# Summative Evaluation of the Standard Research Grants and Research Development Initiatives Programs

## *Final Report*

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Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council

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# PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## SUMMATIVE EVALUATION OF THE STANDARD RESEARCH GRANTS AND RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES PROGRAMS

SSHRC is proud to present the Summative Evaluation of the Standard Research Grants and Research Development Initiatives Programs. This evaluation is a first. It clusters together two large programs that support research in the social sciences and humanities.

In 2009-10, Standard Research Grants (SRG) expenditures amounted to $75 million, or 59 per cent of total SSHRC expenditures under its Research strategic outcome. Research Development Initiatives (RDI) program expenditures ranged from $1-2 million over the last 10 years. With their common purpose of supporting knowledge creation and excellence in the social sciences and humanities, these programs have contributed to the achievement of SSHRC' strategic outcome of "Research—New knowledge based on excellent research in the social sciences and humanities."

In keeping with SSHRC's evaluation plan and Treasury Board's Policy on Evaluation, the purpose of the evaluation was to assess the relevance, delivery and performance of the two programs. The evaluation employed an elaborated and robust methodology to ensure a high-quality product that demonstrates to Canadians the social and economic benefits generated by these programs. It provides program management with solid evidence in support of the renewal of SSHRC's program activity architecture.

Overall, the evaluation demonstrates that research activities supported by the SRG and RDI programs contributed to both a high volume and high quality of research outputs, especially from new scholars, and fostered the development of social sciences and humanities students. The programs have triggered some broad outcomes in different areas.

This evaluation was a collaboration involving SSHRC's evaluation team and Goss Gilroy Inc. The Director, Corporate Performance and Evaluation, wishes to thank Sandy Moir and her team at Goss Gilroy Inc. for their outstanding work. Their collaboration with SSHRC's Corporate Performance and Evaluation team, represented by Hélène Gauthier, manager and project authority, and Nicole Fuhr, senior evaluation officer responsible for the conduct of the project at SSHRC, was crucial in producing a high-quality evaluation product for management's consideration.

Our gratitude is equally extended to Gisèle Yasmeen and Brent Herbert-Copely, respectively the vice-president, research, and vice-president, research capacity, for their tremendous commitment to this major evaluation, as well as to all members of the Advisory Evaluation Committee.

The evaluation report was accepted by SSHRC' Performance and Evaluation Committee in October 2010. The opinions expressed and recommendations proposed are those of the evaluation team. They do not necessarily reflect the views of SSHRC. Both the evaluation report and the management response can be found on SSHRC's website at www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/site/about-crsh/publications/pub_evaluations-eng.aspx.

If you have any questions regarding this evaluation, please contact Wayne MacDonald, director, Corporate Performance and Evaluation, at 613-992-1525 or wayne.macdonald@sshrc-crsh.gc.ca.

# Table of Contents

# List of Acronyms

| | |
|---|---|
| ARC | Average of Relative Citations |
| ARIF | Average of Relative Impact Factors |
| AMIS | Award Management Information System |
| CFI | Canada Foundation for Innovation |
| CHSRF | Canadian Health Services Research Foundation |
| CIHR | Canadian Institutes for Health Research |
| CIDA | Canadian International Development Agency |
| CURA | Community-University Research Alliances |
| CV | Curriculum Vitae |
| FQRSC | Fonds québécois pour la recherche sur la société et la culture |
| FRR | Final Research Report |
| GGI | Goss Gilroy Inc. |
| GoC | Government of Canada |
| HQP | Highly qualified personnel |
| IOF | International Opportunities Fund |
| KI | Key informant |
| KII | Key informant interview |
| MCRI | Major Collaborative Research Initiative |
| NGO | Non-governmental organizations |
| NSERC | Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council |
| PI | Principal Investigator |
| RDI | Research Development Initiative |
| RTS | Research Time Stipend |
| SSH | Social Sciences and Humanities |
| SSHRC | Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council |
| SRG | Standard Research Grant |
| TBS | Treasury Board Secretariat |
| US | United States |
| UK | United Kingdom |

# List of Exhibits

# Executive Summary

## Context and Purpose of the Evaluation

While both Standard Research Grant (SRG) and Research Development Initiative (RDI) are relatively long-running programs, and both have been subject to management reviews focusing on design and delivery issues, neither has been formally evaluated. The timing of the evaluation was determined by SSHRC's Evaluation Plan for 2008-09 to 2010-11. As well, the conduct of the evaluation is consistent with the new Treasury Board Secretariat (TBS) Evaluation Policy (April 2009), which states that all direct program spending must be evaluated every five years. Furthermore, evaluations are a valuable input to the four-year cycle of Strategic Review.

The study aimed to carry out a summative evaluation of the two identified programs, the SRG and RDI. Fourteen evaluation questions addressed three main issue areas (as described below): program relevance and continued need; design, delivery and cost-efficiency; and results and success.

| **Issue/Question** |
|---|
| *A Program Relevance and Continued Need* |
| A1 Are the mandate and objectives of the SRG and RDI consistent with the priorities and strategic goals of SSHRC and the federal government? |
| A2 To what extent do the objectives, approach and reach of the SRG and RDI programs address and satisfy the current and future needs of SSH scholars? |
| A3 Are there alternative sources of funding for investigator-framed research in the SSH? |
| *B Design and Delivery* |
| B1 To what extent do SRG and RDI Programs support a coherent suite of SSHRC programs? |
| B2 To what extent are the SRG and RDI programs effectively delivered, as planned, and in accordance with international best practice? To what extent are SSHRC stakeholders (applicants, adjudication committee members, universities) satisfied with the delivery of the RDI and SRG programs? |
| B3 To what extent is the FRR an effective tool for capturing performance information on results and outcomes of SRG and RDI grants? To what extent is this information being used to inform program decision making and meet other organizational needs? |
| B4 Are the SRG and RDI programs delivered in a cost-efficient manner? |
| *C Results and Success* |
| C1 To what extent did RDI support new and innovative research development ideas as intended in program objectives? |
| C2 To what extent did RDI supported research development activities contribute to the development of mature research proposals, funded by SSHRC or other funding agencies? To what extent did the SRG supported research activities and outputs contribute to new research proposals, funded by SSHRC or other funding agencies? |
| C3 To what extent did research activities supported by SRG and RDI grants contribute to high quality research outputs demonstrating knowledge advancement in all disciplines and areas of the SSH? |
| C4 To what extent did the activities of the SRG and RDI grants contribute to the development of highly qualified research-trained personnel available to pursue various knowledge intensive careers? |
| C5 To what extent were SRG supported research results effectively disseminated throughout the academic community and beyond? |

| Issue/Question |
| --- |
| C6 How did SRG supported research results, directly and indirectly, inform social, cultural, and economic change? |
| C7 Have there been any unintended (positive or negative) outcomes of the SRG and RDI programs? |

## Conclusions

### *Relevance and Continued Need*

Overall, the evaluation found that the programs are relevant and are meeting needs, and there is a continuing need for both programs to effectively support research, aligned with Government of Canada priorities, in the social sciences and humanities (SSH). The mandate and objectives of both programs are consistent with both SSHRC and federal government priorities, although there is some question within the SSH research community about the valuing of investigator-framed or, to use more up-to-date SSHRC terminology, "open" research funding in the context of Canada's Science and Technology Strategy.

For the most part, the objectives and approach of the SRG and RDI programs are meeting the current and future needs of SSH researchers. The issue of decreasing success rates for both SRG and RDI was raised as a concern by interviewees and in the document review (in terms of the ability of the programs to meet the needs of new and regular scholars to undertake high quality research, as well as in terms of the opportunity cost of not conducting unfunded research). Upon further examination, however, since the success rates of SRG and RDI are similar to those of other comparable programs, a more in-depth review of the situation would be needed to assess the adequacy of the funding envelopes for the two programs.

There was also some evidence to suggest that the programs could be more responsive to needs of new scholars, inter- and multidisciplinary researchers and researchers at small universities and new universities. The evaluation found that the overall length of SRG may not be meeting the needs of all scholars. Nonetheless, SSHRC is overwhelmingly considered the most important source of funding for open research in SSH in Canada. Although alternatives exist and are used, they are not equivalent to SRG and RDI, and do not meet needs as fully in terms of supporting open, peer reviewed, disciplinary-based research.

### *Design and Delivery*

The SRG and RDI program designs appear to support a coherent suite of programs at SSHRC (although there was widespread confusion regarding RDI's objectives). Overlap between SRG and RDI is minimal and not an area of concern.

Generally, program applicants are satisfied with both programs, particularly the timing and frequency of the application process. The evaluation found that there are opportunities to improve the nature and ease of interactions between applicants and SSHRC, the ease of the application process and the weighting of the criteria for both regular and new scholars, as these areas received the lowest satisfaction scores from applicants. Earlier findings around the appropriateness of the length of the grants also suggest this should be revisited.

There are many opportunities for improvement regarding the final research report (FRR). In particular, it was not found to be an effective tool in terms of the information it captures (especially with respect to partnerships, longer-term impacts, level of detail regarding outputs and roles of students). Also, the FRR and the information contained therein are not systematically used for performance monitoring, compliance or informing decision-makers (although the information is generally used for evaluation purposes). A comparative analysis conducted by SSHRC on other reporting models in granting bodies makes similar conclusions.

Overall, the programs are being delivered in a cost-efficient manner. No obvious cost-saving approaches were discovered that would not have a likely detrimental effect on the overall quality of program delivery.

***Success***

The evaluation found a high degree of success in the achievement of outcomes for both programs. Specifically, evidence from the evaluation supports the notion that RDI supports new and innovative research development ideas, and that RDI supported research activities contribute to the development of mature research proposals. Similarly, SRG-supported research activities contribute to new research proposals.

The evaluation also found that research activities supported by SRG and RDI are contributing to both a high volume of and high-quality research outputs (including mostly conference papers and articles). There is less direct evidence of research tools being developed. There is evidence of knowledge advancement due to high levels of expected influence of the research of Canadian and international scholars (although this is reportedly occurring to a lesser extent for RDI). SRG appears to have a positive impact on the quality of outputs for new scholars (although this relationship could not be proven for regular scholars).

The evaluation found that SRG plays an important role in the development of scholars (i.e., grantees) and students alike. Generally, SRG grantees were quite positive about their own skill and career development, and the development of students as a result of the grant. Students also felt that participating in the grant had afforded them with improved skills and career opportunities that would not have been available otherwise. The evaluation also found that dissemination within the academic community has been very effective, with high levels of reported dissemination to Canadian and international scholars. Dissemination beyond academia is lower generally and not necessarily appropriate for all kinds of research or all disciplines.

In terms of the degree to which the programs inform social, cultural and economic change, there is evidence to suggest that SRG and RDI grants both have a great deal of potential to have downstream outcomes in these areas. The evaluation did find some evidence to suggest this is occurring already, at least to some degree. There has been the greatest impact in the areas of teaching practice and methodologies, impacting other disciplines and international collaboration impacts (particularly for RDI).

With respect to this last issue, the evaluation did uncover concern among some SRG grantees



regarding whether the intent of research is to distinctly inform social, cultural and economic change, or whether there is a role for "research for the sake of research." Because this matter (i.e., the relative importance of funding research to inform change versus research for the sake of research) was not directly asked in the evaluation (but rather was raised by a few key informants and a few focus group participants, and generated agreement in all focus groups), it is not possible to formulate a conclusion in this regard. That so many grantees shared this concern (regarding whether the intent of research is to inform change or simply to undertake research for the sake of research) when raised in a group setting suggests that this issue could be a widely held view within academia. Thus, there is an opportunity for SSHRC to clarify the role of "open" versus "targeted" research with respect to informing social, cultural and economic change.

## Recommendations

1. SSHRC should make improvements to the design of the programs to address areas where needs are not being met, and those areas of greatest confusion and concern to applicants.
   - 1a) SSHRC should allow principal investigators (PI) to identify their preferred length for the SRG grant at the application stage. SSHRC should consider a range of between two and five years acceptable.
   - 1b) The criteria and weighting for new scholar SRG applicants should be revisited to ensure that it is better meeting the needs of this group. For example, perhaps add weight to indicators of promise as scholars, or redefining "track record" for new scholars.
     - Note that any changes to criteria and weighting must not compromise the competitive nature of the grants. The evaluation found that SRG is currently supporting the best new and regular scholars, and this should continue to be the goal.
   - 1c) Due to the emphasis on inter- and multidisciplinary research being conducted by SSH scholars (as reported by both applicants and non-applicants) and the evaluation finding that the needs of this group of scholars are not being fully met by the programs, it is recommended that SSHRC establish additional inter- and multidisciplinary review committees and/or include scholars with knowledge of inter- and/or multidisciplinary research on committees.
     - The challenge of finding adjudication committee members and external assessors for this nature of research is acknowledged by the evaluator. However, SSHRC must take steps to ensure that their programs continue to be responsive to the best SSH scholars, including those conducting research that is inter- and/or multidisciplinary in nature.
   - 1d) While the evaluation found some evidence to suggest that scholars at small universities and those at new universities may encounter significant challenges to access grants, this issue was not a major thrust for the evaluation. It is recommended that SSHRC undertake a more thorough review of the implications of the selection criteria and the application process for scholars at small universities and those at new universities.
   - 1e) The application process for both SRG and RDI should be clarified and further



streamlined and be available online to improve the overall ease of the application.

1f) While the evaluation found relatively low levels of satisfaction with the ease of the application process and the nature and ease of interactions with SSHRC, the evaluation is not able to describe why these aspects of program delivery received such low ratings. It is therefore recommended that this be an area for further study.
   - SSHRC could undertake a small study aimed at better understanding areas of particular concern and confusion in these areas.

2. SSHRC should clarify the expectations of the organization in terms of the ways in which research is expected to inform social, cultural and economic change, and the balance between "open" versus "targeted" research. This communication should come from the senior levels of the organization.

2a) SSHRC should clarify how accountability in the area of non-academic outcomes (such as social, cultural and economic change) will be assessed.

2b) SSHRC should acknowledge that some or a lot of outcomes may be beyond the PI's range of perception. The appropriate measurement indicators and mechanisms should be put in place to conceptualize and recognize these longer-term, unanticipated outcomes (including generation of thought).

3. Subject to new program objectives and designs based on internal review and redesign, SSHRC should widely disseminate RDI's program objectives and fit within SSHRC's suite of programs.

3a) It is recommended that all SSHRC personnel be well-versed on every program's objective(s) and fit and be encouraged to market programs during visits to universities, conferences, etc.

3b) It is further recommended that educational institutions better promote their full range of SSHRC programs, including RDI, among their faculty members.

4. With respect to the FRR, it is acknowledged that SSHRC has already undertaken work in this area to update and improve the FRR and how SSHRC collects and uses information more generally. However, there remain opportunities for SSHRC to improve its own internal procedures with respect to how it uses the information in performance monitoring, compliance and decision-making.

4a) It is also recommended that educational institutions support and encourage grant holders to complete FRRs in a complete and timely manner, and that SSHRC highlight the ways in which information from FRRs is being used.

# 1.0 Introduction

GGI is pleased to present this second draft of the final report of the cluster evaluation of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council's (SSHRC) Standard Research Grants (SRG) and Research Development Initiatives (RDI) programs.

## 1.1 Overview of the Programs[1]

In accordance with SSHRC's 2007-08 Program Activity Architecture, SRG and RDI both fall under SSHRC's strategic outcome of "Research." SRG contributes to the Investigator-framed Research program activity[2] and RDI contributes to the Strategic Research Development program activity.

Within SSHRC's organization structure, the Standard Research Grants Program is housed in the Research and Dissemination Grants Division under the Vice-President of Grants and Fellowships. The Research Development Initiatives is housed in the Strategic Programs and Joint Initiatives Division under the Vice-President of Partnerships.

Appendix A presents the combined logic model for both the SRG and RDI programs. The logic model describes the main program activities and the expected outputs and outcomes.

### 1.1.1 Standard Research Grants Program

Originating in the 1960s (by the Canada Council as the Research Grants Program), the SRG is the longest standing program at SSHRC. The program also represents SSHRC's most significant investment in terms of support to research in the social sciences and humanities (SSH) ($75 million in expenditures for 2009-10, or 22 per cent of total SSHRC core program expenditures for research).

The broad purpose of SRG is to support research and develop excellence in research

[1] Content for this section is taken from the Evaluation Framework for the SRG and RDI Cluster Evaluation, March 10, 2009. Only a high-level description is provided for each program. For additional details regarding the programs, please refer to SSHRC's website at http://www.sshrc.ca/funding-financement/programs-programmes/standard_grants_subventions_ordinaires-eng.aspx for SRG, and http://www.sshrc.ca/funding-financement/programs-programmes/rdi-idr-eng.aspx for RDI.

[2] Note that the term "investigator-framed research" is no longer in use at SSHRC. Rather, the concept of "open" research is the preferred terminology. However, the evaluation instruments were designed using the original terminology and thus findings are presented to be consistent with how the questions were posed to evaluation participants.

activities in the SSH. More specifically, SRG's objectives are to:

- support high quality independent programs of research, as proposed by scholars and judged by their peers;
- provide opportunities for the training of future researchers;
- contribute to the development or elaboration of new theoretical or methodological approaches to research;
- maintain and develop vigorous disciplinary research activities;
- foster and develop vigorous collaborative, multidisciplinary research activities among researchers in SSH; and
- assist the communication of research results both within and beyond the academic community.

SRGs are offered for the support of on-going, high-quality, independent programs of research proposed by established or new scholars and judged by peer review. Both individuals and teams of researchers may apply. Excellence, based on a scholar's track record and program of research, is the guiding principle for the evaluation and funding of proposals. The program of research must have an overall objective or group of objectives that knit the research activities into a coherent, interrelated whole. Programs of research should contribute to the advancement of knowledge and facilitate the communication of research results.

SRGs are available for a three-year period, although some exceptions apply for a shorter-term period of one or two years. The value of these grants is up to a maximum of $100,000 per year, but not totalling more than $250,000 in a three-year period. The competition deadline is October 15th every year.

### 1.1.2 Research Development Initiatives Program

The RDI program, created in 1998, fulfills the Council's aim to support and encourage innovative work that assesses and promotes the changing directions of research and the evolution of disciplines in SSH. In terms of size, the RDI program is a relatively small program representing 0.5 per cent, or $1.6 million, of SSHRC core program expenditures supporting research in 2009-10.

The overall objective of the RDI program is to support research in its initial stages by supporting the development of new ways of analyzing, structuring, integrating and transferring knowledge in SSH. The program is intended to provide short-term support that enables grant holders to develop their research to a point where they are

able to submit fully developed proposals to other programs with the aim of producing and effectively disseminating advanced research findings. Applicants must clearly distinguish their RDI project from previous or ongoing research. The specific objectives of the program are to help researchers to:

- develop new research questions;
- explore conceptual and methodological perspectives and directions; and
- critically analyze and assess research, including it achievements, impacts, strengths and state of development.

The program supports research activities that can lead to the development of innovative programs of research. These activities may include, but are not limited to, case studies, pilot projects, critical analyses, research collaboration and new ways of producing, structuring and mobilizing knowledge. In addition, the RDI program encourages developmental activities that promote interdisciplinary, cross-disciplinary and multi-disciplinary research.

The maximum value of an RDI grant is $40,000 over two years. Applicants may request support for one or two years. Competitions occur twice a year. RDI grants are not renewable, as the research development activities that the grant supports are intended to lead to mature research proposals suitable for submission to other funding programs, whether those of SSHRC or other agencies.

## 1.2 Evaluation Context

While both SRG and RDI are relatively long-running programs, and both have been subject to management reviews focusing on design and delivery issues, neither has been formally evaluated. SSHRC's Evaluation Plan for 2008-09 to 2010-11 determined the timing of the evaluation. As well, the conduct of the evaluation is consistent with the new Treasury Board Secretariat (TBS) Evaluation Policy (April 2009), which states that all direct program spending must be evaluated every five years. Furthermore, evaluations are a valuable input to the four-year cycle of Strategic Review.

The timing of the evaluation also coincided with the Program Activity (PA) renewal exercise launched by SSHRC in late 2009. The PA renewal covered all of SSHRC's programming, including SRG and RDI. In fact, preliminary findings from the evaluation contributed to the development of the revised PA. The most recent update from the PA renewal was posted on SSHRC's website on July 16, 2010.



The clustering of the two programs for evaluation purposes allows for greater evaluation coverage of the programs that support SSHRC's strategic outcome of "Research." In particular, as one of the key purposes of RDI is to provide short-term support that enables grant holders to develop their research to a point where they are able to submit fully developed proposals to other programs, such as SRG, the clustering allows for the deeper exploration of synergies and coherence among programs within SSHRC's portfolio of research funding mechanisms.[3]

The scope of the evaluation focuses between 2001-02 and 2008-09, although some lines of evidence have more narrow areas of focus (as appropriate in terms of the availability of data or to allow for an adequate time to elapse for outcomes to be realized).

The client for the evaluation is SSHRC senior management. SSHRC Corporate Performance and Evaluation oversaw the conduct of the evaluation itself. Audiences for the evaluation include, within SSHRC, the directors for both programs. Outside of SSHRC, audiences for the evaluation include the SSH community and, ultimately, the public. SSHRC will use the results from the evaluation to make decisions about the programs. These will include larger decisions regarding their continuing relevance, as well as more micro-level decisions regarding design and delivery aspects of the programs.

## 1.3 Evaluation Objective, Issues and Questions

The study aimed to carry out a summative evaluation of the two identified programs, the SRG and RDI. Summative evaluations are intended to focus largely on the degree to which expected outcomes have been achieved (i.e., success) and determining the extent to which the outcomes have been achieved in a manner that offers value for taxpayers' money (i.e., efficiency and economy according to the new TBS evaluation policy). As well, summative evaluations offer an opportunity to consider the continuing need for a program and the extent of its alignment with federal priorities and federal roles and responsibilities.

Fourteen evaluation questions, organized into three evaluation issues, address all of these main issue areas (as described in Exhibit 1.1):

[3] Evaluation Framework, Cluster Evaluation, Standard Research Grant (SRG) and Research Development Initiative (RDI) Programs, March 10, 2009, page 2.

- program relevance and continued need;
- design, delivery and cost-efficiency; and
- results and success.[4]

Thus, the objective of the summative evaluation is to address the evaluation questions and provide sound and evidence-based conclusions and, from those conclusions, concrete actionable recommendations for program and senior management consideration.

**Exhibit 1.1: Evaluation Issues and Questions**

| **Issue/Question** |
|---|
| *A Program Relevance and Continued Need* |
| A1 Are the mandate and objectives of the SRG and RDI consistent with the priorities and strategic goals of SSHRC and the federal government? |
| A2 To what extent do the objectives, approach and reach of the SRG and RDI programs address and satisfy the current and future needs of SSH scholars? |
| A3 Are there alternative sources of funding for investigator-framed research in the SSH? |
| *B Design and Delivery* |
| B1 To what extent do SRG and RDI Programs support a coherent suite of SSHRC programs? |
| B2 To what extent are the SRG and RDI programs effectively delivered, as planned, and in accordance with international best practice? To what extent are SSHRC stakeholders (applicants, adjudication committee members, universities) satisfied with the delivery of the RDI and SRG programs? |
| B3 To what extent is the FRR an effective tool for capturing performance information on results and outcomes of SRG and RDI grants? To what extent is this information being used to inform program decision making and meet other organizational needs? |
| B4 Are the SRG and RDI programs delivered in a cost-efficient manner? |
| *C Results and Success* |
| C1 To what extent did RDI support new and innovative research development ideas as intended in program objectives? |
| C2 To what extent did RDI supported research development activities contribute to the development of mature research proposals, funded by SSHRC or other funding agencies? To what extent did the SRG supported research activities and outputs contribute to new research proposals, funded by SSHRC or other funding agencies? |
| C3 To what extent did research activities supported by SRG and RDI grants contribute to high quality research outputs demonstrating knowledge advancement in all disciplines and areas of the SSH? |
| C4 To what extent did the activities of the SRG and RDI grants contribute to the development of highly qualified research-trained personnel available to pursue various knowledge intensive careers? |
| C5 To what extent were SRG supported research results effectively disseminated throughout the academic community and beyond? |
| C6 How did SRG supported research results, directly and indirectly, inform social, cultural, and economic change? |
| C7 Have there been any unintended (positive or negative) outcomes of the SRG and RDI programs? |

[4] Note that evaluation questions regarding results and success were designed based on the combined SRG/RDI program logic model presented in Appendix A.

# 2.0 Evaluation Methods

## 2.1 Overview of the Approach

The evaluation was implemented over the period of November 2009 and March 2010. The evaluation employed multiple lines of evidence with shared responsibility for the methods between an external consultant, Goss Gilroy Inc. (GGI), and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) internal evaluators. Exhibit 2.1 presents the methods for the evaluation and lead responsibility for each.

**Exhibit 2.1: SRG and RDI Evaluation Methods by Lead Responsibility**

| GGI as the lead for data collection | SSHRC as the lead for data collection |
|---|---|
| Document and literature review | Administrative data review |
| Key informant interviews | Bibliometric study[5] |
| Benchmarking study | Expert panel review |
| Case studies | |
| Survey of applicants | |
| Survey of non-applicants | |
| Focus groups | |

As presented in Section 1.3, the evaluation explored 14 questions. Exhibit 2.2 presents the crosswalk between the questions and the various lines of evidence. Technical reports were prepared for each line of evidence.

**Exhibit 2.2: Coverage of Evaluation Questions by Line of Evidence**

| Evaluation Question | Document and literature review | Key informant interviews | Benchmarking study | Case studies | Survey of applicants | Survey of non-applicants | Focus groups | Administrative data review | Bibliometric study | Expert panel review |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A1 Are the mandate and objectives of the SRG and RDI consistent with the priorities and strategic goals of SSHRC and the federal government? | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | | | |
| A2 To what extent do the objectives, approach and reach of the SRG and RDI programs address and satisfy the current and future needs of SSH faculty and post-doctoral researchers? | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| A3 Are there alternative private and public sources of funding for investigator-framed research in the SSH? | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| B1 To what extent does the design of the SRG and RDI programs support a coherent suite of SSHRC programs? | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | ✓ | | |

[5] The bibliometric study was conducted for SSHRC under contract by Science-Metrix.

| Evaluation Question | Document and literature review | Key informant interviews | Benchmarking study | Case studies | Survey of applicants | Survey of non-applicants | Focus groups | Administrative data review | Bibliometric study | Expert panel review |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| B2 To what extent are the SRG and RDI programs effectively delivered, as planned, and in accordance with international best practice? To what extent are RDI and SRG stakeholders satisfied with the delivery of SRG and RDI programs? | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| B3 To what extent is the FRR an effective tool for capturing performance information on the results & outcomes of SRG and RDI grants? To what extent is information used to inform program decision making and meet other organizational needs? | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | ✓ | | |
| B4 Are the SRG and RDI programs delivered in a cost-efficient manner? | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | ✓ | | |
| C1 To what extent did RDI support new and innovative research development ideas as intended in program objectives? | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| C2 To what extent did RDI supported research development activities contribute to the development of mature research proposals, funded by SSHRC or other funding agencies? To what extent did the SRG supported research activities and outputs contribute to new research proposals, funded by SSHRC or other funding agencies? | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | | | |
| C3 To what extent did research activities supported by SRG and RDI grants contribute to high quality research outputs demonstrating knowledge advancement in all disciplines and areas of the SSH? | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| C4 To what extent did the activities of the SRG and RDI grants contribute to the development of highly qualified research-trained personnel available to pursue various knowledge intensive careers? | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| C5 To what extent were SRG supported research results effectively disseminated throughout the academic community and beyond? | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | | |
| C6 How did SRG supported research results, directly and indirectly, inform social, cultural, and economic change? | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| C7 Have there been any unintended (positive or negative) outcomes of the SRG and RDI programs? | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | |

## 2.2 Document and Literature Review

Relevant documents and literature reviewed for this report include: SSHRC corporate documents and studies/reviews; SRG and RDI program documents; the Blue Ribbon Panel—peer review assessment report; relevant program documents from other agencies; and Government of Canada documents. Each document was reviewed using templates linked to the evaluation questions.

# 2.3 Data Analysis (AMIS, FRR)

## 2.3.1 Analysis of the Award Management Information System

***Applicant Profile Data***

The SSHRC Award Management Information System (AMIS) contains information on the complete grant application life cycle from the initial applications, to assessments, adjudication decisions and grant reporting (Final Research Report and Statement of Account). For this line of evidence, the focus was on the information from the initial applications. Data for SRG and RDI was analyzed from 1998-99 to 2008-09.

***Student Data***

AMIS contains quantitative data on students supported through SRG and RDI grants. This information is collected through applications and grant reporting (Statement of Account and Final Research Report).

The application years 2000-01 through 2004-05 were selected based on an analysis of data availability.

A sample of all projects for which final research reports (FRR) were received and SSHRC payments were completed, or the account was closed (all reporting completed), was selected. A quality check of the data was conducted to ensure that the financial reporting received by SSHRC for the selected files did not have large amounts of funds outstanding from their statements of account.[6] The resulting sample size for the analysis is 2,106 (for the five-year period 2000-01 to 2004-05).

***Analysis of Final Research Reports***

An analysis of the total number of final research reports received by SSHRC as of January 2010, for competition years 2000-01 to 2005-06 was conducted. The competition years 2002-03, 2003-04, and 2004-05 were selected for data analysis (1,570 SRG final research reports and 69 RDI final research reports), as they were the most recent competition years with a consistent final research report response rate

[6] Although grants may be completed and a final research report submitted by the grantees, there may be delays in the final financial reporting (final statements of account) as these are completed by the research institution not the individual grantee.

(see Exhibit 2.3).

**Exhibit 2.3: Overview of Final Research Reports Used for Analysis**

| Competition Year | SRG | | | RDI | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Grants | FRRs received | FRR response rate | Grants | FRRs received | FRR response rate |
| 2002-03 | 741 | 492 | 66% | 25 | 16 | 64% |
| 2003-04 | 774 | 467 | 60% | 31 | 29 | 94% |
| 2004-05 | 949 | 611 | 64% | 31 | 24 | 77% |
| **Total** | **2464** | **1570** | **64%** | **87** | **69** | **79%** |

In order to confirm the representativeness of the group of SRG and RDI grantees who submitted final research reports with the overall population of SRG and RDI grantees, a profile of each group was created. Characteristics of grantees in the sample—such as gender, language, discipline and region—were compared to the grantees' population and the results revealed no gaps or biases in which type of grantees submit their FRRs.

## 2.4 Bibliometric Study[7]

The study aimed to longitudinally assess the SRG program's effect on the research outputs of SRG-supported researchers by performing a bibliometric analysis of their scientific production. In addition, a comparison with publications from average Canadian SSH publications was used.

The SRG program funds two groups of researchers based on their career status, namely regular and new scholars. Therefore, the study provided data to address the following questions for each group of scholars.

1) Has SRG funding contributed to increasing the scientific performance of supported researchers in terms of their number of published journal articles?
2) Are the research outputs, produced with SRG support and amenable to bibliometric analysis (i.e., journal articles), of high impact relative to the average Canadian SSH journal article?
3) Has SRG funding contributed to increasing the scientific performance of supported researchers in terms of the scientific impact of their journal articles?

[7] Science-Metrix, Bibliometric Assessment of the SSHRC's Standard Research Grants Program: Final Report. April 7, 2010.

The following indicators used to answer these questions are the number of papers produced by each researcher and two complementary measures of scientific impact, namely the Average of Relative Citations (ARC) and the Average of Relative Impact Factors (ARIF). The bibliometric study using the Scopus database examined a total of 800 SRG-funded researchers (who received a grant between 1998-99 and 2004-05).

## 2.5 Key Informant Interviews

In all, 80 key informant interviews (KIIs) were completed for the evaluation. Interview stakeholder types are organized under two main groups: internal SSHRC stakeholders and external stakeholders. A heavy emphasis was placed on interviews with external stakeholders from various populations, including members of the grant application audiences, external assessors and committee members/chairs, Canadian universities, representatives of other Canadian and international granting agencies and other external stakeholders (such as senior scholars, policy think tanks, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the private sector).

Exhibit 2.4 below presents a detailed breakdown of the number of targeted and completed interviews by stakeholder type.

**Exhibit 2.4: Completed Interviews, By Type**

| Stakeholder Type | Target | No. of Interviews Conducted |
|---|---|---|
| *Internal Stakeholders* | | |
| SSHRC management/council members | 3 | 3 |
| SSHRC program staff | 3 | 3 |
| *External Stakeholders* | | |
| Grant holders | 15 | 16 |
| Unsuccessful applicants | 10 | 5 |
| Non-applicants | 5 | 6 |
| External assessors | 4 | 2 |
| Adjudication committee chairs/members | 10 | 12 |
| University officials—management | 12 | 9 |
| University officials—staff | 12 | 10 |
| Representatives of other funding agencies | 4 | 5 |
| External stakeholder groups/users of research | 10 | 9 |
| **Total** | **88** | **80** |

Interviewees were selected largely based on lists developed by the consultant (either from Internet searches or master lists provided by SSHRC. In some cases, SSHRC suggested interviewees (e.g., SSHRC personnel).

Interviews were conducted in the respondents' preferred official language, using a semi-structured interview guide tailored for each stakeholder type.

## 2.6 Benchmarking Study

The benchmarking study consisted of three main components: analysis of SRG and RDI administrative costs over time; comparison of SRG and RDI administrative costs to those of a comparable program within SSHRC (namely the International Opportunities Fund (IOF)); and comparison of SRG and RDI administrative costs to those of a comparable program outside of SSHRC (namely the Discovery Grants Program administered by the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC)).

By benchmarking, we mean the comparison against comparable alternatives of per unit costs (in this case, per application costs) of running the programs. The costs considered are those of: designing, announcing, soliciting applications for, adjudicating, managing disbursements for, monitoring and otherwise supporting the programs. Both salary and non-salary costs were considered. The adjudication costs include those paid for directly by SSHRC (e.g., travel and accommodation expenses), as well as those contributed by the institutions (e.g., coverage of the salary time of the review panel members prior to and during the meetings).

The comparison to comparable programs was intended to establish the extent to which SRG and RDI costs are in line with those of other programs; in other words, at the outset, there was no reason to expect that cost-efficiency of SRG and RDI would be either higher or lower than that of other programs.

The comparisons were also conducted over time, so that either gains or losses of efficiency over time could be assessed. This was particularly important because of evolution in the number of units included in the per unit costs. More simply, applications to SSHRC programs—especially SRG—have increased greatly over the last decade, and it is important to take into account the implications of this application pressure on administrative efficiencies.

## 2.7 Case Studies

A total of eight case studies were conducted. The case units are bodies of research work to which SSHRC has contributed funding through the RDI and SRG programs

on at least one grant. While outcomes of RDI are not a main focus of this line of evidence, one case study has an RDI focus and the SRG case studies include a subset of cases that have received both RDI and SRG funding.

The overall approach to identifying and tracing outcomes is derived from concept mapping[8] (where groups map sets of ideas in relation to each other); outcome mapping[9] (assessing the contributions of programs to the achievement of outcomes); as well as the constructivist methodology (path of ideas) used in the case studies conducted by the UK's Arts and Humanities Research Council.[10] Specifically, we aimed to map as completely as possible the outcomes of the selected bodies of research on intellectual developments in the research field, and indirect and direct applications of the work in social, cultural and economic policies, programs and practices. Use of "bodies of research work" rather than "grants" recognizes that research impacts may not be directly attributable to any one grant, and allows for documentation of the synergies among sources of funding (including SRG and RDI, as well as Major Collaborative Research Initiative (MCRI) and strategic funding programs). The mapping approach aimed to facilitate the documentation of the diversity and complex linkages among sets of research outcomes. This approach supported an emergent strategy for data collection, thus ensuring maximum information gain from each case.

To maximize the diversity and richness of outcomes mapped, as well as to clearly establish a link between research excellence and outcome, cases were selected systematically from the highest quality research funded through the SRG (the selection process and criteria are described below). The selection of cases was undertaken with a view to achieving a mix of disciplines (social sciences, humanities), size of institution, new scholar versus regular applicant and region. One case received only an RDI grant and two additional cases received RDI funding in addition to an SRG. To ensure that the body of research had enough time to accumulate outcomes, and that the individuals involved were more likely to be reachable, only grants issued between 1998 and 2004 were selected. Within these parameters, to maximize the credibility of the case study design[11], cases were randomly selected from among the applications that received ratings of 10 or higher in the combined rating of research

[8] Kane, M., Trochim., W. (2007). *Concept mapping for planning and evaluation*. Sage
[9] http://www.idrc.ca/en/ev-26586-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html.
[10] AHRC (n.d.). *Social Impact of Artist Exhibitions: Two Case Studies.* Arts and Humanities Research Council. UK.; AHRC (n.d.). *A Home in Renaissance Italy. An Impact Case Study.* Arts and Humanities Research Council. UK.
[11] That is, to avoid perpetuating the observed weakness of overemphasis on "story telling." Coryn, C. (2009) *Method and Measurement: An International Comparison with an Emphasis on Canada*, Congress paper.

record and program in their peer adjudications. Given that the cases are representative of SSHRC's disciplines and constituencies, it was expected that they would also allow for the identification of outcomes in all impact areas captured in the Final Research Reports.

For each of the eight selected cases, consultants carried out the following:

- file (including the FRR) and document review;
- an interview with the principal investigator (PI and/or co-applicant(s); and
- approximately four follow-on interviews with other individuals associated with the body of research.

An emergent sampling strategy was used for each case, aiming to develop the most complete portrait of the research outcomes. These follow-up interviews were conducted with individuals associated with the research results as collaborators, students, research users, course designers or others.

## 2.8 Focus Groups

In total, 12 focus groups—four with SRG recipients, two with RDI recipients, and six with students—were conducted in four cities: Vancouver, Toronto, Montreal and Halifax. The cities were selected based on the concentration of post-secondary institutions and the availability of small, medium and larger institutions within a reasonable travel radius. As well, these cities represent a range of the regions within Canada.

***Grantees***. In total, 368 grantee participants were recruited by email and telephone to: participate in the focus groups in four cities (132); participate *and* identify students for participation in the student focus groups (77); and identify students for participation in the student focus groups (159). Using the program's administrative database of SSHRC SRG and RDI grantees as a recruiting frame, the evaluation team selected 50 grantee names per SSHRC grant who were affiliated with post-secondary institutions within a 25 kilometre radius of the four cities. A mix of grantees across a number of different criteria were sought, such as applicants and co-applicants, large and small funding, and multiple grant recipients and single grant recipients. a mix of disciplines (social sciences and humanities), were considered in the selection of the grantees to ensure representation across and within groups.

From this selection, participants were recruited randomly until the quota for each

group (15 participants) was met. GGI followed up with grantees by email two days prior to each focus group to remind participants of the focus group and related logistics. See Exhibit 2.5 for actual locations and participant numbers for SRG and RDI grantees.

***Students***. In total, 134 student participants were recruited by email and telephone. Students were recruited only through SRG grantees, including current and former undergraduate and graduate students and post-doctoral fellows. Requests were sent to grantees to either identify the students with whom they worked within an SSHRC SRG grant and provide the names and email addresses to GGI, or to pass along information to the student regarding the focus group with a link to GGI's online focus group recruitment form (11 students used the online focus group recruitment form).

Students were then recruited until the quota for each group (15 participants) was met. GGI followed up with students by email two days prior to each focus group to remind participants of the focus group and related logistics.

Exhibit 2.5 below provides the distribution of groups according to SRG and RDI grantees and students, and number of actual participants.

**Exhibit 2.5: Distribution of Focus Groups**

| City | SRG Grantees | RDI Grantees | Students |
|---|---|---|---|
| Vancouver | 13<br>(1 group) | - | 6<br>(1 group) |
| Toronto/Hamilton | 7<br>(1 group) | 6<br>(1 group) | 10, 11<br>(2 groups) |
| Montreal | 8<br>(1 group) | 6<br>(1 group) | 8, 8<br>(2 groups) |
| Halifax | 7<br>(1 group) | - | 10<br>(1 group) |
| **Total** | **35** | **12** | **53** |

# 2.9 Survey of Applicants

An online survey of successful and unsuccessful SRG and RDI applicants was conducted over four weeks in January and February, 2010, including the entire sample of RDI applicants in the frame. The sampling frame for SRG applicants was drawn from administrative data for the fiscal years 2003-04 to 2008-09. Earlier applicants were not chosen in order to maximize recall and minimize problems associated with bad contacts (because applicants may have changed their contact information). The list of survey participants was drawn from administrative databases maintained by SSHRC.

GGI worked with the data to identify various applicant characteristics and ensured a minimum number of responses for each category of the characteristics (e.g., 200 where possible). These characteristics included:

- single versus multiple SRG applications;
- single versus multiple SRG grants;
- individuals who were also RDI applicants and/or grantees;
- individuals who were also applicants and/or grantees for other SSHRC programs;
- new scholar versus regular applicants/grantees; and
- MCRI grant holders.

As appropriate, each of these characteristics was flagged in the survey frame to allow for the sample to be drawn based on a mix of the above characteristics. Other factors considered for sampling included:

- region;
- language;
- gender; and
- size of institution.

The sampling plan was based on a minimum number of respondents within each of these characteristics to allow for analyses within a reasonable margin of error. Quotas were set in the online survey software to secure balanced numbers for the different sub-groups.

To maximize the number of completed survey questionnaires, GGI implemented a strategic approach to the surveys. First, only applicants from the five-year period of 2003-04 to 2008-09 (all RDI applicants, SRG grantees and a sub-sample of SRG applicants) were invited to participate, maximizing the likelihood that the individuals would have the same contact information. Then, GGI sent out weekly email reminders to applicants who had not yet completed the survey questionnaire. Third, all invited respondents who had not yet completed the survey received a follow-up by phone, reminding them of the survey close date and offering to call them back at a convenient time to complete the survey over the phone.

The response rates (and how they were calculated) for the SRG and RDI surveys are presented below in Exhibits 2.6 and 2.7, respectively. The total responses to the applicant survey included 1,455 SRG applicants (for a response rate of 41.7 per cent)



and 240 RDI applicants (for a response rate of 56.2 per cent).

**Exhibit 2.6: Survey Outcomes: SRG Survey Response Rates**

| Survey Outcome | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Bounced emails | 347 | 9.0% |
| Refused | 68 | 0.2% |
| Ineligible (mismatch in applicant status based on self-report and administrative data, assigned to RDI survey questions, etc.) | 188 | 4.9% |
| No response | 1751 | 45.6% |
| Incompletes | 218 | 5.7% |
| Completed survey | 1267 | 33.0% |
| **Total participants emailed** | **3839** | **100.0%** |
| **Response Rate Calculation** | | |
| Total contacts (emailed–wrong address) | 3492 | |
| Cooperative Contacts (completed + ineligible) | 1455 | |
| **Response rate (cooperative contacts/total contacts)** | | **41.7%** |

**Exhibit 2.7: Survey Outcomes: RDI Survey Response Rates**

| Survey Outcome | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Wrong email address or bounced | 47 | 9.9% |
| Refused | 3 | 0.6% |
| Ineligible (mismatch in applicant status based on self-report and administrative data, assigned SRG questions, etc.) | 115 | 24.3% |
| No response | 184 | 24.3% |
| Completed survey | 125 | 26.4% |
| **Total participants emailed** | **474** | **100.0%** |
| **Response Rate Calculation** | | |
| Total contacts (emailed–wrong address) | 427 | |
| Cooperative Contacts (completed +ineligible) | 240 | |
| **Response rate (cooperative contacts/total contacts** | | **56.2%** |

As with any survey, there are always concerns regarding the representativeness of the survey results. In the case of the SRG applicant survey, there was a reasonably high response rate for this type of survey, which resulted in a relatively large sample size. In addition, there was very good administrative database to compare the profile of the survey respondents to the population profile. Although the profiles were similar, some weighting was implemented to ensure the sample and population profiles were similar on observed characteristics.

In the case of RDI, there was not a large sample size and there was apparent confusion for some survey respondents in terms of whether the funding they received was under RDI or not. This was very apparent when comparing the administrative data to determine who was an RDI applicant and successful in the time period to individuals who stated in the survey they applied and also received funding. A substantial number of responses had to be eliminated because they did not correspond to any administrative data, and some were retained although the time periods were different.

These problems with the RDI sample are further complicated by the fact that the elimination of survey responses that did not correspond to survey data left a sample of only 125 respondents. Even if the sample were entirely random, the sampling error would still be +/–8 per cent based on a dichotomous variable with a 50 per cent split and $p < .05$. This sampling error increases substantially for questions with missing responses or questions answered only by funding recipients or other subgroups of respondents.

## 2.10 Survey of Non-applicants

The survey of non-applicants was administered online over three weeks in February 2010. The survey frame for the survey of those who had never applied to SRG and RDI was developed in two steps. First, GGI randomly selected (using a stratified random sample based on language, size of the institution and region) a subset of SSHRC-eligible institutions from a total of 20 institutions. Within each institution, SSHRC verified those faculty members identified as eligible to apply for SSHRC to ensure that only non-applicants were included in the sample.

The other half of the sample came directly from SSHRC: based on their administrative data, they identified potential participants who had applied to SSHRC programs other than SRG and RDI. A few of the individuals identified were extracted from the sampling frame to be invited to participate in Key Informant Interviews, while the rest were invited to participate in the survey.

In all, 331 non-applicants responded to the survey for a response rate of 17.4 per cent.

## 2.11 Expert Panel Review

An Expert Panel was assembled by officials of SSHRC to assess the quality of SRG



research outputs and the degree of originality and innovation in RDI research activities and outputs. The Panel consisted of five members; a sixth individual acted as Chair.

All members participated in an initial calibration exercise whereby the five members were all asked to assess two FRRs from SRGs and one FRR from an RDI grant holder (the three reports in question were selected by the Chair). Members indicated that FRRs from both types of grants were assessed in a very similar manner. Results from this exercise were circulated to all members to ensure a common understanding of the approach taken by the other members.

Individual members were then asked to assess 20 FRRs (16 SRG and four RDI FRRs). A descriptor summarized the assessment of each file. Specifically, for SRG FRRs, the panel used descriptors in response to the evaluation question, "To what extent did research activities supported by SRG grants contribute to high quality research activities and research outputs demonstrating knowledge advancement in SSH?" The descriptors for SRG final research reports were poor, fair, good, very good and excellent. For RDI FRRs, the panel used descriptors to answer the evaluation question, "To what extent did RDI grants support new and innovative research development ideas as intended in program objectives?" The descriptors for RDI were low degree, medium degree and high degree. In addition to the descriptors, members of the panel were also invited to formulate comments on the collection of files considered.

Once all members had submitted their results, a conference call was held, during which members offered comments on the assessments, challenges encountered (and suggestions to address these) and the process itself.

Once issues of fields of expertise were taken into consideration, a total of 79 SRG files and 21 RDI files were assessed.

## 2.12 Challenges and Limitations

***Potential success story bias.*** There is likely a bias resulting from selecting only the highest-ranked projects for the case studies. This has the effect of revealing extremely positive results that likely cannot be generalized to the entire population of RDI/SRG grant holders. As well, it is possible that FRR results are positively biased if the more successful grantees are more likely to submit FRRs, as opposed to those that have accomplished less with their funding. The inclusion of the expert panel line of



evidence will help to offset this potential bias.

***Representativeness of the findings.*** Key informant interviews and focus group findings may not represent the views and experiences of the larger populations they represent (e.g., for focus groups, this would be grantees and students), and are thus difficult to generalize. To maximize learning about varied experiences, a mix of respondents across a number of different criteria were sought. In terms of the SRG survey findings, even after weighting the data, we cannot be certain that the sample did not differ from the population of SRG applicants on some unobserved variables. Potential sources of bias should be kept in mind when extrapolating the survey finding to the broader population of SRG applicants. For the RDI survey findings, because of the mismatch between the administrative data and survey responses, even with weighting the data to adjust the profile of the respondents to match the population, it is possible that the survey sample is systematically different from the intended population of RDI applicants intended to be sampled. Moreover, because of the small sample sizes (due to a large number of cases removed because of inconsistencies with the administrative data), extrapolation of the survey findings to the entire population of RDI applicants should be undertaken with caution and preferably when other confirmatory sources of information exist.

***Lack of qualitative evidence for some questions.*** In many lines of evidence and in many respondent groups (e.g., university official key informants, student focus group participants), there were varying levels of awareness of SRG and RDI. The result is that many evaluation questions and indicators have a considerable proportion of responses where the respondent was unable to provide an opinion. The evaluation question on relevance/alignment with federal government priorities was addressed largely based on documentary evidence, without detailed interviews with federal government officials.

***Assessment of scientific impact.*** The bibliometric study was expected to provide concrete evidence with respect to scientific impact. However, there were a number of significant limitations. Many of the limitations relate to the ability to conduct lateral comparisons (e.g., comparisons between countries). Specifically, the omission of books, grey literature and conference proceedings, the tendency for SSH research to focus more on local audiences, and because SSH scholars tend to publish somewhat more in their own language (whereas the major citation databases are somewhat biased in favour of scientific literature authored in English) would affect lateral comparisons. However, these were not considered to be significant limitations for longitudinal comparisons. There are other limitations that are more important. First,

because coverage of the humanities in the main database used for evidence (Scopus) appears to be incomplete, no conclusions could be made regarding the effect of the SRG program on the research outputs of humanities scholars. Second, because of the emphasis on publications in books in SSH, it is unclear whether SSH scholars shift their attention away from articles in journals and toward publishing in books when they receive a grant such as an SRG. Third, the study was undertaken in the absence of a control group and therefore the bibliometric study could not determine with great certainty the attribution of scientific impact to the SRG, as opposed to other factors. Thus, the attribution of scientific impact to SRG must rely heavily on other more subjective lines of evidence (such as opinions of grantees via the survey and the opinions of key informants).

Also connected to the limitation regarding assessing scientific impact, the expert panel noted that there are challenges in appreciating the different types of outputs and outcomes valued by different disciplines—a challenge that also arises in the case of inter- and multidisciplinary projects. From this perspective, members of the panel felt that it is important for panels of this kind to include individuals with the expertise needed to assess the quality of research outputs and outcomes from a number of disciplinary perspectives.

***Availability of data in FRRs.*** The FRR analysis is based on rates of return for the report from grant holders ranging from 50-75 per cent across the sample years. The expert panel also felt that more information about the role and participation of students in individual projects would have been desirable to be able to better assess the outcomes for students. As well, in some cases it was difficult to disentangle individual contributions and especially those made by researchers other than the principal investigator. It was also difficult to assess the nature and quality of the conferences at which grant-related presentations were made.

## 2.13 Presentation of the Report

The evidence from the evaluation is presented by evaluation question. Evidence has been synthesized and specific findings from certain lines of evidence highlighted where appropriate. For qualitative lines of evidence (e.g., focus groups, key informant interviews), the following scale is used in the text of the report to indicate the relative weight of the responses for each of the respondent groups.

- **"All/almost all"**—findings reflect the views and opinions of 90 per cent or more of the focus group participants commenting on that particular issue.

- **"Large majority"**—findings reflect the views and opinions of at least 75 per cent but fewer than 90 per cent of the focus group participants commenting on that particular issue.
- **"Majority/most"**—findings reflect the views and opinions of at least 50 per cent but fewer than 75 per cent of the focus group participants commenting on that particular issue.
- **"Some"**—findings reflect the views and opinions of at least 25 per cent but fewer than 50 per cent of the focus group participants commenting on that particular issue.
- **"A few"**—findings reflect the views and opinions of at least two respondents but fewer than 25 per cent of the focus group participants commenting on that particular issue.

# 3.0 Findings Related to Relevance and Continued Need

## 3.1 Consistency with Priorities

**Evaluation Question A1:**
**Are the mandate and objectives of the SRG and RDI programs consistent with the priorities and strategic goals of SSHRC and the federal government?**

**Findings for Question A1:**
Overall, the evaluation found that the mandate and objectives of both programs are consistent with both SSHRC and federal government priorities.

***Consistency with SSHRC priorities***

All available sources of data converged to the main finding that both the SRG and RDI programs remain strongly consistent with SSHRC's strategic goals of improving the quality of publicly funded research; fostering connections among researchers and research users; and increasing the impact of SSHRC-supported research on society.[12] As the stated purpose of the SRG program is to support research excellence in SSH, and key informants in SSHRC's community agree that an SRG award is a hallmark of excellence, SRG's alignment with improving the quality of publicly-funded research is clear. As a developmental program, RDI was cited as being particularly well aligned with SSHRC's mandate to support research advancement. With respect to the strategic priorities of fostering connections among researchers and research users and increasing impact of SSHRC-supported research on society, the programs' alignment is less direct in that neither connections with research users or increasing societal impact are program requirements. However, the SRG program was cited as addressing these Council priorities due to its emphasis on dissemination. And, as data presented in the section on research outcomes will show, the SRG program is in fact producing research that has and will continue to have impacts on society.

For the RDI program, whose overall objective is to support new ways of "analyzing, structuring, integrating and transferring knowledge in the humanities and the social sciences," documentary and interview sources confirmed that the program is also aligned with SSHRC's strategic priorities. It also supports innovation that can lead to

[12]Framing our Directions, http://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/about-au_sujet/publications/strategic_plans-plans_strategiques-eng.aspx

new insights, and hence enhances research quality.

### *Consistency with federal government priorities*

Both the SRG and RDI programs were found to be aligned with the federal government's priorities and goals. In particular, the document review found they are consistent with the objectives of the federal Innovation Strategy[13] which aims to make Canada a world leader in innovation, as well as with Canada's Science and Technology Strategy[14]. With respect to the latter, key informants noted the clear consistency between, and thus the programs' potential to contribute to, Canada's Knowledge Advantage ("positioning Canadians at the leading edge of the important developments that generate health, environmental, societal, and economic benefits") through the results of the research they enable. Both programs are also seen as contributing to the People Advantage ("being a magnet for the highly-skilled people we need to thrive in the modern global economy with the best-educated, most-skilled and most flexible workforce in the world"). SSHRC and external stakeholder key informants affirmed that both programs support the development and advancement of highly-qualified personnel by offering opportunities for students to participate in research projects.

While in general the SRG and RDI programs are seen to be aligned with Government of Canada priorities, it was also found that there are divergent understandings in SSHRC's stakeholder community about the Government's current strategic foci in research support[15]. Some key stakeholders from universities maintained that applied research that can demonstrate utility (consistent with the concept of commercial application in the Entrepreneurial Advantage of the S&T Strategy) is most highly valued, while others from the SSHRC and external stakeholder respondent groups argued that the Strategy prioritizes knowledge advancement through the funding of basic (i.e., "non-targeted") research. Not surprisingly, those who view Government of Canada priorities as vested in applied research (i.e., some KIs from universities) were more likely to see some disconnect between these and the objectives of the SRG and RDI programs.

[13] Government of Canada. Canada's Innovation Strategy—New Ideas, New Opportunities. 2002.
[14] Government of Canada. Mobilizing Science and Technology to Canada's Advantage. 2007.
[15] Because a representative from the federal government was not interviewed for the evaluation, this perspective is not presented.

# 3.2 Degree to Which Needs of Researchers are Being Met

**Evaluation Question A2:**
**To what extent do the objectives, approach and reach of the SRG and RDI programs address and satisfy the current and future needs of SSH faculty and post-doctoral researchers?**

**Findings for Question A2**:
The evaluation found that, for the most part, the objectives and approach of the SRG and RDI programs are meeting the current and future needs of SSH researchers. There is some concern about whether the reach of the programs, as expressed by success rates (and in the case of RDI, the overall awareness of the program itself), is providing adequate support to the community and providing opportunities for a larger proportion of high-quality research to be conducted. As well, concern was voiced about the response of SRG to the needs of new scholars, the overall length of SRGs, and the degree to which the needs of interdisciplinary researchers, researchers at small universities, and researchers at new universities are being met by the programs.

Exhibit 3.1 presents the findings from the survey on the extent to which the SRG and RDI programs are meeting the needs of scholars. These findings will be referred to throughout this section.

**Exhibit 3.1: Degree to Which SRG and RDI Programs are Meeting Needs**

| The need(s) … | SRG | | | RDI | Non-applicants | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Successful | Unsuccessful | Total | Total | SRG | RDI |
| For open research funding in SSH | 95% | 89% | 94% | 83% | 78% | 73% |
| For grants of varying size and length | 77% | 72% | 76% | 80% | 73% | 60% |
| Of new scholars | 79% | 54% | 75% | 69% | 60% | 55% |
| To conduct research in new/ emerging thematic areas and approaches | 72% | 59% | 70% | 89% | n/a | 66% |
| To fund innovation and creativity for open research in its initial stages | 65% | 52% | 63% | 82% | n/a | 67% |
| **Number of respondents** | **822** | **118** | **940** | **90** | **326** | **327** |

Percent indicating program is meeting the need to some or large extent
Source: SSHRC Applicant Survey
Note that the sample size of RDI respondents was too small to permit separation into successful and unsuccessful applicants.

**Case study synopsis for the 2003 SRG: Archaeological investigations at the classic Maya centre of Naachtun**

The SRG supported a program of research that: 1) explored the Late Pre-Classic to Early Classic transition, which included the collapse of most major centres in the Mirador Basin and the transition to smaller city-states; 2) discovered several large stelea with women on them; 3) conducted excavations at Naachtun that revealed architectural styles and site layouts similar to north areas; and 4) explored the extent of Early Classic defensive fortifications.

The SRG has had a notable academic and applied impact. As well, there have been powerful synergies among the grantee's SRG and other SSHRC and non-SSHRC sources of funding. The impact of the grantee's work is potentially vast and far-reaching. The grantee's body of research has helped advance knowledge in the areas of: i) warfare and violence in early state societies; ii) the role of women in early states; iii) the adoption of new political and religious ideologies; and iv)water management systems.

Research results have been disseminated widely to academic and non-academic audiences. The work has led to many publications in academic journals, book chapters, conference presentations, invited addresses and media attention. Dissemination to other researchers and to students has led to further knowledge development in these areas as others take the grantee's results forward. Research training opportunities provided to students have contributed to the development of highly qualified personnel (HQP).

The grantee (and others consulted for the case study) indicated that SSHRC funding was essential to the achievements of impacts regarding the development of new knowledge, informing of social, cultural, and economic change, and the training of HQP.

The grantee was awarded the SRG as a new scholar. The grantee believes it has helped to fast-track her career. The grantee described the 2003 SRG as essential for conducting her research in Naachtun. Conducting research in such a remote area of the Guatemala rainforest requires substantial resources. The SRG funding along with other sources of funding allowed the grantee to set up research facilities in this area, hire a team for excavations, and analyze results.

### *Overall response to needs*

The evaluation found that, for the most part, SRG and RDI are meeting the current needs of SSH researchers. This was confirmed in all lines of evidence. For example, both successful (95%) and unsuccessful (89%) applicants to the SRG program agreed that it is meeting the need for open research funding in SSH to some or a large extent. Applicants to the RDI program provided similar endorsement: 83 per cent agreed that the program is meeting this need to some or a large extent. Interestingly, 78 per cent of non-applicants to the programs—who could have been expected to view their needs as not being met, and some of whom were not very familiar with the programs—agreed that the SRG program is meeting the need for open research funding in SSH, and almost three quarters (73%) also agreed that the RDI program was meeting the same need. The majority of grantees who participated in focus groups indicated that the SRG and RDI programs generally meet the needs of SSH researchers, principally due to their flexibility in terms of budget and freedom for researchers to be

exploratory. Key informants' responses were similar: most university officials, SSHRC personnel and grantees indicated that the two programs are meeting SSH scholars' needs to at least some extent.

***Needs of new scholars***

The evaluation specifically addressed the extent to which the SRG and RDI programs are meeting the needs of new scholars. Here, findings diverged somewhat among sources, but overall suggested that the programs' response to their needs—gaining a foothold on the academic career ladder through securing first or early-career SSHRC grants—may be less than optimal.

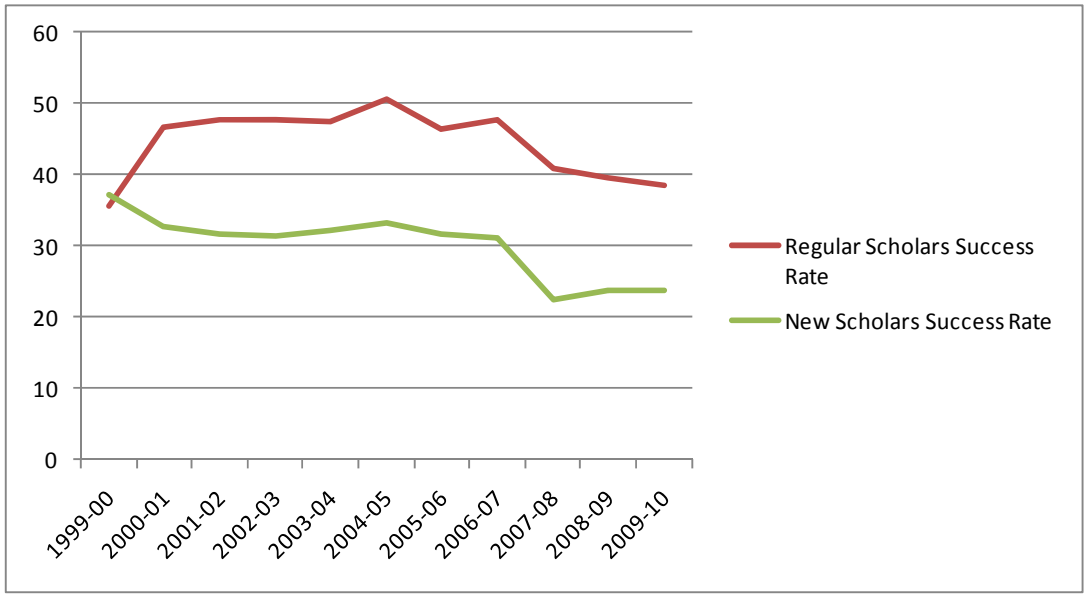
First, while survey results indicated that the majority of respondents in all categories agreed that the programs are meeting needs of new scholars to some or a very large extent, these ratings are lower than those for meeting scholars' needs for open research funding in SSH overall, as reported above (see Exhibit 3.1). Respondents indicated that needs of new scholars were being met by 79 per cent of successful SRG applicants, 54 per cent of unsuccessful SRG applicants and 69 per cent of successful and unsuccessful RDI applicants. Non-applicants were also the least positive about the extent to which both programs are meeting the needs of new scholars, with 60 per cent indicating that SRG is meeting these needs to some or large extent and 55 per cent indicating RDI is meeting the needs.

Some grantee and adjudicator interviewees indicated that the programs have not fully met the needs of new scholars, whose chances of receiving funding are perceived as being significantly lower than those of regular scholars, despite SSHRC's attempts to "level the playing field." Responses from focus group participants were also mixed, with some grantees arguing that SRG and RDI programs are meeting the needs of new scholars, as the grant programs offer the opportunity for new scholars to develop their research agendas, experience the SSHRC peer review process, and compete against senior researchers. Other focus group participants, however, indicated that the programs are not meeting the needs of new researchers, because of the emphasis placed on publications in the adjudication criteria. Some respondents expressed support for a need to improve weighting (to make the application process fairer for new scholars), as well as for an altogether separate competition or program for new scholars.

The data in Exhibit 3.2 show that there is indeed a difference in the success rates of new and regular scholars in SRG competitions, with new scholars being less likely to

be successful. With the exception of 1999-00, this difference has been at least 13 per cent, and as high as 18 per cent.

**Exhibit 3.2: Success Rates of Regular and New Scholars (SRG), 1999-00 to 2009-10**




Percent successful
Source: SSHRC website.

***Success rates and funding rates versus demand***

While the SRG program is meeting needs in the sense that it provides opportunity for research funding based on high standards of excellence across the entire range of SSH, it may not be meeting demand. Success rates are a function of both application quality (as determined through peer review) and of available funds, with about one-third of projects being funded, and another proportion being rated as meritorious but not highly-ranked enough to be funded (referred to as the "4A" category). The implication is that potentially high-quality research is not being funded. However, the question remains whether there is an argument for increasing funding for SRG and RDI with a view to increasing the success rates for the programs.

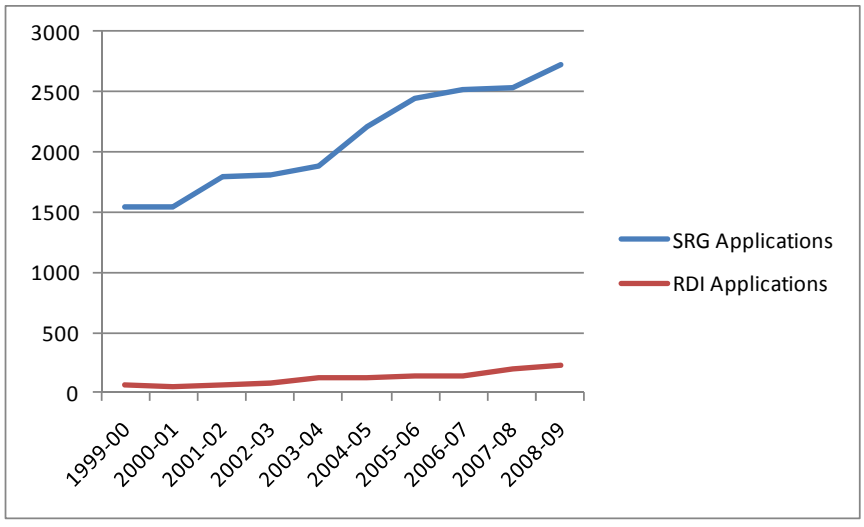
Adjudication committee notes indicated that there are a disproportionate number of applicants to recipients of funding for both SRG and RDI programs, and in particular that success rates for RDI competitions were also low, leaving many important projects unfunded. These data were echoed in key informant data, where some stakeholders in the university, adjudicator and SSHRC groups reported that low success rates hinder the programs' ability to satisfy SSH scholars' needs; the high number of "4A" ratings is seen as discouraging applications. Indeed, in the survey, 35

per cent of non-applicants said they have not applied to SRG because the chance of being funded is too small.

Somewhat paradoxically, although respondents expressed concern about low success rates for the RDI program, there is also a lack of awareness and understanding of this program in the academic community. While the low level of applications (relative to the numbers received for the SRG competition) may suggest that the need for the program is relatively low, university officials and some other stakeholder groups indicated they don't know enough about RDI. In some cases, RDI was erroneously described as a "small SRG." Moreover, only 8 per cent of non-applicants said they were very or completely familiar with the RDI program, compared to 32 per cent for the SRG program. In addition, 23 per cent said that their main barrier to applying was lack of familiarity with the program. Interestingly, about two thirds of RDI applicants and about one third of SRG applicants intend to apply for RDI in the future.

Exhibit 3.3 shows that applications to both programs have been steadily increasing over time, with the RDI applications more than tripling over the 12-year period (from 71 in 1999-2000 to 233 in 2008-09), and SRG application almost doubling (from 1,548 in 1999-2000 to 2,731 in 2008-09). Thus, while RDI might not be as well known as SRG, it has certainly become more well-known over time. It is also possible that the declining success rates over time (from a high in 2004-05) can be attributed (at least in part) to the increase in applications to both programs.

**Exhibit 3.3: Numbers of Applications to SRG and RDI, 1999-00 to 2008-09**




Source: SSHRC website.

To put these findings into a broader context, a review of success rates for comparable granting programs was undertaken. Exhibit 3.4 presents these results. The

comparative review reveals that the success rates for SRG and RDI are not unreasonably low.

**Exhibit 3.4: Success Rates for Other Comparable Granting Programs**

| Program (SRG or Comparable Program) and Success Rates | | Program (RDI or Comparable Program) and Success Rates | |
|---|---|---|---|
| SSHRC SRG 2009-10 (regular and new scholars) | 32.7% | SSHRC RDI 2007-08 | 33.1% |
| SSHRC INE 2007-08 | 31.7% | SSHRC International Opportunities Fund | Not avail. |
| CIHR Open Grants 2009-10 | 18% | SSHRC Development Grants | Not avail. |
| NSERC Discovery Grants 2010 | 58% | CIHR Catalyst and Emerging Team Grants Program | Not avail. |
| FQRSC Soutien aux équipes de recherche 2009-10 | 52.7% | ESRC Small Grant Scheme (UK) 2009-10 | 19% |
| ESRC Research Grant Scheme (UK) 2009-10 | 14% | | |
| National Competitive Grants Program (Australia) 2008 | 30% | | |

Source: Various web-based sources[16] and Interim Findings Report, Initiative on the New Economy, February 27, 2009[17].

When considering only the opinions of adjudication committee members and KIs and the fact that there are increasing numbers of applications to both SRG and RDI, there appears to be an argument for increasing the funding available to both programs. However, since the success rates are similar to those of other comparable programs, a more in-depth review of the situation would be needed before any formal conclusions could be reached.

### *Innovation and conservatism*

The evaluation addressed the question of whether the SRG and RDI programs are fulfilling a need for funding innovation in SSH research. Seventy per cent of SRG applicants, 89 per cent of RDI applicants, and 66 per cent of non-applicants to either program agreed that the respective programs are meeting the need to conduct research in new or emerging thematic areas and approaches. Responses to questions more

[16] Operating Grant: 2009-2010 - Funding Decisions Notification, http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/41996.html; NSERC, 2010 Competition Statistics - Discovery Grants Program, http://www.nserc-crsng.gc.ca/_doc/Professors-Professeurs/2010-DG-CompStat_e.pdf; Annonce des octrois 2009-2010 - PRÈS DE 5,6 MILLIONS DE DOLLARS EN NOUVELLES SUBVENTIONS DE RECHERCHE, http://www.fqrsc.gouv.qc.ca/upload/editeur/comm-se2010(1).pdf; Success rates by number & £k (at 80 % FEC), http://www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/Images/RGB%20Statistics%20April%202010_tcm6-36525.pdf; NCGP Statistics, National Competitive Grants Program (NCGP) Dataset, http://www.arc.gov.au/general/searchable_data.htm.

[17] R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd., and Natalie Kishchuk: Research & Evaluation Inc. Evaluation of the Initiative on the New Economy (INE), Interim Findings Report, November 6, 2008, page 34.

specifically about innovation and creativity showed a similar demarcation between the programs: 63 per cent of SRG applicants, 82 per cent of RDI applicants and 67 per cent of non-applicants agreed that the respective programs were meeting this need. These results both reflect the emphasis on innovation in the RDI program and suggest that there is room for the SRG program to be more supportive of creativity and innovation in SSH research.

In support of this, some KIs—including grantees, external assessors, adjudicators and unsuccessful applicants—indicated that the SRG program has not been fully successful at meeting scholars' innovation and creativity needs. Several factors were cited as contributing to this. First among these was conservatism that, according to some KIs, including adjudication committee members, is inherent in SSHRC's peer review processes. Second, respondents observed that because access to SRG funds is so competitive, researchers play to their strengths in their applications, which limits innovation and risk-taking.

This view echoes the observation and recommendation of the Blue Ribbon Panel, which noted that "intensive competition and low rates of success are not especially conducive to risk-taking" and recommended that SSHRC "explore new mechanisms dedicated exclusively to the support of high-risk, path-breaking and transformative research, open to all domains of the humanities and social sciences. Set specific peer review rules and adjudication mechanisms accordingly."[18] As well, there is a perception among some adjudication committee members/chair KIs that SRG is a "one-size-fits-all model," with a corresponding fear that true diversity in research is not being expressed due to the inflexibility of the funding model. That is, because the amounts of SRG funding are limited, there is a perception among some in this KI group that researchers will play to their strengths in their applications, which limits growth and innovation. This may have implications for reactions to the new streamlined SSHRC program architecture. Overall, however, the results support a conclusion that these programs adequately support innovation and creativity in SSH research.

### *Amounts and duration of grants*

Applicants and other stakeholders generally consider the amount of the grants in both the SRG and RDI programs as appropriate. Among survey respondents, 76 per cent of SRG applicants, 80 per cent of RDI applicants, and 73 per cent and 60 per cent of non-applicants felt that the SRG and RDI programs were meeting needs for supplying

[18] Promoting Excellence in Research – An International Blue Ribbon Panel Assessment of Peer Review Practices at the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada p. 65. http://www.sshrc.ca/about-au_sujet/publications/peer-pairs_e.pdf

grants of varying size and length, respectively.

Respondents nonetheless felt that the issue of budget cuts made by committees was of concern. First, both grantees and university officials expressed frustration with the challenge of carrying out proposed research on lower-than-expected budgets. This was corroborated by lower levels of satisfaction among successful SRG applicants with the amount actually awarded (55% satisfied or very satisfied) versus the maximum potential size of the grant (72% satisfied or very satisfied), as demonstrated in Exhibit 3.5. Some participants in interviews and focus groups also indicated that statutory budget-cutting has led to statutory budget-padding.

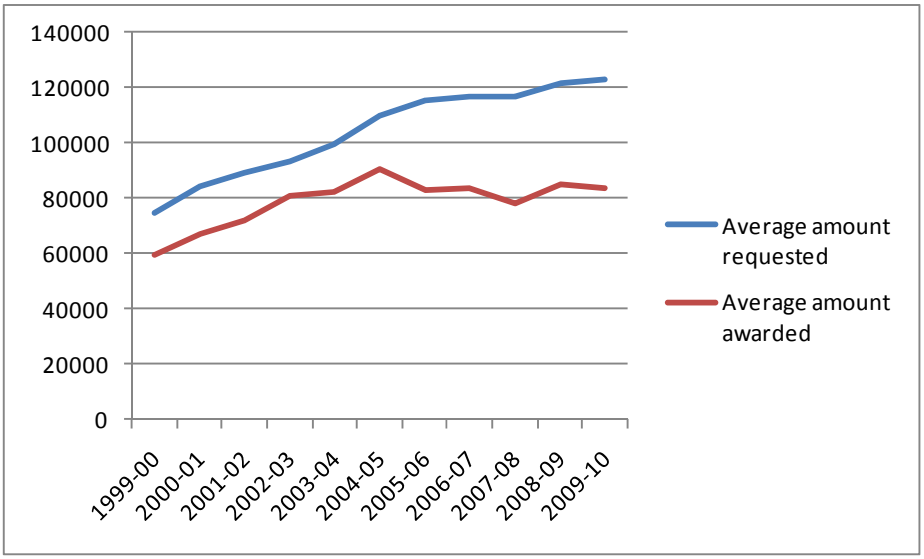
**Exhibit 3.5: Applicants' Satisfaction with SRG and RDI Program Delivery**

| Program and Program Component | SRG | | | RDI |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Successful | Unsuccessful | Total | Total |
| Maximum allowable grant size | 72% | 55% | 65% | 57% |
| Size of the grant amount actually awarded | 55% | n/a | 55% | 72% |
| Length of grant | 67% | 62% | 65% | 57% |
| Number of respondents | 817-890 | 350-377 | 822-1167 | 39-125 |

Percent indicating Satisfied and Very Satisfied
Source: SSHRC Applicant Survey

As Exhibit 3.6 shows, while both the amounts requested and awarded in SRGs have increased over the last decade, the amount awarded is consistently less than the request. Moreover, the proportion of requested funds awarded appears to have declined since 2004-05 (from 82 per cent of the amount requested awarded in that year to 68 per cent in 2009-10), perhaps as a response to the budget padding mentioned above. On average, SRG applicants can expect their budgets to be cut by about 30 per cent.

**Exhibit 3.6: Amount of Requested Funding Awarded, SRG 1999-00 to 2008-09**




Source: Year in numbers, 2008-09, Table 31b. Note that because the grants awarded are a subset of applications, they may not be completely comparable in terms of budgets.

In addition, SSHRC's analyses of student funding showed that when budgets are reduced, budgeted amounts for student involvement are cut to a larger degree than other areas of the grants' budgets. While SRG grantees were awarded 80 per cent of what they asked for, they disbursed just under 50 per cent of what they planned to spend on students; this reduction is even greater for RDI-supported students.

In general, the data suggest that some of the SSH research community often finds the SRG's three-year timeframe too short. Views in this direction were expressed by KIs, focus group participants, and survey respondents. Among surveyed SRG applicants, 65 per cent were satisfied or very satisfied with the grant duration. Many evaluation participants suggested that this timeframe may allow for data collection, but not analysis, reporting and knowledge translation, and that there is a need for more flexibility around the length of grants, ranging from two to five years. Note, however, that SSHRC allows automatic extension for one year, and has recently introduced a deferment policy when a sizeable amount of a grant has not been used.

### *Inter- and multidisciplinarity*

Inter- and multidisciplinarity in SSH research appear to be quite common. Sixty per cent of SRG applicants characterized their research as extremely or somewhat interdisciplinary, as did 78 per cent of RDI applicants and 63 per cent of non-applicants. Administrative data in AMIS, which asks applicants to identify their

research discipline, indicates that 10 per cent of SRG and 18 per cent of RDI applications are from researchers from interdisciplinary studies. This suggests that while a large proportion of applicants identify themselves with a single discipline, a sizeable proportion of applicants are undertaking research that spans more than one discipline.

There is some limited evidence[19] that need for support of interdisciplinary research is not being met as fully as possible. Among KI respondents, a few grantees and external assessors expressed the view that researchers' need for funding for inter- and multidisciplinary research is not being met. Focus group participants held divergent views, but they expressed concerns about challenges in achieving success through the interdisciplinary review committees, sometimes attributed to some adjudicators who do not fully understand the applications. On the other hand, respondents felt RDI was being supportive of interdisciplinarity and its associated risks, consistent with the higher proportion of RDI applicants who characterize their work as interdisciplinary.

The Blue Ribbon Report appears to confirm the need for added emphasis on the availability of interdisciplinary perspectives on committees. Given the high proportion of scholars who see their work as interdisciplinary and the increasing permeability of disciplinary boundaries in SSH in general, the panel questioned the need for an interdisciplinary review committee and argued that, "It would be a mistake to entertain the notion that committees ideally should exhibit purely disciplinary composition."[20]

[19] A better-rounded picture is not possible as this was not a major thrust of inquiry for the evaluation (but rather an issue that was raised by some evaluation participants in responding to the evaluation question regarding the degree to which the needs of researchers are being met). However, there were enough comments about the extent to which the programs are meeting needs in this area that it was felt it warranted a discussion.

[20] Blue Ribbon Panel report, p. 53. http://www.sshrc.ca/about-au_sujet/publications/peer-pairs_e.pdf

**Case study synopsis for the 2003 SRG: Women, the family and house churches in early Christianity**

This program of research "aims to shed light upon how women in house churches contributed to the development of early Christianity." For early Christian communities, the house was the physical meeting place, until approximately the end of the second century when houses began to be remodeled into buildings specifically for worship. The house and household life, specifically women's role as patrons, household leaders and teachers, is thus considered of paramount significance for study of early Christianity. The research explored how conventional aspects of women's existence in the family may have been crucial to early Christian growth and interaction with society.

The SRG has had notable academic and applied impact. Respondents explicitly noted that SSHRC funds invested in the research have handsomely paid off. The grantee's research has significantly contributed to the advancement of knowledge within the field of religious studies within academia, specifically the study of women and children in early Christianity, which have largely been neglected to date. As well, her work has crossed the line outside of academia through her involvement with numerous public institutions. Along those lines, the collaborative, interdisciplinary approach to the grantee's work has also led to more international exposure. Collaborations with world-renowned researchers have increased the international visibility of this work, facilitating the dissemination of her research. The grantee's funded research has been widely disseminated through academic publications, book chapters, conference presentations, and workshops, and has made a notable impact to advancing knowledge in the field of religious studies.

The grantee's program of research has significantly contributed to informing social, cultural and methodological change, as a result of disseminating to academic and non-academic audiences. The grantee's research situates religious topics within present day, making the research relevant for the everyday person. Her research has indirectly contributed to social policy on children, such as childhood education in the United States and marital legislation in Norway, and continues to be vitally important for women's studies.

The case study also found that the grantee has been very supportive and active in the development of highly qualified personnel throughout her career, as she has provided support and mentorship to a number of students both in Canada and internationallv.

### *Other areas of need*[21]

Interview and focus group participants identified other areas where they consider the SRG program is considered to be meeting scholars' needs to a lesser extent. These include the needs of scholars at small universities and scholars at new universities, where many scholars focus on teaching rather than research, and it was reported that there are few institutional supports for applying to research and incentive structures that point away from publication record for career advancement (and toward teaching, for example). The administrative data with regards to applications confirms that a small proportion of the applications to SRG are from small universities (13%). While this proportion is quite low, the percent of grants actually awarded to scholars from small universities is lower, at 9 per cent. Administrative data are not available for new universities.

[21] As with the discussion on interdisciplinarity, evaluation participants were not asked to comment directly on the degree to which the program is meeting needs in the areas mentioned below. The volume of comments (while only mentioned by a few) suggest that they are worthy of mention.

As well, respondents cited health research in social areas as an area of concern. Scholars in this zone appear to be struggling with the transition to funding from the Canadian Institutes for Health Research (CIHR).[22] Finally, while it was not directly within the scope of the evaluation, grantees expressed a great deal of dissatisfaction with the demise of Research Time Stipends (RTS).

## 3.3 Alternative Sources of Funding

**Evaluation Question A3:**
**Are there alternative private and public sources of funding for investigator-framed research in the SSH?**

**Findings for Question A3** :
Overwhelmingly, SSHRC is considered to be the most important source of funding for open research in SSH in Canada. Although alternatives exist and are used, they are not equivalent to SRG and RDI and do not fully meet needs in terms of supporting open, peer reviewed, disciplinary-based research.

***Alternative sources***

Practically all those consulted for the evaluation consider SSHRC as the most important source of funding for open research in SSH in Canada. Apart from the important role of SSHRC as an excellence-focused, arm's length delivery agent (discussed below), this is because there are few equivalent alternatives for scholars in SSHRC's constituencies. The document review identified some alternative private and public sources of funding for open research in SSH such as: SSHRC's other programs such as Community-University Research Alliances (CURA), Fonds québécois pour la recherche sur la société et la culture (FQRSC; available only in Québec), Canadian Foundation for Innovation (CFI), Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC) Discovery Grants program, Canadian Institutes for Health Research (CIHR), Canadian Health Services Research Foundation (CHSRF), the Canada Research Chairs program, Canadian Heritage, Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Donner

> "In terms of importance, I think that SSHRC is one of the most important [sources of funding] open to SSH."
> Unsuccessful applicant

[22] Note that a tri-council document has been posted to the SSHRC website that clearly outlines funding guidelines for health-related social research. The document "Selecting the Appropriate Federal Granting Agency" can be accessed at http://www.sshrc.ca/funding-financement/apply-demande/background-renseignements/selecting_agency-choisir_organisme_subventionnaire-eng.aspx

Canadian Foundation, and the Ontario Trillium Foundation.
Some international alternatives exist in the US, the UK and Australia, but often fund for shorter periods of time than SSHRC does and for one time only. These alternatives are highly competitive. In addition, some have residency requirements that make Canadian resident scholars ineligible.

Despite the appearance of the availability of alternative sources of funding, SRG appears to be the only national program in SSH supporting open, peer reviewed and disciplinary-based research. This was confirmed through interviews with adjudicators, external stakeholders, grantees, SSHRC personnel and university officials, who emphasized that other options tend not to be open or are more thematic, are smaller and may only support team-based research.

Scholars do appear to be aware of and availing themselves of alternative sources of research funding. Seventy-three per cent of SRG applicants, 74 per cent of RDI applicants and 74 per cent of non-applicants have applied to at least one alternative source of funding. For SRG applicants, the most frequently applied-to alternative programs are international (including the US) (45%), followed by provincial or regional (i.e., regions that cover more than one province) (34%), local (e.g., municipal foundations or governments) (22%) and university programs (20%). Successful SRG applicants were more likely to apply for funding from at least one other source (75%) than unsuccessful applicants (69%), suggesting that successful applicants are generally more active in seeking research funding. For RDI, the most frequently applied-to alternative programs are local (49%), followed by regional (29%) and international (26%). Non-applicants rated international and regional programs as their top funding sources.

### *SSHRC and federal roles*

The evaluation data suggest that the federal role in supporting open research in the social sciences is uncontested, as is SSHRC's role as the delivery agent for that funding. In surveys, 95 per cent of SRG applicants, 94 per cent of RDI applicants and 87 per cent of non-applicants to either program agreed that there was "definitely" a role for the federal government in supporting open research in the social sciences. Key informants of all types strongly concurred, with those in favour of a federal government role suggesting that open research is important to help identify important issues that underlie social problems, to reflect the diversity of cultures in Canada and to go beyond the short-term priorities of the government. While agreeing there is a federal government role to support open research, the majority of respondents also felt

that it also has a role in support of targeted research. The majority of grantee focus group respondents also felt that the federal government should continue to play a role in providing funding for open research in SSH, as the federal presence helps to support research culture within Canada and internationally. It was further noted that federal support for SSH disciplines is especially important because industry support is unavailable, as compared with natural and health sciences.

In key informant interviews and focus groups, participants expressed strong support for SSHRC's continued role as a delivery agent for open funding. They highlighted excellence in peer review, years of experience in delivery and national level review and competition as reasons for keeping SSHRC as the delivery agent. Respondents consistently pointed out that SSHRC carries a very strong reputation for funding research excellence in Canada. However, university officials, SSHRC personnel and external stakeholders were generally of the opinion that the arm's length relationship between the Government of Canada and SSHRC must be maintained, and, correspondingly, that decisions on which types of research to fund should be determined by social sciences and humanities scholars as opposed to government officials.

# 4.0 Findings Related to Design and Delivery

## 4.1 Support for a Coherent Suite of SSHRC Programs

**Evaluation Question B1:**
**To what extent does the design of the SRG and RDI Programs support a coherent suite of SSHRC programs?**

**Findings for Question B1:**
Generally, the findings from the evaluation support the assertion that the SRG and RDI program designs support a coherent suite of programs at SSHRC (e.g., application patterns suggest that RDI is seen as a one-time, early stage grant whereas SRG is viewed as a grant for more established researchers). Where overlap between SRG and RDI and between one program and another program (funded by SSHRC or another funding body) was identified, this overlap was not considered by most to be problematic because it appears to be only for research on the fringes of various fields.

Findings from the document review and interviews with SSHRC staff, adjudication committee members and grant holders indicate that the design of the SRG and RDI programs support a coherent suite of SSHRC programs. KIs in the aforementioned groups generally feel that there is no overlap between the SRG and RDI programs, and that the two programs fit neatly within a continuum of funding that ranges from post-doctoral fellowships, to RDI, to SRG, to Major Collaborative Research Initiative (MCRI). The general opinion seems to be that RDI and SRG complement each other. For projects of a larger scope, scholars have the option of applying for an MCRI.

> Researchers "innovate in RDI and consolidate their research in SRG."
> Adjudication Committee Member

Findings from the document review and interviews with knowledgeable respondents in the external stakeholder group indicated some degree of overlap between the RDI and SRG programs, and also between SSHRC, CIHR and NSERC, but this small overlap is not viewed as problematic, as it appears to be only for research on the fringes of fields. Importantly, recent revisions to the RDI program have led to a clearer distinction between RDI and SRG, although interview findings reveal some continuing confusion about the program objectives and design. While SSHRC offers development grants through Strategic Research programs, such as the Aboriginal

Research Program and the International Opportunities Fund, which are similar to RDI in terms of their objectives and funding mechanisms, their program foci and purposes are distinct from the RDI program. Note that there were many cases where the lack of awareness of RDI objectives and design prevented KIs from discussing that program's overall fit and degree of overlap.

SSHRC administrative data can shed some light on application patterns to RDI, SRG and other SSHRC programs, which can be used to draw findings regarding how RDI and SRG support a suite of programs at SSHRC. The analysis found that most (77%) scholars apply to RDI only once, whereas only 42 per cent of researchers apply to SRG only once. For those who have received an SRG, 32 per cent have applied for at least one additional SRG. Most (67%) SRG grantees have only received one SRG, 22 per cent have received two SRGs, and 10 per cent have received more than two SRGs.

A large majority (88%) of RDI grant holders have also applied to other SSHRC programs (and 38 per cent of grantees were successful). Conversely, about half (53%) of SRG grantees have also applied to other SSHRC programs. While almost half (46%) of RDI grantees have also applied to SRG, only 7 per cent of SRG grantees have applied to RDI. In terms of sequence, 79 per cent of RDI grantees applied to RDI before applying to any other SSHRC program. For SRG, 69 per cent of grantees applied to other SSHRC programs before applying to SRG (23%).

Thus, while it appears that RDI is seen as a one-time, early stage grant, and most RDI grantees have applied to other SSHRC programs (usually after they have received their RDI), SRG application patterns are reversed, but less stark. SRG has a higher rate of re-application and lower rates of applications to other programs (although, in absolute terms, still representing thousands of researchers who apply to SRG and other SSRHC programs) than RDI. Also, more SRG grantees apply to other programs before SRG than is the case for RDI.

**Case study synopsis for the 2003 SRG: Enseignement de la conception et techniques numériques : validation d'hypothèses fondant le développement des dispositifs cognitifs numériques pour l'apprentissage de la conception en architecture**

The grantee's grant history includes synergies between SSHRC (RDI and SRG) grants as well as grants from the government of Quebec. The grantee's SRG- and RDI-supported program of research: 1) contributed to knowledge advancement to the field of pedagogy in architecture, particularly relating to CAD; 2) informed cultural changes in the way computer-aided design (CAD) in architecture is taught at the university level; and 3) contributed extensively to the training of HQPs.

With respect to knowledge advancement, the grantee explained that this body of research would not have happened without SSHRC funding. The grantee believes SSHRC funding is essential to all research of this type in Canada. Furthermore, the grants received by the grantee were critical to building the Groupe de Recherche en CAO and other key collaborations.

Research findings produced by the grantee and his team have had limited distribution outside academia, although they have clearly influenced teaching at the university. The advances to knowledge and understanding made through their research are contributing to improved training of future professionals and have had an indirect impact on the use of CAD and, more importantly, the design of CAD software programs. In terms of the contribution to the development of HQP, the experiences gained through this project have been pivotal in helping launch the careers of young researchers. Furthermore, because the research occurred in a program that trains professionals, it allowed the development and testing of these theories to support professionals in developing their skills in a cutting edge area of their professional field.

# 4.2 Effectiveness of and Satisfaction with Delivery

**Evaluation Question B2:**
**To what extent are the SRG and RDI programs effectively delivered, as planned, and in accordance with international best practice? To what extent are RDI and SRG stakeholders satisfied with the delivery of the RDI and SRG programs?**

**Findings for Question B2:**
Generally, program applicants are more satisfied with SRG overall than RDI overall (68 per cent versus 56 per cent, respectively). Applicants to both programs rated the timing and the frequency of the application process highly (i.e., the annual process for SRG and the semi-annual process for RDI). SRG applicants were least satisfied with the ease of the application process, the size of the grant actually awarded and the nature of the interactions between applicants and SSHRC. RDI applicants were also least satisfied with the nature of interactions between applicants and SSRHC and also rated the ease of these same interactions quite low. Qualitative evidence was generally more positive; recommendations for improvement centred around the application process, the size and length of the grants, and increasing the chances of success for less experienced

applicants, francophone applicants, applicants from smaller schools and interdisciplinary applicants.

The evaluation did not find any evidence to suggest that the SRG and RDI programs are not being delivered as planned. The peer review process of the SRG and RDI programs are generally effectively delivered as planned and in accordance with international best practice according to the Blue Ribbon Panel (2008).[23] Otherwise, no significant findings were made regarding the extent to which the SRG and RDI programs are being delivered as planned and in accordance with international best practice.

Exhibit 4.1 presents the findings from the survey with regards to applicants' opinions of the delivery of the SRG and RDI. Over two-thirds (68%) of the survey respondents (n=1,167) were satisfied or very satisfied with SRG program. By contrast, only a slight majority (56%) of survey respondents (n=115) were satisfied with the RDI program.

SRG applicants were most satisfied with the fact that the application process is annual, the two selection criteria, the appropriateness of the weighting for new scholars and the date for application submission. Interestingly, satisfaction was higher among new scholars than regular scholars regarding the appropriateness of the weighting for new scholars (87 per cent versus 77 per cent for successful new and regular scholars, respectively). Similarly, regular scholars were more satisfied with the appropriateness of the criteria for regular scholars than new scholars (76 per cent versus 66 per cent for successful regular and new scholars, respectively).

[23] Promoting Excellence in Research – An International Blue Ribbon Panel Assessment of Peer Review Practices at the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (2008). Retrieved November 6, 2009 from http://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/about-au_sujet/publications/peer-pairs_e.pdf.

**Exhibit 4.1: Applicants' Satisfaction with SRG and RDI Program Delivery**

| Program and Program Component | SRG | | | RDI |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Successful | Unsuccessful | Total | Total |
| Overall satisfaction | 85% | 38% | 68% | 56% |
| Application process is annual (SRG)/semi-annual (RDI) | 77% | 66% | 73% | 72% |
| Appropriateness of the two/five selection criteria (SRG/RDI) | 86% | 51% | 72% | 63% |
| Appropriateness of the weighting of selection criteria for new scholars (SRG) | 79% | 53% | 69% | n/a |
| Date(s) for submission deadlines | 74% | 57% | 68% | 68% |
| Maximum allowable grant size | 72% | 55% | 65% | 57% |
| Length of grant | 67% | 62% | 65% | 57% |
| Clarity of the application process | 68% | 50% | 61% | 57% |
| Ease of interactions between applicants and SSHRC | 68% | 47% | 60% | 53% |
| Appropriateness of the weighting of selection criteria for regular scholars (SRG) | 73% | 38% | 60% | n/a |
| Nature of the interactions between applicants and SSHRC | 68% | 38% | 56% | 51% |
| Size of the grant amount actually awarded | 55% | n/a | 55% | 72% |
| Ease of the application process | 60% | 38% | 52% | 60% |
| Number of respondents | 817-890 | 350-377 | 822-1167 | 39-125 |

Percent indicating Satisfied and Very Satisfied
Source: SSHRC Applicant Survey

For their part, RDI applicants were also most satisfied with the fact that their application process is semi-annual and with the dates for the application submissions. Unlike SRG successful applicants, RDI successful applicants were quite satisfied with the size of the grant actually awarded (72 per cent indicating they were satisfied or very satisfied compared to 55 per cent of SRG grantees).

The areas receiving the lowest satisfaction among SRG applicants (including successful and unsuccessful) included ease of the application process (52 per cent satisfied or very satisfied) (while clarity of the application process received higher satisfaction, it was nonetheless lower than overall satisfaction), size of the grant actually awarded (55 per cent satisfied or very satisfied) and the nature of the interactions[24] between applicants and SSHRC (56 per cent satisfied or very satisfied). The lowest satisfaction ratings among RDI applicants varied somewhat, although they also gave low satisfaction ratings for the nature of interactions between applicants and SSHRC (51 per cent satisfied or very satisfied), as well as the ease of interactions

[24] While not specifically defined in the survey questionnaire, the nature of interactions with SSHRC are intended to refer to the content/topic, type, timing, frequency and/or method of contact with SSHRC.

between applicants and SSHRC (53 per cent satisfied or very satisfied).

For SRG, there were a number of areas where satisfaction varied by quite a large margin between successful and unsuccessful applicants. Those where ratings differed by more than 25 percentage points included appropriateness of the weighting criteria for regular scholars, appropriateness of the two selection criteria, nature of interactions between applicants and SSHRC and the appropriateness of the weighting criteria for new scholars.

With respect to RDI and SRG stakeholders' satisfaction with the delivery of the programs, respondents from all KI groups and the majority of focus group participants in Halifax, Montreal and Toronto appeared to be generally satisfied with the delivery of both programs. (Notably, only a few focus group participants across cities could identify areas for improvement for the delivery of SRG or RDI programs, which suggests that most were satisfied.)

While non-applicant survey respondents were not asked to comment on the delivery of the programs directly, they were asked about the barriers they perceive to applying for a grant. These findings are interesting as they help to contextualize the experience of applicants. Non-applicants highlighted the ease of the application process as being a barrier to them applying to both SRG and RDI (mentioned by 29 per cent of respondents for SRG and by 22 per cent for RDI). The appropriateness of the weighting of the selection criteria for regular scholars was the next most commonly cited barrier (20%) for non-applicants considering applying to SRG. Non-applicants also cited concerns with the appropriateness of the selection criteria overall (18 per cent for SRG and 15 per cent for RDI). Exhibit 4.2 presents other findings related to barriers highlighted by non-applicants.

**Exhibit 4.2: Barriers Cited by Non-Applicants in Applying to SRG and RDI**

| Program and Program Component | SRG | RDI |
|---|---|---|
| | % | % |
| Ease of the application process | 29.2 | 22.1 |
| Appropriateness of the weighting of selection criteria for regular scholars (SRG) | 19.9 | n/a |
| Appropriateness of the two/five selection criteria (SRG/RDI) | 17.6 | 14.8 |
| Date(s) for submission deadlines | 16.2 | 10.7 |
| Clarity of the application process | 13.4 | 10.7 |
| Application process is annual (SRG)/semi-annual (RDI) | 10.2 | 4.1 |
| Appropriateness of the weighting of selection criteria for new scholars (SRG) | 9.7 | n/a |
| Ease of interactions between applicants and SSHRC | 6.0 | 10.7 |
| Nature of the interactions between applicants and SSHRC | 5.6 | 9.0 |
| Length of grant | 3.2 | 4.1 |
| Maximum allowable grant size | 0.5 | 8.2 |
| Lack of familiarity with the program | 13.4 | 23.0 |
| None | 15.3 | 17.2 |
| Other (e.g., low chance of winning because of criteria or their area of research, time to prepare an application) | 31.9 | 27.9 |
| Don't know | 6.0 | 9.8 |
| Number of respondents | n=216 | n=122 |

Source: Survey of non-applicants
Multiple responses allowed

The Blue Ribbon Panel, adjudication committee members, focus group participants, and KIs from the groups comprised of university officials, grantees, adjudicators, unsuccessful applicants/non-applicants, external assessors and representatives from other funding agencies made recommendations for improvement. Common recommendations included:

- Having more transparent processes (e.g., greater transparency in the scoring process);
- Reducing workloads for adjudication committee members;
- Developing a common curriculum vitae format across the tri-council granting bodies;
- Allowing for more rounds of applications;
- Distributing smaller grants to more researchers;
- Increasing the length of SRG projects (e.g., from a potential maximum of four years—including the year allowed for project extensions—to a potential

maximum of five years); and

- Increasing the chances of success for less experienced applicants, francophone applicants, applicants from smaller schools and interdisciplinary applicants.

## 4.3 Effectiveness of the Final Research Report Tool/Use of Information

**Evaluation Question B3:**
**To what extent is the Final Research Report (FRR) an effective tool for capturing performance information on the results and outcomes of SRG and RDI grants? To what extent is this information being used to inform program decision making and meet other organizational needs?**

**Findings for Question B3**:
There are a number of areas for improvement for the FRR as an effective tool in terms of the information it captures (especially with respect to partnerships, longer-term impacts, level of detail regarding outputs and roles of students) and how it is used within SSRHC for performance monitoring, compliance and decision-making. Reporting tools for other funding bodies have been reviewed by SSHRC and the findings from this study are generally consistent with those of the evaluation. SSHRC has developed a strategy for addressing the FRR's shortfalls.

According to a study by David Phipps[25], research summaries as captured through SSHRC's FRR are not useful or relevant to non-academic decision-makers. Corroboratively, almost all KIs who commented on the FRR felt that it is not an effective tool for capturing performance information on the results and outcomes of SRG and RDI grants. Some of these KIs commented that researchers are asked to complete the FRR too soon after research has been completed. Some also implied that, by primarily focusing on the publications and conferences that have resulted from SRG-/RDI-funded research (i.e., the outputs of the grant), the FRR is failing to fully reflect the benefits and outcomes of the research being produced. The expert panel review of FRRs confirmed this to some extent. They found that there was limited information about the extent and nature of student involvement, the nature and characteristics of conferences at which grant-supported presentations were made, the role of collaborators and partners and the linkages between funds from other sources and grant-supported research activities (when and as appropriate).

[25] Phipps, D. (2009). Evaluating the production, utility and dissemination of social sciences and humanities research summaries.

SSHRC KIs stated that the FRR is not currently being used with respect to programming, but rather is only being used for indicators of performance and for program evaluation by the evaluation group at SSHRC (insofar as the FRR allows for an assessment of outputs). Furthermore, according to these KIs, program officers do not typically review FRRs; instead, reports are reportedly only received and filed.

A number of best practices can be adopted from other funding agencies, such as extending the time when the FRR is submitted and having the FRR reviewed by external reviewers.

Revising the FRR was identified as a SSHRC corporate priority for 2010[26]. In January, SSHRC completed a diagnosis study of the FRR. This study included a comparative analysis of reporting policies among 12 granting councils (including SSHRC) in Canada and abroad. The resulting report concluded "SSHRC's current FRR is moderately adequate in that it captures output and basic outcomes/impact information."[27] Moreover, the report also indicated that, "[i]n comparison to the eleven other granting councils that were part of the comparative analysis, SSHRC's current FRR can be considered among best practice."[28]

While seemingly contradictory, the focus of the conclusions of the diagnostic report is on the content of the FRR, rather than its usefulness for decision making (which is the main criticism of Phipps and KIs). In fact, the diagnostic confirms the evaluation findings that, while used for program evaluation purposes at SSHRC, "[t]o a lesser extent, the information contained in the FRRs is used as a data source for policy development or ongoing program-level performance measurement."

With respect to content, the diagnostic report also confirms that there are opportunities for improvement, especially with respect to the impact section and the partnerships section. Members of the expert panel also mentioned this latter point in terms of areas where additional information could be sought to improve the FRR.

[26] SSHRC, Final Research Report Diagnosis and Recommendations, January 2010, page 2.
[27] Ibid., page 11.
[28] Ibid.

# 4.4 Cost-efficiency of Delivery

**Evaluation Question B4:**
**Are the SRG and RDI programs delivered in a cost-efficient manner?**

**Findings for Question B4**:
The benchmarking review found that the programs are generally being delivered in a cost-efficient manner, with the main drivers of efficiency being the ratio of applications to program officers, given the review mechanisms that are in place (e.g., with or without external reviewers). Comparison to other programs with somewhat different review mechanisms suggested that SRG and RDI are in an expected range of administrative efficiency. Other lines of evidence pointed out a number of possible cost-saving measures. However, the introduction of additional cost-saving measures—in particular eliminating external reviews for the SRG—combined with a high number of applications assigned to each program officer could risk decreasing the overall quality of the programs' delivery.

The SRG and RDI programs use somewhat different peer review processes, which affect the level of resources (in particular, the amount of program officer time) required to review each application. Specifically, RDI does not use external reviews, while SRG aims to have two external reviews per application with the reviewers identified and solicited by program officers according to the specific content expertise required. Accordingly, the per-application administration costs of SRG are about 15 per cent higher than those of RDI. Over and above this main difference, the benchmarking review found that the main driver of efficiency for the SRG and RDI programs is the number of applications received in any one year. Because there are increasing numbers of applications each year while the number of staff members remains relatively constant (due to the delays in hiring to meet the demand), there is cost-efficiency, but the impact this is having on the amount of time that can be spent on each application is unclear.

A comparison of SRG and RDI with NSERC's Discovery Grants program points to higher per-application costs, again associated with differences in the peer review processes. For example, in 2008-09, the SRG program's non-salary costs were 0.79 per cent of the total grant funds awarded and the RDI program's were 0.43 per cent, compared to 0.35 per cent for the NSERC program. However, in the latter, peer review committee members and not program officers select external reviewers and write committee comments, displacing some of the administrative burden carried by SSHRC staff in SRG to the institutions who supply the reviewers' time. The review

also found that the per-application administration costs of RDI and SSHRC's International Opportunities Fund (IOF), considered by SSHRC to be a comparable program to RDI in terms of review processes, were comparable.

Although documents clearly indicate that delivering the SRG and RDI programs in a cost-efficient manner is important to SSHRC, few documents could be found to directly address this question. In line with the findings above, a 2006 study[29] indicated that SRG costs could be reduced by eliminating external assessments and replacing them with more expert committees. This recommendation, however, was based on many assumptions and unknown variables.

The KIs who were in a position to answer this question generally indicated that the SRG and RDI programs are being delivered in a cost-efficient manner, as evidenced by the cost-saving online application process and by the use of teleconferencing in the adjudication process, for example. However, some KIs in the SSHRC and adjudication groups indicated that excessive cost-efficiency might do the programs more harm than good, possibly resulting in unwanted consequences (e.g., decreased effectiveness) and/or a forfeiture of quality. For example, savings could be realized by having only one competition per year instead of two, but this would likely result in (a) a less comfortable timing scheme for potential RDI applicants, and (b) scholars' reduced ability to "catch the wave," (i.e., to gain an advantage by becoming involved with the most current issues of the times). Correspondingly, KIs noted that money would certainly be saved if there were no external assessments—thus echoing the findings from the benchmarking and document review—but this would be a "huge compromise on the overall rigour of the selection process."

Overall, a reduction in SRG peer review costs of about 15 per cent would bring them in line with those of RDI and IOF. This could be accomplished by eliminating or streamlining the external review process, and/or by increasing program officers' application workload. However, the findings suggest that SRG and RDI are both in an expected range of administrative efficiency and delivery quality, given the peer review mechanism that are judged to be most acceptable for them. Thus, neither of these options is recommended.

[29] Natalie Kishchuk (2006). Feasibility Study on Tools and Mechanisms to Deliver Type A and Type B Research Grants—Interim Report: Identification of Issues and Data Sources.

# 5.0 Findings Related to Success

## 5.1 Achievement of Outcomes

**Evaluation Question C1:**
**To what extent did RDI support new and innovative research development ideas as intended in program objectives?**

**Findings for Question C1:**
Overall, findings from all lines of evidence suggest that RDI did support new and innovative research development ideas, although the assessments from the expert panel were not overwhelmingly positive (this was explained in part due to the difficultly to assess the degree of newness and innovativeness in the FRRs).

**What is "new and innovative?"**
Respondents were posed this question during interviews and focus groups. Responses largely fell into three main areas:

1. Research that pushes methodological approaches beyond the traditional boundaries (including forming new partnerships in research).
2. Research that represents new thematic approaches and new questions; research questions that are variations on approaches to a problem.
3. Taking knowledge into new areas; reaching out to new populations.

Overall, findings from all lines of evidence suggest that RDI did support new and innovative research development ideas. From the survey of applicants, all respondents (100%) who had received an RDI grant reported that the RDI grant they had received from SSHRC in the past had supported a new and innovative idea (or ideas) to some or a large extent (89 per cent said to a large extent).

Similarly, RDI focus group respondents in both cities where they were consulted (Toronto and Montreal) agreed that the RDI program supports new and innovative research. Some focus group respondents in Montreal specifically described the RDI program as a vehicle to explore new theories and methodologies, and that RDI grants are often the only entry point for new researchers.

Finally, the case study cross-case analysis revealed that all of the case studies where an RDI had been received showed evidence that the RDI program supported the development of new and innovative research development ideas. These new and innovative ideas included a large database of information related to the Arctic, a workplace environmental audit tool and the application of the Adaptive Ecosystem Approach to a developing country.

**Case study synopsis for the 2001 RDI: An Adaptive Ecosystem Approach to Managing Urban Environments for Human Health**

The research of this new scholar grantee focused on the application of adaptive ecosystems approaches and complexity theory to environmental issues, with a focus on the developing world. The RDI has had important impacts both in and outside of academia as well as demonstrating innovation. As well, there have been significant synergies between this RDI funding and additional funding the grantee leveraged to continue this important research.

The impact of the work is evident in its direct impacts in academia as well as in real-world situations but will continue to resonate through the important student and HQP training components of his work. His research has helped advance knowledge on the effective aspects of adaptive ecosystem approaches, especially as these related to health. The results of this research have been disseminated widely to academic and non-academic audiences including students as well as HQPs, other researchers (both in Canada and internationally), as well as NGOs. The work has led to many publications in peer-reviewed journals as well as the organization of a conference, additional conference presentations, invited addresses, and non-academic publications (e.g., research papers for NGOs).

Dissemination within academia has led to further knowledge development as students and other researchers use the findings, techniques and approaches developed through this research and find new ways of applying these. For example, the development work training opportunities provided to students (through internships as well as training through IDRC) has allowed greater numbers of HQPs with an understanding of how these approaches apply to international development work. Some of these students are now currently working on graduate research related to this research or are applying the skills in the area of international development.

The results of this research have been disseminated to NGOs and will continue to influence their work as well as the creation of policy (in Canada and abroad) which will likely have a positive impact on both the environment and the health of populations. It was evident that this research continues to be used as a concrete example of the applied use of this approach and will thus continue to have an impact on the training of HQPs.

The grantee indicated that SSHRC RDI funding was essential to the achievement of the outcomes described in this report. According to the grantee, this research would not have happened without this funding. Further, it is evident that his work has had an influence on the lives of slum residents of the community.

KI interviewees also generally felt that RDI supports new and innovative research development ideas: most KIs from most respondent groups (including university officials, grantees, unsuccessful applicants, non-applicants, SSHRC respondents) believed that the RDI program has supported new and innovative research development ideas to a large extent.

From the expert panel, the overall assessment of RDIs is that new and innovative research development ideas had been supported to a medium degree. Of the 21 RDI FRRs that were reviewed, only two grants met this outcome to a high degree, whereas 11 RDIs met this outcome to a medium degree. Another 8 RDIs received an assessment of "low degree." Expert panel members explained the moderate to low assessments as being due, in part, to the fact that members felt it was difficult to assess the RDI FRRs because the original/innovative aspects of the work were not

always clearly identified in the FRRs, and it was at times difficult to see what some projects could lead to in the future. Nonetheless, members unanimously indicated that RDI offers good investments for SSHRC.

KI respondents also offered more nuanced perspectives on the matter. A few KIs from universities felt that the low level of understanding regarding RDI's objectives (among scholars and universities) may reduce its ability to fully facilitate this type of initiative. As well, respondents in the unsuccessful applicant group, in particular, indicated that RDI was too risk-adverse to be truly innovative. And while the opinions of the latter group may be construed as biased, most adjudication committee chairs/members who responded to this question confirmed the importance of having adjudication committee members who are willing to take risks.

> "In order for truly innovative research to be funded, committee members must be willing to take risks and fund research where outcomes are uncertain."
> SRG Committee Member

**Evaluation Question C2:**
**To what extent did RDI supported research development activities contribute to the development of mature research proposals, funded by SSHRC or other funding agencies? To what extent did the SRG supported research activities and outputs contribute to new research proposals, funded by SSHRC or other funding agencies?**

**Findings for Question C2:**
Overwhelmingly, the evidence from all lines of evidence suggests that RDI-supported research activities do contribute to the development of mature research proposals and that, similarly, SRG-supported research activities do contribute to new research proposals.

Survey results illustrate that this outcome has been achieved for most grantees. According to RDI respondents, close to 89 per cent reported that the RDI grant had resulted in a mature research proposal, and 85 per cent said new research proposals were developed based on the activities of the original grant (both to some or a large extent). Similarly, almost all SRG respondents (90%) indicated that new research proposals were based on the activities of the original SRG grant.

These findings are supported by all lines of evidence. For example, case study findings indicate that all four RDI grants led to the development of subsequent research proposals (of which three cases found these research proposals had been funded by SSHRC and/or other sources). Case study findings also indicate that, in six

out of seven cases that had SRG grants, researchers subsequently went on to develop new research proposals, all of which had been successfully funded by SSHRC and/or other sources.

**Case study synopsis for the 1999 SRG: La question du père dans la fiction québécoise contemporaine: analyse féministe comparative de la production masculine et féminine, 1975-2000**

This project analyzed models of fatherhood in literature by Québec writers, aiming to uncover how ideas about gender relations and identity related to fatherhood are expressed in contemporary Québecois novels. This work was an expansion of a previous major study, funded by a SSHRC New Scholar grant (1991) and is also connected to work currently being conducted with colleagues for another Standard Research Grant (2006).

In terms of impact, while the grantee and her students are convinced that literature can change the world, they acknowledge that this happens in an indirect way. Indeed, the grantee's view is that literature does not aim to incite social change. However, through the critical analysis supported by these SRG grants, a vision of society is reflected back to itself, and those who are of the mind to do so will take that reflection and apply it to thinking about, and perhaps militating for, alternative visions. These scholars are not convinced that the political class is very interested in their work and its implications, but they are nonetheless optimistic that this SSHRC-funded work has the potential to nudge, if not propel, the world down a better path.

Findings from the grantee's work have been disseminated widely to national and international academic audiences. She and her students are continuing to produce outputs that have the potential to inform social and cultural change, and hope that audiences outside of academic circles become aware, if only indirectly, of the implications of their work for furthering social development toward egalitarianism.

This body of work has contributed to the training of 12 students and fellows in the innovative literary analysis approaches developed by the grantee. The students interviewed noted that opportunities afforded to work on SSHRC-funded research in literature are rare, and this experience had contributed invaluable preparation for their future careers in research and teaching.

In the grantee's view, SSHRC's contribution to the production of these advances in knowledge was indispensable. Without this support, it would not have been possible to realize the theoretical and methodological advances that this work has produced.

Focus group respondents and KI interviewees confirmed these findings from case studies. Of those KIs who indicated that SRG-supported activities and outputs had contributed to new research proposals to a large extent, there was general consensus that scholars naturally identify new questions and ideas about what needs to be investigated as a function of the growth of their SRG-funded research, leading to new research proposals. A few focus group and interview respondents expressed some concern that research proposals require a significant time investment and that it is not always possible for researchers to apply for funding every three years (as suggested by

> There is a "tremendous amount of pressure from the universities for one to continue and expand on one's research program. Even if they don't take you on as full-time staff, they still expect you to continue, so I would imagine that SRG grant holders often develop new research proposals."
> SRG grantee interview respondent

SRG's three-year funding cycle) due to teaching and personal commitments. Some grantees (in focus groups and interviews) also indicated that there is an expectation that they will continue their research program and thus continue to develop new research proposals.

**Evaluation Question C3:**
**To what extent did research activities supported by SRG and RDI grants contribute to high quality research tools and high quality research outputs demonstrating knowledge advancement in all disciplines and areas of the SSH?**

**Findings for Question C3**:
The evaluation found that research activities supported by SRG and RDI are contributing to both a high volume of and high-quality research outputs (including mostly conference papers and articles). There is less direct evidence of research tools being developed. Knowledge advancement is demonstrated through influence of the research on Canadian and international scholars (although this is reportedly occurring to a lesser extent for RDI). SRG appears to have a positive impact on the quality of outputs for new scholars (this relationship could not be proven for regular scholars). The most commonly cited factors influencing success appear to be access to/amount of funding, access to/skills of students and dedicated time available to focus on research.

Generally, the evaluation found that the SRG- and RDI-supported research activities contributed to the development of high-quality research outputs and tools. The analysis of the FRRs and the survey in particular provide strong evidence this is occurring.

***Production of research outputs and tools***

The analysis of FRRs, the survey of grantees and the bibliometric study all confirmed that SRG and RDI grantees produced a large number of research outputs. SRG grantees, in particular, appear to be quite productive in the development of outputs. There is less evidence of the production of research tools, although qualitative evidence suggests this is also occurring, but to a lesser extent (see below).

The analysis of FRRs, for example, found that 23,367 outputs were reported from SRG research projects, for an average of 14.8 outputs per grant. The range of reported outputs per grant was vast: from 1 to 135 outputs. For RDI, the production of outputs was slightly lower, with a total of 713 outputs reported for an average of 10.3 reported outputs per grant. The range, while smaller than for SRG, was still quite large: from 1

to 57 outputs.

SRG grantees reported a fairly narrow range of types of outputs, with almost two-thirds of all outputs being a conference paper (28.3%), peer reviewed article in a research journal (23%) or a book chapter (14.3%). There was greater variation in the outputs reported by RDI grantees, although they too cited conference papers and peer reviewed articles the most often (21.2% and 18%, respectively). Please refer to Exhibit 5.1 below for these and other details.

According to the survey of grantees, large proportions of respondents reported that they had produced new findings (as they had originally expected in their proposal) (99% SRG grantees; 92% RDI grantees). The survey also found that unexpected research outputs were realized by a large majority of grantees (88% SRG grantees; 73% RDI grantees).

**Exhibit 5.1: Research Outputs Reported by SRG and RDI Grantees in FRRs**

| Research Contributions | SRG | | RDI | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Number | % of total | Number | % of total |
| Conference paper | 6 608 | 28.3% | 151 | 21.2% |
| Peer reviewed article in research journal | 5 376 | 23% | 134 | 18% |
| Article in popular media, trade journal, or web | 1170 | 5% | 134 | 5% |
| Book chapter | 3 340 | 14.3% | 67 | 9.3% |
| Media, radio, television, public lecture | 2188 | 9.4% | 78 | 11% |
| Book | 1880 | 8.0% | 68 | 9.5% |
| Other academic output | 620 | 2.7% | 20 | 2.8% |
| Audio, film, video, CD, multimedia, website | 277 | 1.2% | 43 | 6% |
| Thesis | 249 | 1.07% | 9 | 1.3% |
| Reports | 242 | 1.04% | 30 | 4.2% |
| Development of policies and programs, advisory, consulting | 212 | 0.9% | 9 | 1.3% |
| Exhibition catalogue | 13 | 0.06% | n/a | n/a |
| Textbook | 16 | 0.1% | n/a | n/a |
| Instrument or equipment | 13 | 0.06% | 1 | 0.2% |
| Other | 1155 | 4.9% | 73 | 10.2% |
| No response | 4 | 0 | n/a | n/a |

Source: FRR Analysis

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The bibliometric study looked at research output production for SRG grantees only.[30] In terms of the degree to which SRG funding contributed to increasing the scientific performance of supported research in terms of their number of published journal articles, the absence of a control group makes it difficult to understand the relative impact of SRG. For regular scholars, the scientific production was not significantly higher while they were supported by the SRG program compared to when they were not. For new scholars, the scientific production was significantly higher while they were supported by the SRG program compared to when they were not. This difference could be the result of the SRG program or of the usual increase observed in the production of young and promising researchers early in their career. At this time, there is not enough evidence to conclude that SRG funding contributed to increasing the scientific performance of new scholars in terms of their number of published journal articles. More investigations are required to rule out alternative factors that could have resulted in the observed patterns of scientific production.

The case studies and KI interviews also revealed some evidence that research tools are being produced. Some KIs from the stakeholder groups comprised of university officials, grantees and external stakeholders were able to identify tools that have resulted from SRG and RDI research (including tools that guide decision procedures, urban planning tools, manuals, software tools, financial models, databases, bibliographies, contractual forms, and formulae (e.g., formulae for pricing financing instruments)). In addition, two of the eight case studies resulted in new tools. One is a tool for environmental auditing that is being used by the research team in undertaking workplace audits to help organizations make improvements in terms of environmental sustainability and efficiency. Another tool identified in case studies is an online database of cultural items, which details the social history of the Inuit and the eastern Arctic. Anyone wishing to learn more about this social history can use the database, including scholars and other research users. One specific example of how the database has been used includes its role in shaping housing policy in the north.

***Quality of research outputs and tools demonstrating knowledge advancement***

The quality of research outputs and tools was assessed by looking at influence within scholarly audiences (as measured by assessments by the expert panel, perceptions of grantees and an analysis of citations via the bibliometric study) and perceptions of

[30] It is important to recall that a large proportion of the knowledge produced in SSH is published in books and other types of documents (estimated to be between 40% and 60%) and these were not covered in the bibliometric study (only peer reviewed journal articles were considered). As well, since the coverage of the humanities in the Scopus database appears to be incomplete, no conclusions could be made regarding the effect of the SRG program on the research output of humanities scholars. Finally, in the absence of a control group, it is not possible to say with certainty the level of attribution of SRG to the production of research outputs.

quality via interviews.

The expert panel members concluded that the recipients of SRGs performed well. Almost one-half of grants assessed were deemed to have performed at excellent (17% or n=13 of 79) or very good levels (29% or n=23 of 79). Another sizeable proportion of the grants were assessed at good (30% or n=24 of 79). Another 17% (n=13 of 79) FRRs were considered to be fair and 8% (n=6 of 79) were rated as poor.

> Members were unanimous in their assessment that [the SRG] represented very good investments for SSHRC.
> Expert Panel Final Report

From the survey of grantees, a large majority of SRG grantee survey respondents reported that publications or other outputs from the grant had influenced other scholars, either internationally (86%) or those based in Canada (80%). A smaller proportion of RDI survey respondents felt that the publications and other outputs produced from the grant had influenced scholars in Canada and internationally (60% for both). Thus, while knowledge advancement appears to be quite high among SRG grantees, it appears to be a bit lower for RDI grantees.

The bibliometric study assessed the quality of research outputs in two ways: the impact of the research outputs related to the average Canadian SSH output; and the increase in scientific performance of supported researchers in terms of the scientific impact of their journal articles.

With respect to the first area (whether research outputs produced with SRG support are of high impact relative to the average Canadian SSH output), the study found that regular scholars supported by the SRG program (including both SRG-supported and non-supported papers) stand out in terms of their overall scientific impact as measured by citations received, compared to the average Canadian scholar. However, the papers authored by regular scholars that were produced with SRG support did not have significantly more impact (in terms of the impact of the journals in which papers were published) than the average Canadian journal article. New scholars, however, produced papers (including both SRG-supported and non-supported papers) that do not differ significantly from the Canadian average in terms of impact. This is not necessarily a negative finding, since it would not be expected that new scholars would have a higher level of scientific impact than established scholars. In fact, since new scholars would be expected to have lower than average impact scores, that they do not differ from the average suggests that SRG-supported new scholars are able to overcome some of the systematic disadvantages that lead to lower levels of citation early in their careers. As well, the bibliometric assessment also found that new

scholars published their SRG-supported papers in journals that have, on average, a significantly higher impact factor compared to the journals in which other Canadian papers were published. These results suggest that the SRG program helped new scholars produce papers that meet higher standards of quality than the average Canadian researcher in SSH.

With respect to the second area (scientific performance of supported researchers in terms of the scientific impact of their journal articles), the papers produced by regular scholars while they were supported by the SRG program do not have significantly more scientific impact (in terms of both citations and the impact of the journals that published the papers) than those authored while they were not receiving financial support from this program.[31] However, the impact of new scholars' supported papers was higher than that of their unsupported papers, and the difference was nearly significant in SSH. This suggests that the SRG program helps new scholars produce papers that meet higher standards of quality. Recall that, in the absence of a control group, it is difficult to assess the degree of attribution to the SRG program.

**Case study synopsis for the 2003 RDI: "The social history of the Eastern Arctic: an on-line data base," and three separate SRGs, including "Inuit Relocation and Resettlement in the Eastern Arctic" (1987-1990), "Historical relations of health care in the Eastern Arctic: health care policy implications" (1998-2003), and "Iglurjuaq' in transition: an historical analysis of Inuit housing policy" (2006-2009)**

This work is aimed at documenting, analyzing and redressing colonial operations and their impacts on the people, systems and services of the Arctic.

This body of work has produced major advances in knowledge about the Inuit and the colonial legacy, in ways that have resonance both historically and in terms of the contemporary social issues being lived in Nunavut. This work has been far-ranging, covering many aspects of society and development in the Eastern Arctic as well as the north more generally. The view of the grantee and of all those interviewed for this case study was that this work could not have happened without SSHRC. While other sources of funding have been available, SSHRC has consistently provided core funding.

In terms of the development of HQP, RDI- and SRG-funded projects have enabled training of both Inuit and non-Inuit students in both social work and other disciplines. Through these experiences, students have not only gained specific skills for conducting research in the North, but have benefitted from new understandings of themselves and of their roles. For some, this experience has been transformational.

Overall, this body of work—carried out through a series of interconnected SRG and RDI grants—has had vast impacts on both scholarly work and applications to social policy and debate related to the impacts of colonialism on the people of the Arctic. The implications of this work are far-reaching, extending beyond the experience of colonialism in northern Canada, to any settings with a colonial history and indeed, to any setting where issues of social injustice and inequity are present—most, if not all of the world. This work has had repercussions in a highly varied range of research domains, from suicide, to childbearing, to housing, to mineral exploration… to name only those covered in this case study. The work is unusually strongly linked to not only informing social and cultural change, but also to effecting change directly, through translation of research findings into action on policy development. It is safe to say that this work has already had significant positive impacts on the lives of Canadians.

Findings from qualitative lines of evidence also support the assertion that SRG and RDI grants produced high quality research outputs and tools. For example, all eight case studies found that research activities supported by SRG and/or RDI funding contributed to high-quality research tools and high-quality research outputs demonstrating knowledge advancement. (High-quality research outputs included journal articles, book chapters and conference presentations. High-quality research tools produced include a large database and an environmental audit tool.) The users of the outputs/tools were consulted in follow-up interviews to assess quality.

> "High-quality research is a function of… the degree [to which] you have 1) a competitive process with quality evaluation of research proposals; 2) a research program that the best researchers apply to; 3) an ongoing program to which researchers apply; and 4) personal consequences [associated with] applying for and obtaining a grant. When you have all of these things, you have created the best scenario for producing high-quality research outputs. That's the case with SRG."
>
> External stakeholder KI respondent

Findings for KI interviews are similar to those of case studies. The majority of KI respondents from all stakeholder groups thought that research activities supported by SRG and RDI have contributed to high-quality research outputs (including journal publications, conference papers/presentations, meta-analyses, books (including web-books) and workshops), demonstrating knowledge advancement in all disciplines and areas of SSH.

### *Factors influencing the development of high quality research outputs and tools*

Exhibit 5.2 presents the top six success and hindrance factors as reported in FRRs. The exhibit also presents the top responses provided during interviews. Considering these responses together, the most commonly cited factors influencing success appear to be access to/amount of funding, access to/skills of students and dedicated time available to focus on research (i.e., RTS/release time). Availability of/access to data and institutional support were also frequently mentioned.

**Exhibit 5.2: Top Six Factors Influencing Success**

| SRG (FRRs) | | RDI (FRRs) | | Key Informants (SRG and RDI) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Success factors** | **Hindrance factors** | **Success factors*** | **Hindrance factors** | **Factors influencing success** |
| SSHRC Funding | Lack of Research time stipend (SSHRC)/release time from employment | Team collaboration | Lack of Research time stipend (SSHRC)/release time from employment | Sufficient time to focus on the research without distraction |
| Access to qualified students | Availability of/access to data | Access to qualified students | Availability of/access to data | Adequate funding |
| Availability of/access to data | Student recruitment | SSHRC Funding | Insufficient SSHRC funding | Institutional support |
| Team collaboration | Insufficient institutional support | Partner involvement | Insufficient complementary funding (i.e. other sources) | Length of the grant |
| Research time stipend (SSHRC)/release time from employment | Insufficient SSHRC funding | Research time stipend (SSHRC)/release time from employment | Student recruitment | Grants that are less task- or project-oriented (prefer program-oriented) |
| Institutional support | Physical/material resources (e.g., office space) | Qualified personnel | Partnership negotiation | Skills of students |

* Institutional support was listed seventh in terms of a success factor for RDI.

Source: FRR Analysis and Key informant interviews

**Evaluation Question C4:**
**To what extent did the activities of RDI and SRG grants contribute to the development of highly qualified research-trained personnel available to pursue various knowledge intensive careers?**

**Findings for Question C4:**
Generally, SRG grantees were quite positive about their own skill and career development and the development of students as a result of the grant. Students also felt that participating in the grant had afforded them with improved skills and career opportunities that would not have been available otherwise.

The analysis of FRRs focusing on student training and mentorship opportunities indicated that, on average, about seven students are hired for every SRG and RDI

grant; and, on average, $320 out of every $1000 awarded for each SRG grant and $270 out of every $1000 awarded for each RDI grant was disbursed to students and post-doctoral fellows. Exhibit 5.3 presents the nature of involvement that students have had in SRG-funded research activities (as reported by SRG grantees during the survey).[32]

Students are increasingly involved the further along they are in their academic career (i.e., post-doctoral students are more involved than doctoral students, who are more involved than masters students, who are more involved than undergraduate students). The one exception to this trend is the area of data/information sharing, where masters and doctoral students are reportedly only slightly more likely to be involved than undergraduate or post-doctoral students.

**Exhibit 5.3: Nature of Involvement of Students in SRGs**

| Research Activity | Under-graduate | Masters | Doctoral | Post-doctoral |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Research project design | 10% | 14% | 24% | 39% |
| Methodology design (such as questionnaires, guides, sampling, etc.) | 10% | 25% | 33% | 49% |
| Data/information collection | 75% | 82% | 82% | 73% |
| Analysis of research results or content | 31% | 55% | 61% | 83% |
| Presenting research results at conferences or other forums | 16% | 38% | 55% | 76% |
| Publishing articles or books about research results | 12% | 29% | 48% | 72% |
| Number of respondents | 197 | 275 | 264 | 41 |

Percent indicating Most or All students involved; multiple responses allowed.
Source: SSHRC Applicant Survey

### *Overall experience for students*

Generally, most SRG grantees from the survey and all grantees interviewed for the case studies feel that they have provided both a high-quality training opportunity and a high-quality mentorship opportunity to students as a result of having participated in the grant. In terms of the quality of the training opportunity, about a third of grantees who responded to the survey felt that most or all of masters students had received a high-quality opportunity and this proportion increased for undergraduate students (78%) and doctoral and post-doctoral students (both at 87%). Grantees were also quite positive about the mentoring opportunities provided to students, with 78 per cent indicating most or all undergraduate students had a high-quality opportunity, 80 per

[32] RDI results are not presented, as the numbers of grantees responding to each category of student are too low to be considered.

cent for post-doctoral students, 84 per cent for doctoral students and 86 per cent for masters students.

The evaluation found that grantees for all eight case studies hired students to work with them on the SRG and/or RDI grant. Grantees generally felt that the quality of the mentoring and training experience for students was high. Where students were interviewed for case studies, they agreed that the quality of the experience was high (citing opportunities to conduct data collection, attend conferences and in some cases, co-author articles).

***Practical skills development***

All lines of evidence support the view that RDI and SRG grants give academic personnel an opportunity to develop and advance practical, hands on research and mentoring skills. The survey found that 83 per cent of SRG grantees stated that they improved research skills to some extent or large extent as a result of the grant.

In particular, respondents highly regard the SSHRC grants for supporting students in skills acquisition. The interview and focus group participants mentioned that a variety of skills were developed via RDI- and SRG-funded research, including skills in writing proposals, research planning, ethics review process, technical skills, research methodology, field work, critical thinking, data mining/collection/analysis, report writing, editing, team work and conference/journal preparation and presentation. Students who participated in the grants explored during case studies reportedly received training for a variety of skills, including how to conduct library and online literature searches, perform qualitative research, administer surveys, conduct experiments, carry out meta-analyses, undertake field research, perform a variety of statistical analyses and write research reports. The interim findings report from the Evaluation of Initiative on the New Economy[33] (INE) found that a majority of students who had been involved in an INE project felt that they had enhanced a number of skill areas, including analysis skills, data collection skills, capacity to develop methodology and capacity to develop research designs. Since the nature of the students' involvement appears to be similar to their involvement with SRG grants, this would suggest that students who had been involved in an SRG or RDI grant would likely have identified a similar pattern of skill development.

Some students focus group participants explained that the involvement in whole

[33]R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd., and Natalie Kishchuk: Research & Evaluation Inc. (2008). Evaluation of the Initiative on the New Economy (INE), Interim Findings Report. Page 56.

projects, rather than piecemeal work, was considered important in understanding the process of a research as well as an opportunity to develop specific skills sets. These skills help students build confidence in their research abilities and give them opportunities to develop awareness of the process and observe how senior researchers conduct research. In some cases it helped students to focus their work and direct research questions. They were then able to use this knowledge in future SSHRC applications. The student focus group participants indicated that about half of the students who had been on SSHRC projects had then also received an SSHRC scholarship. Some KIs indicated that SRG- and RDI-funded projects enable students to work one-on-one with professors, which is critical to the mentoring process.

> "Measure your success with the success of your students."
> Student focus group respondent

According to about two-thirds of SRG grantee survey respondents, some or all of the masters and doctoral students involved in their grant developed specific skills needed for research (e.g., foreign language, computer software knowledge). Just over half (58%) and a third (34%) of SRG grantees felt that some or all of the undergraduate and post-doctoral students, respectively, had developed specific skills.

In the KIIs, the perceived internal and external factors influencing the successful development of HQP included the level of a student's experience at the start of a project, willingness of researchers to delegate challenging tasks to their collaborating students, grant size, availability of facilities and the amount of release time from teaching granted to researchers by their universities following the acquisition of an SRG or RDI.

The focus group participants indicated that as a result of the experience of being on SRG and RDI grants some, although not all, students continued their education (e.g., applied for graduate school), moved on to faculty positions or applied for further SSHRC funding such as the Doctoral Fellowships. Those who didn't follow an academic path saw the experience as a preparation for the job market.

The evidence from the survey, interviews and focus groups supports previous research findings identified in the document review that the activities of RDI and SRG grants have contributed to the development of highly qualified research-trained personnel. A 2005 SSHRC study[34] on student training in SSHRC-funded research indicated that students hired under SSHRC grants generally experience high levels of

[34] Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2005-2006 Performance Report. Retrieved February 19, 2010 from http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/webarchives/20071120100213/http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/dpr-rmr/0506/sshrc-crshc/sshrc-crshc_e.asp.

intellectual involvement and participate in a wide range of research-related activities in a variety of research settings; they acquire research and communication skills, and have wide access to resources and facilities. When asked to identify the outcomes of participating in SSHRC-funded research, 90 per cent of students responding to this 2005 survey indicated increased knowledge of their own field, 89 per cent cited increased data collection skills, 88 per cent indicated increased analysis skills and 85 per cent indicated increased confidence in their own research capacities.

**Case study synopsis for the 2002 SRG: Legitimacy in Global Governance**

This SRG supported a program of research that 1) assessed what basis of legitimacy is operative and identified processes of legitimization that enable and constrain the scope and function of international or transnational institutions, and 2) assessed whether legitimacy demands are being satisfied in the eyes of relevant audiences.

The case study found that this SRG has had a notable academic impact. As well, there have been synergies among the SRG and other SSHRC sources (e.g., MCRI). The grantee rated the contribution of the SRG program to the achievement of impacts as essential. He indicated that the grant allowed him to explore new ideas and pursue the research where it took him.

A number of peer reviewed publications and conference presentations resulted from the research, indicating that the research has made a notable impact on advancing knowledge in the area of legitimacy in global governance. Over 15 peer reviewed academic works such as journal articles and book chapters have been published based on the grantee's work disseminating information on the results highlighted above. In addition, there have been many non-refereed publications and over a dozen conference presentations based on the SRG-supported research.

Dissemination to other researchers and to students has led to further knowledge development in these areas as others take the grantee's results forward. The 2002 SRG contributed to the employment of three undergraduate students and four doctoral students. Research training opportunities provided to students have contributed to the development of highly qualified personnel (HQP). One student in particular went on to work as a professor and continues to advance knowledge in the field, and described the impact of her involvement with the grant as "pivotal" in her own career.

The grantee, a new scholar applicant, indicated that SSHRC funding was essential to the achievements of impacts regarding the development of new knowledge, and the training of HQPs.

### *Career advancement opportunities*

KIs in the grantee group indicated that tenure and/or promotion were sometimes contingent on a researcher's ability to obtain an SRG/RDI. Comments in the focus groups also indicated that it was difficult to get tenure without an SSHRC grant. The focus group feedback also included comments that some researchers felt they would not have a career without SSHRC, and that the continuity of funding allows for the development of research and publications.

Grantees believed that the SRG and RDI grants enable them to leverage further grants: 89 per cent of the survey respondents stated that they were more likely to obtain research funding to some extent or a large extent as a result of the grant. Feedback from both the interviews and the focus groups supported this view.

"Getting SSHRC grants provides a sense that you've made it."
Grantee focus group respondent

Publication records are a major component of a researcher's performance record. Survey respondents stated that as a result of the grant they were more likely to get articles accepted in academic journals (79%), and more likely to get papers accepted at academic conferences (78%) to some extent or a large extent. Holding grants and publication records allow for researchers to move up within an institution/academia (i.e., to achieve metrics that are valued to move "up").

Grantee participants in focus groups also commented that the grants didn't just help the individual investigators, but they also helped at a department level, creating a collective synergy and enhancing a departmental reputation within university.

Regarding career advancement for students, the majority of SRG grantee survey respondents felt that most or all of the students had realized opportunities for career advancement as a result of participating in the grant. In particular, grantees were more encouraging the further along the students were in their academic programs. Specifically, 64 per cent of SRG grantees indicated that most or all undergraduate students had realized career advancement, 69 per cent indicated that most or all masters students had realized this outcome, 75 per cent felt that most or all doctoral students had opportunities for career advancements and fully 86 per cent felt that most or all post-doctoral students had realized this outcome.

Consistent with these findings, the majority of KIs in the grantee and university-official groups thought it could be attributed to SRG-/RDI-supported activities to a significant extent. KIs in the grantee group indicated that SRG-/RDI-supported activities could "ease [students'] path to a PhD," help them find jobs, enable them to obtain solid letters of reference and allow them to get published, all of which are important for career advancement.

The focus group and case study comments supported these ideas, indicating that the grants created many opportunities for student to advance their careers through the demonstration of skills acquisitions, mentioned above, and in practical evidence of outputs and outcomes such as publications and references. In fact, several students

interviewed during the case studies indicated that working with the Principal Investigator of the SSHRC grant had an important impact on their career trajectory. Several former students have gone on to careers in academia, while others have secured employment in private companies where they are putting their skills to use.

### *Visibility, exposure and networking*

The grants allow both investigators and students to showcase their work, become more visible in the research community and build their professional networks.

The focus group participants felt that it ensured the transfer of knowledge through conferences, media interviews and publications that added to the profile of the researcher, and helped to develop a reputation within the field. It also helped gain self-confidence, authority and recognition. The focus group participants stated that the grants increased the visibility of research (and it also helped students associated with research). SSHRC opens the door for students to work with professors, and they benefitted from the association with SSHRC grantee.

The survey found that 87 percent of grantees stated that as a result of the grant they extended their national research networks to some extent or a large extent. The evidence from the interviews and focus groups supported previous research findings identified in the document review that the activities of RDI and SRG grants contribute to career advancement by developing networks and contacts, and by improving their understanding of the role of research in both academic and non-academic settings.[35]

For students, the opportunities to present research results at conferences and other forums greatly increase as they progress in their academic careers. According to three quarters (76%) of SRG grantees responding to the survey, most or all of the post-doctoral students involved with the grant had presented the research results. This number decreases as follows: 55 per cent saying some/all doctoral students presented research; 38 per cent saying some/all masters students presented research; and 16 per cent saying some/all undergraduate students presented research.

### *Independence in research*

The autonomy and independence provided by the grants was noted in several of the

[35] Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2005-2006 Performance Report. Retrieved February 19, 2010 from http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/webarchives/20071120100213/http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/dpr-rmr/0506/sshrc-crshc/sshrc-crshc_e.asp.

lines of evidence. The survey found that 91 per cent of the respondents stated that the grant resulted in greater autonomy/independence in research to some extent or a large extent. The focus group comments also indicated that the funding made it possible for researchers to do their own work, and provided them with flexibility of time.

For students, the lack of independence in research was more of an issue. The focus group participants indicated that students were sometimes resentful working on SRGs because it took time away from their graduate research. There was a danger of becoming too absorbed in a professor's work, which may distract from their own thesis research. Participants also stated that investigator research does not always correspond to student interests. The 2005 SSHRC study[36] on student training in SSHRC-funded research also indicated that more attention may be needed to assure that proposed work for students is better integrated into research projects and is of high quality and analytical in nature and that more funding specifically for students may be necessary.

**Evaluation Question C5:**
**To what extent were SRG[37] supported research results effectively disseminated throughout the academic community and beyond?**

**Findings for Question C5:**
The evaluation found that dissemination within the academic community has been very effective, with high levels of reported dissemination to Canadian and international scholars in the survey of applicants and supporting evidence from the FRR analysis, interviews, case studies and documentation. Dissemination beyond academia is lower generally, and not considered to be necessarily appropriate for all kinds of research or all disciplines.

In the FRR, grantees are asked to indicate the breadth of the dissemination of their research results. The analysis revealed that, according to both SRG and RDI grantees (via the FRR analysis), results are almost always disseminated to academic audiences (95 per cent and 86 per cent indicating dissemination to this type of research audience by SRG and RDI grantees, respectively). Having said that, a large proportion of grantees still indicated that their findings would be disseminated to decision-makers (50 per cent and 62 per cent for SRG and RDI grantees, respectively) and even to the general public (54 per cent and 56 per cent for SRG and RDI grantees, respectively). Exhibit 5.4 presents these results.

[36] Ibid.
[37] While this question focuses on SRG, where the evidence exists, findings related to RDI have been included.

The survey of applicants did not explore the degree to which grantees disseminated their findings to certain target audiences. However, it did ask grantees to consider the likely influence of their work on audiences both within and outside of academia. We present those findings here as a proxy for dissemination (i.e., if influence is expected, it can be extrapolated that dissemination to those users of research was effective).

**Exhibit 5.4: Dissemination of Research Results by Type of Audience**

| Research Audience | SRG | | | RDI | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Yes/ expected | Possibly | Unlikely/ No | Yes/ expected | Possibly | Unlikely/ No |
| Academic | 95% | 2% | 2% | 89% | 2% | 7% |
| Decision-makers (public, private and non-profit) | 50% | 16% | 16% | 62% | 13% | 15% |
| General public | 54% | 17% | 21% | 56% | 9% | 27% |

Source: FRR Analysis; may not add to 100 because "not applicable" is not presented.

Exhibit 5.5 presents the results for the survey. The survey found the greatest level of use of research results is among Canadian and international scholars, according to both SRG and RDI grantees (although the use of results is believed to be much lower in academic circles by RDI grantees—60 per cent indicating this is occurring to some or a large extent in Canada and internationally, compared to almost 80 per cent and 86 per cent for SRG grantees who reported some or a large degree of usage by Canadian and international scholars, respectively). Usage patterns outside of academia were quite similar based on whether the grantee had received an SRG or RDI. Fewer than half of SRG and RDI grantees felt their research had been used by any one of the non-academic audiences. For example, 42 per cent and 45 per cent SRG and RDI grantees felt their research results had been used by NGOs and community organizations to some or a large extent (with similar, albeit lower, anticipated use by governments—about a third for both SRG and RDI—and the private sector—20 per cent and 25 per cent for SRG and RDI, respectively). SRG grantees were more likely to say non-university based educators and the general public had used their research results than RDI grantees.

That publicly funded research is being used outside of academia is confirmed by a Science-Metrix study,[38] which also found that social sciences, arts and humanities-related research produced with support from public funds produce knowledge that is used not only by their peers and by their students, but also by the general public,

[38] Archambault, E., and Caruso, J. (n.d.) The Use and Impacts of Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities Research: Evidence from a Large-Scale Survey of Academics. Science-Metrix.

NGOs and community organizations, by governmental, as well as by private sector organizations.

**Exhibit 5.5: Influence of Research Results by Type of Audience**

| Research Audience | SRG | | | RDI | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Some/ large extent | Little/no extent | Not applic. | Some/ large extent | Little/no extent | Not applic. |
| Academic—Canadian scholars | 80% | 6% | 2% | 60% | 10% | 0% |
| Academic—International scholars | 86% | 5% | 2% | 60% | 10% | 0% |
| Outside academia—NGOs and community | 42% | 33% | 8% | 45% | 16% | 13 |
| Outside academia—Governments | 34% | 39% | 8% | 35% | 25% | 13% |
| Outside academia—Private sector | 20% | 51% | 10% | 25% | 30% | 13% |
| Outside academia—Non-university based educators | 43% | 31% | 6% | 34% | 19% | 11% |
| General public | 43% | 36% | 4% | 26% | 36% | 18% |

Source: Survey of Applicants, n=789 for SRG, n=39 for RDI; may not add to 100 because "don`t know" is not presented.

Clearly, there is a fairly wide discrepancy between the dissemination to certain audiences (as revealed by the FRR analysis) and the perceived use of their research results. Consider, for example, the case of RDI. According to the FRRs, findings were or were expected to be disseminated to decision-makers in 62 per cent of grants and disseminated to the general public in 56 per cent of grants. However, according to survey respondents, well under half of grantees expected these groups to be using their results (this proportion is lowest for use by the general public). This could speak to the effectiveness of the dissemination, but there is not enough evidence to make this link with the findings from evaluation.

A review of documents revealed interesting patterns of dissemination based on the granting history of the scholar. In particular, two studies conducted by Science-Metrix[39,40] found that researchers who have been funded by SSHRC as PIs have a

[39] Archambault, E. (n.d.) How is SSH Research being used? Insights from the Blue Ribbon Plan Survey on SSHRC's Peer-Review Process. Science-Metrix.
[40] Archambault, E., and Caruso, J. (n.d.) The Use and Impacts of Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities Research: Evidence from a Large-Scale Survey of Academics. Science-Metrix.

significantly greater use of their research output in the international academic community. As well, a significantly larger proportion of co-applicants who received SSHRC funding claim that their research is used nationally by the academic and non-academic sectors than researchers that have not been funded by SSHRC or have never applied to SSHRC. As a corollary, researchers who have never applied to SSHRC have the lowest rate of use for their research, be it in the academic or non-academic sectors nationally, and in the academic sector internationally. These studies also confirmed that there is a relationship between the number of grants received and the use of research results in the national and international communities; as the number of grants received increased, research results are increasingly used by the academic or non-academic sector.

The studies also found that the number of grants influences use of research outside of academia, regardless of whether the users of research are within the national or international community, and that more grant monies translate into greater use of research in academia and outside of academia, be it nationally or internationally.

Qualitative evidence from all sources that probed this question (i.e., case studies, KIIs) confirmed high levels of and effective dissemination to academic audiences. All eight cases disseminated their findings to academic audiences through journal articles, book chapters and conference presentations. In particular, new scholars were equally as likely as regular scholars to disseminate research results within academia. As well, the large majority of SRG grantee KIs who responded to this question thought that SRG-supported research results were being effectively disseminated throughout the academic community via the classic models of knowledge transfer and exchange (e.g., journals, white papers, edited collections, and conferences).

The qualitative evaluation evidence is more mixed with respect to the dissemination of research results beyond academia. For example, case studies generally found that dissemination beyond academia is still quite strong, with six out of eight cases disseminating their research findings to wider audiences through media such as radio, newspaper, television, film, and workshops (this finding was equally likely based on whether the grantee was a new or regular scholar). Conversely, findings from KIIs indicate that dissemination outside academic is less common.

That dissemination outside academia occurs less commonly is not necessarily inappropriate or cause for concern. According to a few SRG KI grantees, there are many reasons why this might be. For instance, some fields or topics are more difficult to diffuse to wider audiences, as they do not have immediate applications or are more



difficult to put in plain language. Also, the topicality of the research was said to play a significant role in the effectiveness of its dissemination.

These reasons are confirmed by the work of Science-Metrix discussed above. Specifically, the studies found that research in certain disciplines will have different applicability beyond academia and that it is not reasonable to expect high levels of dissemination among these audiences across the board.

**Evaluation Question C6:**
**How did SRG[41] supported research results, directly and indirectly, inform social, cultural, and economic change?**

**Findings for Question C6:**
In administrative data, grantees reported very broad outcomes of their research, particularly in the areas of teaching practice and methodologies. Understanding social issues and realizing outcomes in other disciplines were also commonly mentioned by both SRG and RDI grantees. RDI grantees were also more likely than SRG grantees to mention an impact on international collaboration. The case studies found a great deal of evidence to suggest that those projects have had a number of outcomes (using the Blue Ribbon Panel survey framework of outcome areas).

The FRRs provide some evidence regarding the downstream outcomes of grantees research. The most commonly cited area of outcome[42] for both SRG and RDI grantees is cultural, followed by social and development of policies and programs (although these latter two were cited by more RDI grantees than SRG grantees). Please refer to Exhibit 5.6 for these findings. Note that grantees are only able to choose one area of impact for this area of the FRR template.

[41] While the focus of this question was originally SRG, where findings are available for RDI, they are also presented.
[42] Note that FRR terminology is "impact," but this term is no longer commonly used at SSHRC and has been replaced with the concept of "outcome." Therefore, in this section the term "outcome" is used interchangeably with "impact."

**Exhibit 5.6: Areas of Impact for Research**

| In which of the following areas will your research have the most impact? | Program | |
|---|---|---|
| | SRG | RDI |
| Cultural | 31% | **30%** |
| Social | 22% | **28%** |
| Development of policies and programs | 22% | **28%** |
| Contribution to public debate | 11% | **7%** |
| Economic | 11% | **3%** |
| Not applicable | 3% | **4%** |
| **Grand Total** | **100%** | **100%** |

Source: FRR Analysis

The FRR also asks for grantees to identify the degree of impact for the areas above, as well as others. In this case, responses are not mutually exclusive; that is, grantees completing the FRR are able to indicate impact in more than one area. An analysis of these findings reveals much broader outcomes of the research (Exhibit 5.7). For both SRG and RDI, the greatest outcomes are recognized or anticipated in the areas of academic practices (i.e., teaching or professional practice and new research methodologies) and multidisciplinary and collaborative research. Respondents also commonly stated that knowledge advancement in terms of impacting the understanding of social issues and social development definitely or possibly occurred. Over half of SRG and RDI grantees indicated knowledge advancement in the areas of culture and economic development, policies or practices , but to a lesser extent than other outcome areas.

**Exhibit 5.7: Areas of Impact for Research (2)**

| Research will have the most impact on: | SRG | | RDI | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Definitely | Possibly | Definitely | Possibly |
| Understanding of culture | 43% | 24% | 45% | 18% |
| Understanding of social issues and social development | 49% | 36% | 58% | 32% |
| Understanding of economic development, policies or practices | 23% | 29% | 30% | 30% |
| Impact on public policy debate | 27% | 39% | 30% | 45% |
| Teaching or professional practice | 54% | 34% | 74% | 20% |
| Development of new research methodologies | 35% | 44% | 62% | 25% |
| Impact in other disciplines | 44% | 49% | 41% | 54% |
| Impact on international collaboration | 46% | 36% | 54% | 33% |

Source: FRR Analysis

Analysis of the open-ended items on the survey of applicants regarding how audiences used their research results revealed that just over half of SRG grantees and over a third of RDI grantees believed that their results would change knowledge, understandings and attitudes and lead to informed debates. About a quarter of SRG grantees and a third of RDI grantees said it would influence practices. Two in ten SRG grantees and one in ten RDI grantees also felt their research results would be used to influence policy in or outside of Canada. Ten percent of SRG grantees felt their research would be used to influence strategies (RDI grantees did not mention this outcome area).

Qualitative research confirmed the quantitative findings. SRG- and RDI-supported research activities appear to be informing social, cultural and economic change. For example, all eight SRG-supported cases provided examples of outcomes or potential outcomes regarding social, cultural and economic change. Impact areas include those from the Blue Ribbon Panel survey qualitative analysis[43]: i) impacts on the education system, ii) impacts on the improvement of behaviours, ways of thinking, living, iii) impacts on public awareness, iv) impacts on the creation or development of new things, v) impacts on civil society, vi) impacts on the public sector, vii) impacts on the private sector, and viii) impacts on the knowledge transfer process. All outcomes from the case studies were able to be classified under these Blue Ribbon Panel areas.

**Some examples from case studies and interviews of social, cultural and economic change.**

- Archaeological excavations at a residential school have been used within truth and reconciliation activities.
- Use of SRG-supported open-source statistical software in South America to analyze statistics for dengue fever.
- More effective organizations due to application of research on virtual teams and "multi-communicating."
- Empowerment of Inuit communities through innovative participatory research methods and the Naming Project (whereby photographic material is used to re-connect youth with elders).
- Work at a Mayan site has contributed to Guatemalan national pride and interest for their cultural treasures.
- Research that shows how literary works of all types mirror and perpetuate views of human relations that are reflective of ongoing social justice concerns.
- Research on the presence and activity of women in early Christianity has been used to transform their perspectives and other's within the religious domain, as well as society.

KI respondents were also quite positive in their assessment of the influence of SRG-supported research activities. Some KIs explained that SRG-supported research results have informed social, cultural and economic change by influencing practices, behaviours and policies (domestic and international), contributing to changes in

[43] SSHRC Corporate Performance and Evaluation Division, In Search of SSH Research Impact—Qualitative Data Analysis, Blue Ribbon Panel Survey Section IV, April 14, 2010.

understanding and attitudes, and by advancing knowledge which, in turn, enriches the Canadian curriculum, giving Canada its own unique voice, and which enables the Canadian scholarly community to speak to the most relevant issues of our times. That said, a few KIs also mentioned that the influence of SSH research (and, more specifically, SRG-supported research) on policies, practices, behaviours, understanding, attitudes and knowledge is often indirect and/or invisible, and often takes place over long periods of time, thus reducing one's ability to attribute changes in society/culture/the economy to the research.

A few KIs indicated that there are more examples of research influencing policy, practices and behaviours from the social sciences—especially in areas related to the environment, governance, economics, medicine, health, education and electoral policy—than from the humanities. The evaluation team suggests this is perhaps because research in the humanities may not be as topical or as immediately applicable as research in the social sciences.

The following vignette is interesting, but unfortunately the tone is uncertain with the use of expressions such as "will likely," "possible," "may apply," "may lead." In fact, the vignette contradicts the statement in the summary box that "The case studies found a great deal of evidence to suggest that those projects have had a number of outcomes."

**Case study synopsis for the 2004 SRG: Studying virtual team effectiveness in organizations**

Virtual teams are groups of individuals who work together in different locations (i.e., they are geographically dispersed), work at interdependent tasks, share responsibility for outcomes and rely on technology for much of their communication. This SRG-supported program of research: 1) explored how virtual teams differ from traditional teams; 2) studied best practices for virtual teams; 3) compared different virtual team designs; 4) investigated electronic communication tools and training to support virtual teams; and 5) examined appropriate leadership styles for virtual teams.

The SRG had a notable academic and applied impact. As well, there have been powerful synergies among SRG, RDI and other SSHRC and non-SSHRC sources of funding. The impact of the grantee's work is potentially vast and far reaching. The body of research has helped advance knowledge in the areas of virtual teams (including knowledge hiding), multi-communicating and environmentally-friendly practices for organizations.

Research results have been disseminated widely to academic and non-academic audiences including students, managers and executives in training, other researchers, organizations and the general public. The information regarding best practices for virtual teams, multi-communicating and environmental sustainability that has been disseminated to organizations will likely result in organizations that are more efficient, cost-effective and environmentally friendly, and lead to healthier working relations in organizations. The work has led to many publications in academic journals, book chapters, conference presentations, invited addresses and media attention. It is possible that people from the general public exposed to the grantee's body of research through media coverage may apply the research results to their own situation. Applying the results of the studies on multi-communicating, for example, may lead to improved interpersonal relations and more civility in communications. This, in turn, may lead to healthier working relations within organizations.

Dissemination to other researchers and to students has led to further knowledge development in these areas as others take the grantee's results forward. Research training opportunities provided to students and classes

Most focus group grantee respondents across cities questioned whether the intent of research is to inform social, cultural and economic change, and supported the position that there is a role for research for the sake of research. A few KIs raised this issue, but not across the board as in the case of focus groups. However, because the evaluation did not directly address this issue (i.e., the appropriateness of expectations that SSHRC-supported research will inform social, cultural and economic change), it cannot be said that this was not a widely-held view. The fact that so many focus group respondents commented on this may be due to one or two outspoken focus group participants expressing their opinion and other participants agreeing with the principle of research for the sake of research. That so many grantees shared this concern (regarding whether the intent of research is to inform change or simply to undertake research for the sake of research) once raised in a group setting suggests that this could be a widely held view within academia.

## 5.2 Other Findings Related to Success

**Evaluation Question C7:**
**Have there been any unintended (positive or negative) outcomes of the SRG and RDI programs?**

**Findings for Question C7:**
Respondents did not mention many unintended outcomes of the programs, and none suggest a change in program design is warranted.

Respondents did not mention many unintended outcomes of the programs. Some of the more common outcomes cited by survey respondents include:

- increased respect for your work by others;
- reputational impacts (e.g., asked to sit on committees, invitations to speak at conferences);

- networking impacts/cross-fertilization of ideas;
- greater access to/interest by government, NGO and private sector communities; and
- surprise over the high quality of graduate and undergraduate students.

# 6.0 Conclusions

## 6.1 Relevance and Continued Need

Overall, the evaluation found that the programs are relevant and are meeting needs, and there is a continuing need for both programs to effectively support research, aligned with Government of Canada priorities, in SSH. The mandate and objectives of both programs are consistent with both SSHRC and federal government priorities, although there is some question within the SSH research community about the valuing of investigator-framed or, to use more up-to-date SSHRC terminology, open research funding in the context of Canada's Science and Technology Strategy.

For the most part, the objectives and approach of the SRG and RDI programs are meeting the current and future needs of SSH researchers. Interviewees and the document review raised the issue of decreasing success rates for both SRG and RDI as a concern (in terms of the ability of the programs to meet the needs of new and regular scholars to undertake high-quality research, as well as in terms of the opportunity cost of not conducting unfunded research). Upon further examination, however, since the success rates of SRG and RDI are similar to those of other comparable programs, a more in-depth review of the situation would be needed to assess the adequacy of the funding envelopes for the two programs.

There was also some evidence to suggest that the programs could be more responsive to needs of new scholars, inter- and multidisciplinary researchers and researchers at small universities and new universities. The evaluation found that the overall length of SRG may not be meeting the needs of all scholars. Nonetheless, SSHRC is overwhelmingly considered the most important source of funding for open research in SSH in Canada. Although alternatives exist and are used, they are not equivalent to SRG and RDI and do not meet needs as fully in terms of supporting open, peer reviewed, disciplinary-based research.

## 6.2 Design and Delivery

The SRG and RDI program designs appear to support a coherent suite of programs at SSHRC (although there was widespread confusion regarding RDI's objectives). Overlap between SRG and RDI is minimal and is not an area of concern.

Generally, program applicants are satisfied with both programs, particularly the timing and frequency of the application process. The evaluation found that there are opportunities to improve the nature and ease of interactions between applicants and SSHRC, the ease of the application process and the weighting of the criteria for both regular and new scholars, as these areas received the lowest satisfaction scores from applicants. Earlier findings around the appropriateness of the length of the grants also suggest this should be revisited.

There are many opportunities for improvement regarding the FRR. In particular, it was not found to be an effective tool in terms of the information it captures (especially with respect to partnerships, longer-term impacts, level of detail regarding outputs and roles of students). Also, the FRR and the information contained therein are not systematically used for performance monitoring, compliance or informing decision-makers (although the information is generally used for evaluation purposes). A comparative analysis conducted by SSHRC on other reporting models in granting bodies makes similar conclusions.

Overall, the programs are being delivered in a cost-efficient manner. No obvious cost-saving approaches were discovered that would not have a likely detrimental effect on the overall quality of program delivery.

## 6.3 Success

The evaluation found a high degree of success in the achievement of outcomes for both programs. Specifically, evidence from the evaluation supports the notion that RDI supports new and innovative research development ideas, and that RDI-supported research activities contribute to the development of mature research proposals. Similarly, SRG-supported research activities contribute to new research proposals.

The evaluation also found that research activities supported by SRG and RDI are contributing to both a high volume of and high-quality research outputs (including mostly conference papers and articles). There is less direct evidence of research tools being developed. There is evidence of knowledge advancement due to high levels of expected influence of the research of Canadian and international scholars (although this is reportedly occurring to a lesser extent for RDI). SRG appears to have a positive impact on the quality of outputs for new scholars (although this relationship could not be proven for regular scholars).



The evaluation found that SRG plays an important role in the development of scholars (i.e., grantees) and students alike. Generally, SRG grantees were quite positive about their own skills and career development, and the development of students as a result of the grant. Students also felt that participating in the grant had afforded them with improved skills and career opportunities that would not have been available otherwise. The evaluation also found that dissemination within the academic community has been very effective, with high levels of reported dissemination to Canadian and international scholars. Dissemination beyond academia is lower generally and not necessarily appropriate for all kinds of research or all disciplines.

In terms of the degree to which the programs inform social, cultural and economic change, there is evidence to suggest that SRG and RDI grants both have a great deal of potential to have downstream outcomes in these areas. The evaluation did find some evidence to suggest this is occurring already, at least to some degree. There has been the greatest impact in the areas of teaching practice and methodologies, impacting other disciplines and international collaboration impacts (particularly for RDI).

With respect to this last issue, the evaluation did uncover concern among SRG grantees regarding whether the intent of research is to distinctly inform social, cultural and economic change, or whether there is a role for "research for the sake of research." Because this matter (i.e., the relative importance of funding research to inform change versus research for the sake of research) was not directly asked in the evaluation (but rather was raised by a few KIs and a few focus group participants, and generated agreement in all focus groups), it is not possible to formulate a conclusion in this regard. That so many grantees shared this concern (regarding whether the intent of research is to inform change or simply to undertake research for the sake of research) when raised in a group setting suggests that this issue could be a widely held view within academia. Thus, there is an opportunity for SSHRC to clarify the role of "open" versus "targeted" research with respect to informing social, cultural and economic change.

# 7.0 Recommendations

1. SSHRC should make improvements to the design of the programs to address areas where needs are not being met, and those areas of greatest confusion and concern to applicants.
   1a) SSHRC should allow principal investigators (PI) to identify their preferred length for the SRG grant at the application stage. SSHRC should consider a range of between two and five years acceptable.
   1b) The criteria and weighting for new scholar SRG applicants should be revisited to ensure that it is better meeting the needs of this group. For example, perhaps add weight to indicators of promise as scholars, or redefine "track record" for new scholars.
      - Note that any changes to criteria and weighting must not compromise the competitive nature of the grants. The evaluation found that SRG is currently supporting the best new and regular scholars and this should continue to be the goal.

   1c) Due to the emphasis on inter- and multidisciplinary research being conducted by SSH scholars (as reported by both applicants and non-applicants) and the evaluation finding that the needs of this group of scholars are not being fully met by the programs, it is recommended that SSHRC establish additional inter- and multidisciplinary review committees and/or include scholars with knowledge of inter- and/or multidisciplinary research on committees.
      - The evaluator acknowledges the challenge of finding adjudication committee members and external assessors for this nature of research. However, SSHRC must take steps to ensure that their programs continue to be responsive to the best SSH scholars, including those conducting research that is inter- and/or multidisciplinary in nature.

   1d) While the evaluation found some evidence to suggest that scholars at small universities and those at new universities may encounter significant challenges to access grants, this issue was not a major thrust for the evaluation. It is recommended that SSHRC undertake a more thorough review of the implications of the selection criteria and the application process for scholars at small universities and those at new universities.
   1e) The application process for both SRG and RDI should be clarified and further streamlined and be available online to improve the overall ease of the application.
   1f) While the evaluation found relatively low levels of satisfaction with the ease



of the application process and the nature and ease of interactions with SSHRC, the evaluation is not able to describe why these aspects of program delivery received such low ratings. It is therefore recommended that this be an area for further study.

- SSHRC could undertake a small study aimed at better understanding areas of particular concern and confusion in these areas.

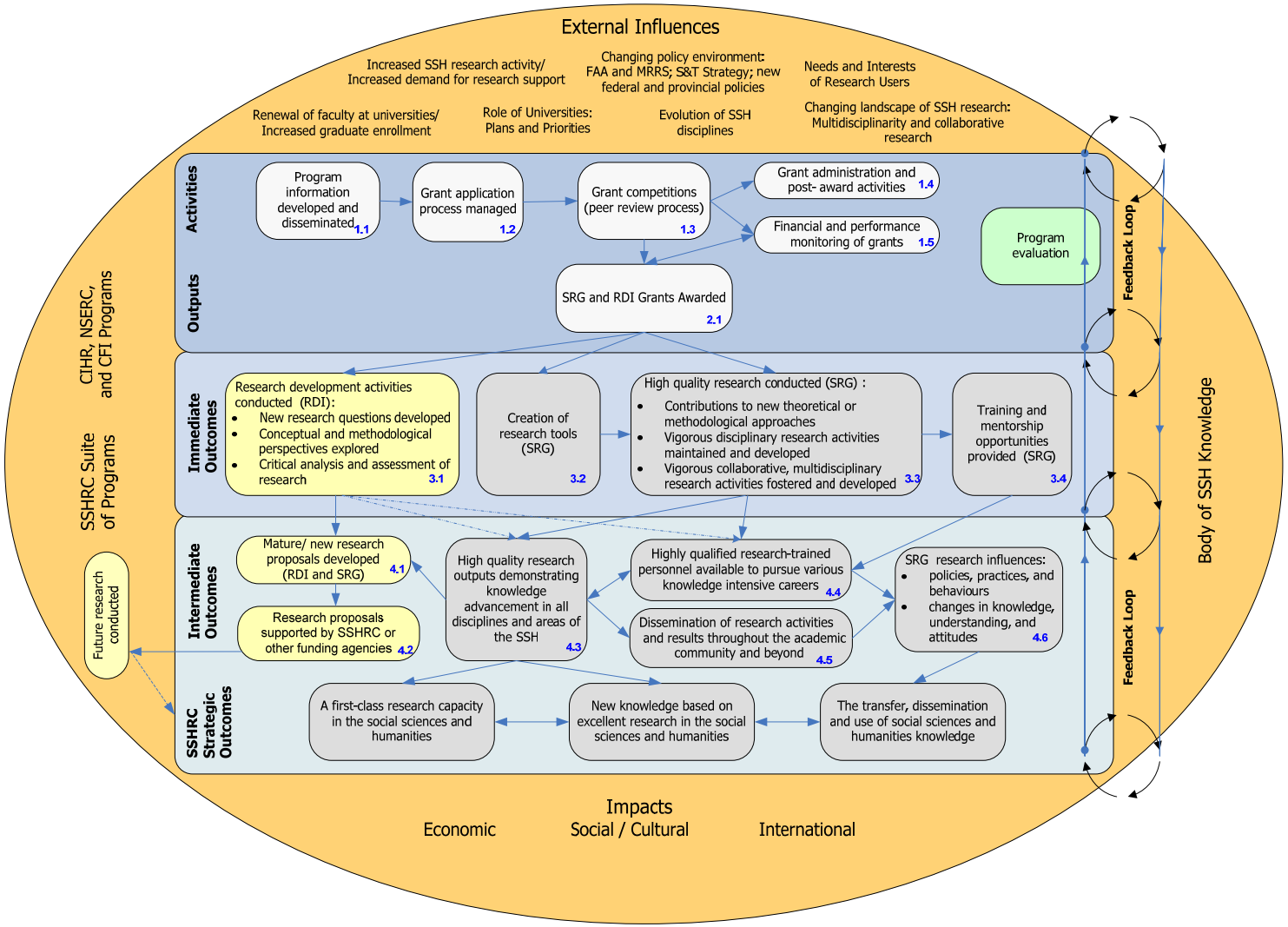
2. SSHRC should clarify the expectations of the organization in terms of the ways in which research is expected to inform social, cultural and economic change and the balance between "open" versus "targeted" research. This communication should come from the senior levels of the organization.
   2a) SSHRC should clarify how accountability in the area of non-academic outcomes (such as social, cultural and economic change) will be assessed.
   2b) SSHRC should acknowledge that some or a lot of outcomes may be beyond the PI's range of perception. The appropriate measurement indicators and mechanisms should be put in place to conceptualize and recognize these longer-term, unanticipated outcomes (including generation of thought).

3. Subject to new program objectives and designs based on internal review and redesign, SSHRC should widely disseminate RDI program objectives and fit within SSHRC's suite of programs.
   3a) It is recommended that all SSHRC personnel be well-versed on every program's objective(s) and fit and be encouraged to market programs during visits to universities, conferences, etc.
   3b) It is further recommended that educational institutions better promote their full range of SSHRC programs, including RDI, among their faculty members.

4. With respect to the FRR, it is acknowledged that SSHRC has already undertaken work in this area to update and improve the FRR and how SSHRC collects and uses information more generally. However, there remain opportunities for SSHRC to improve its own internal procedures with respect to how it uses the information in performance monitoring, compliance and decision-making.
   4a) It is also recommended that educational institutions support and encourage grant holders to complete FRRs in a complete and timely manner, and that SSHRC highlight the ways in which information from FRRs is being used.



# Appendix A – Logic Model for SRG and RDI Programs



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