most challenging and exhilarating questions of this century concerns the rapidly changing relationship between minds and machines and between physical bodies and technology. Trained opera singer, artist and master of fine arts candidate at Concordia University, Erin Gee, is blurring the line between human and machine to create a very special kind of music. By tapping into a person's brain and correlating data on the physiology of emotion, using physiological responses, including breathing, heart rate, sweat glands, blood pressure and skin sensitive neural activity, Gee is creating a set of experimental instruments to deliver music shaped by the human body and its emotions.

Gee is collaborating with the Australian neurophysiologist Vaughan Macefield to map this data into meaningful robotic music, movement and light patterns, reflecting the shifting emotional state of the performers. These signals paint a kind of digital picture of the subject's emotions. Gee's custom software processes the signals, resulting in a musical soundscape representing feelings.

This research presents significant potential therapeutic opportunities for people with difficulty recognising and expressing emotion. Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), for example, could benefit from Gee's innovative music by learning to better identify, understand and clearly express complex emotions.

Are there any other projects currently underway that you are particularly excited about?

Many youth with disabilities find the transition into the labour market challenging because they often experience barriers such as discrimination, lack of accommodation and lack of training opportunities. Very little is known, however, about employment skills and experience among youth and how these may differ among those with and without a disability.

At the Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital, Sally Lindsay and her team are studying employment readiness and skills gaps among adolescents with disabilities. Her research focuses on social justice, diversity and the participation and inclusion of children and youth with disabilities. She leads a number of studies exploring childhood bullying, employment readiness among youth with disabilities and the self-management of chronic conditions.

Lindsay's current research project – in collaboration with Holland Bloorview's Centre for Participation and Inclusion – is designed to help youth with disabilities lead healthy, active lives and make a successful transfer to adulthood. Entitled 'Improving employment opportunities for youth with disabilities', the project aims first to identify what skills employers are looking for in their ideal candidate for entry-level positions, then to support the development of role-playing employment exercises to study and seek insight into what areas of additional skills training would be most beneficial to youth with disabilities in securing a job.

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