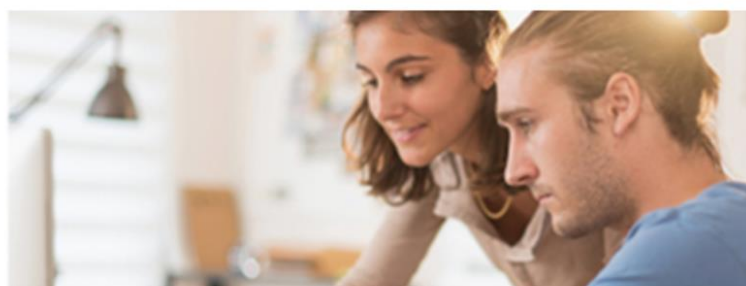
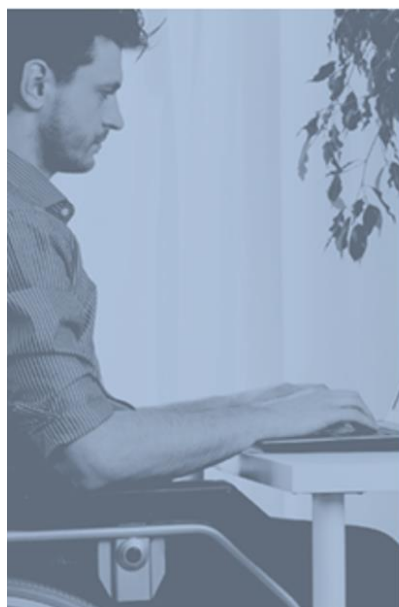
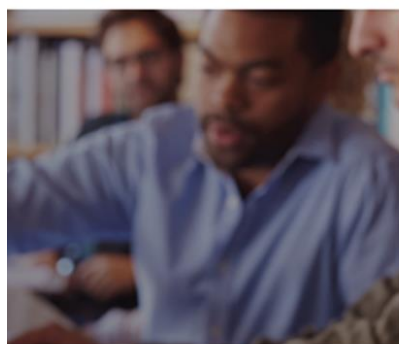


Evaluation of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) Connection Grants

Final Report

July 2026



Social Sciences and Humanities
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Canada

Evaluation of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) Connection Grants
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Executive Summary

About Connection Grants

The Connection Grants (CG) funding opportunity sits within the Research Partnerships Program (RPP) at the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC). It provides grants of up to \$50,000 for events and outreach activities geared toward short-term, targeted [knowledge mobilization](#) initiatives. Grants of higher amounts are possible if satisfactorily justified. The purpose of the funded activities is to offer opportunities for knowledge exchange and engagement with participants, specifically around research issues of interest to participants. CG therefore serves as a complement to other funding opportunities that fund research.

Between 2017 and 2022, CG funded an average of 305 initiatives per year for a total average investment of \$7,887,232 per year.

About the evaluation

This evaluation examined CG's relevance and outcomes and was intended to provide recommendations for improvements. The study also included consideration of relevant changes outside of CG. CG was last evaluated in 2018 as part of an evaluation of the other RPP funding opportunities with which it shares common objectives. The current evaluation focused solely on CG and provided an opportunity to assess how CG is functioning, including its value to the research community and potential directions for the future.

The evaluation included the following lines of evidence: analysis of agency administrative data related to research participation in CG and other SSHRC funding opportunities; qualitative analysis of funded and unfunded CG proposals and CG grantee achievement reports; key informant interviews with CG applicants, recipients and sponsoring organizations; a review of agency documents and academic literature on knowledge mobilization; and a focus group with SSHRC staff. The Evaluation Advisory Committee (EAC) provided guidance for this evaluation, in accordance with the federal Policy on Results.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Continue to provide funding for knowledge mobilization events and outreach activities through Connection Grants in multiple competitions per year to allow for flexibility. Consider adjusting grant amounts for inflation.

Recommendation 2: Continue to recognize and support the wide range of tools used in knowledge mobilization with a wide range of purposes, including newer and less common options that have the potential to engage researchers, trainees, other-sector partners and communities in meaningful ways.

Recommendation 3: Adopt the draft logic model developed during the design phase of the evaluation of the Connections Grants funding opportunity, with some adjustments.

Recommendation 4 (for SSHRC): Review and update SSHRC's public-facing descriptions of knowledge mobilization, especially the definition on the Definitions of Terms webpage and the Guidelines for Effective Knowledge Mobilization, to ensure consistent framing and use of relevant terminology.

Recommendation 5: Seek opportunities to facilitate increased levels of formal participation in Connection Grants projects by other-sector actors (i.e., as co-applicants, collaborators or partners) by

clarifying program language and modifying application procedures for co-applicants. Consider ways to improve recognition of the time and work that go into some forms of participation in Connection Grants-funded activities.

Introduction

This report presents the findings, conclusions and recommendations that came out of an evaluation of the Connection Grants (CG) funding opportunity. The evaluation was conducted in 2023-25.

About Connection Grants

The following presents an overview of CG. A more detailed description can be found in Appendix B.

CG provides financial support for knowledge mobilization (KMb) events and outreach activities in the social sciences and humanities (SSH). It was created in 2011 as a result of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council's (SSHRC) 2010 program architectural renewal, although its roots go even further back in time¹.

CG is intended to support:

- exchanges and collaborations among academics from SSH disciplines and fields of research;
- intersectoral exchanges between researchers working in postsecondary institutions and groups working outside of academia; and/or
- international collaborations and exchanges inside and outside of Canada.

Funding amounts for successful proposals are \$7,000 to \$25,000 for events and \$7,000 to \$50,000 for outreach activities; higher amounts are possible if they are adequately justified. CG requires a minimum of 50% of the amount requested from SSHRC in the form of cash and/or in-kind contributions from sponsoring organizations. Eligible events and activities may be a one-time encounter to share knowledge, or the purpose may be to create longer-term partnerships for ongoing research programs. Typically, events are shorter term (< 1 week) (e.g., conferences, workshops). Outreach activities are meant to engage a wider audience in SSH research through a range of knowledge-sharing methods (e.g., for dissemination, networking or co-creation).

Additionally, CG provides funding for Special Initiatives (SIs), Joint Initiatives (JIs), and through special calls, all of which are important mechanisms that support SSHRC's mission-driven priorities. For example, from 2019 to 2025, the CG funding opportunity partnered with Canadian Heritage to provide funding for the Joint Initiative for Digital Citizen Research, and in 2018, CG held a special call for Indigenous Research Capacity and Reconciliation (IRCR).

CG has not experienced any major changes since its implementation, although in 2014, it switched from accepting applications on a continuous basis throughout the year to four funding cycles per year. From fiscal years 2017-18 to 2021-22, CG funded 1,526 proposals, for a total value of \$39,436,161. This is an average of 305 funded proposals per year, averaging just under \$26,000 per grant. Between fiscal years

¹ CG has roots in funding opportunities with a KmB focus that existed prior to the architecture renewal. One such funding opportunity was Aid to Research Workshops and Conferences (646), which existed from 1995 to 2011.

2017-18 and 2019-20, between 40% and around half of CG applications were successful. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the success rate rose to around 80% before gradually returning to prepandemic levels.

Purpose of the Evaluation

The purpose of the evaluation was to provide SSHRC program leadership and others responsible for CG with credible evidence to inform potential improvements to this funding opportunity. The evaluation was also designed to provide information about the role of CG within the broader family of RPP funding opportunities and KMb at SSHRC.

The evaluation examined CG's relevance and outcomes with consideration for relevant changes in the environment outside of CG, for example, methods for organizing events and activities enabled by new technology and accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The evaluation was conducted in compliance with the requirements outlined in the Treasury Board's 2016 Policy on Results and the *Financial Administration Act*.

Scope of the Evaluation

This evaluation covered the fiscal years 2017-18 to 2022-23.² Focusing on this time frame allowed for concentration on recent developments in the context around CG, while also providing longitudinal data to assess trends.

The evaluation focused on grants awarded through the regular CG competition cycle. CG also provides funding for Special Initiatives (SIs), Joint Initiatives (JIs), and through special calls. Although special calls were out of scope, this evaluation did review the 2021 IRCR Special Call as an illustrative case of the use of special calls within the CG funding opportunity.

This evaluation also includes data for some of SSHRC's research funding opportunities, to assess whether and how CG is used to complement these other opportunities. Specifically, the evaluation sought to identify any links between CG and research funded through Partnership Development Grants, Partnership Engage Grants and Partnership Grants, as well as through Knowledge Synthesis Grants, Insight Grants and Insight Development Grants³. The analysis assessed whether and how CG is leveraged to support KMb at various phases and in relation to different types of research projects.

Evaluation Questions

The evaluation addressed three main questions and related subquestions:

- 1. Has the way that knowledge mobilization is described at SSHRC changed since Connection Grants was launched? If so, in what way, and what are the implications for Connection Grants?**

² For evaluation question 2a, the timeline was extended to capture data from earlier years.

³ See Appendix G for a description of these funding opportunities.

2. Does Connection Grants continue to make a distinct contribution to SSHRC's knowledge mobilization objectives?

2a. To what extent and in what ways do initiatives funded by Connection Grants contribute to research funded by other SSHRC funding opportunities, specifically Research Partnerships program grants and Insight Grants?

2b. To what extent do Connection Grants attract and fund proposals for activities and events to encourage an exchange of knowledge between groups of academics, as well as between academics and non-academics?

2c. To what extent does Connection Grants make other distinct contributions of importance to SSHRC and the research community?

2d. Are the tools the research community uses to exchange knowledge changing? If so, in what way, and to what extent does Connection Grants support changing tools?

3. What opportunities exist, if any, to optimize the role and contributions of Connection Grants?

The evaluation questions focused on CG's relevance and performance:

- alignment of CG within SSHRC's programs, and responsiveness to the research community (i.e., whether CG continue to fulfil a distinct purpose or meet a unique need); and CG's role in contributing to KMb as one of SSHRC's long-standing priorities;⁴ and
- how CG performs, both on its own and as a complement to other funding opportunities at SSHRC that support research, and whether CG makes a meaningful contribution to KMb initiatives.

Evaluation Methods

The SSHRC and Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC) Evaluation Division conducted this evaluation, with support from an external consulting firm. The EAC, with members from the RPP and SSHRC's Corporate Strategy and Performance team, provided guidance for the evaluation.

The evaluation covered five lines of evidence:⁵

- quantitative analysis of agency administrative data related to researcher participation in CG and other SSHRC funding opportunities (n > 7,300 records);
- qualitative and quantitative analysis of CG funding proposals (n = 660), and grantee achievement reports (n = 1,385);
- review of agency documents and academic literature on KMb (n = 120 documents);
- key informant interviews with CG recipients, applicants and sponsoring organizations (n = 41) employing an adapted approach to ripple effects mapping (REM);⁶ and

⁴ For details on SSHRC's priorities, see [SSHRC's Strategic Plan 2016-20](#) and [SSHRC's Strategic Plan 2020-25](#).

⁵ See Appendix D for details on methodology.

⁶ REM is a participatory method used to identify and analyze patterns in indirect outcomes.

- a focus group with agency staff (n = 11).

Some limitations were noted in the data for subquestion 2a. While a substantial number of CG recipients have also held SSHRC research grants, in some cases the nature of the relationship (if any) between the CG project and the research funded through these other specific grants could not be verified. This was in part due to interview participants' difficulty recalling, especially for CG grants received earlier in the time frame, and because the research process was more dynamic than is reflected by a sequence of grants (i.e., a CG grant may be part of a long-term research program that includes multiple projects, funded by various sources). Data from grantee achievement reports were intended to verify relationships between CG and the grantee's research. However, achievement reports could not be used to the extent intended in the evaluation plan due to missing data.

Overview of Findings

The following section summarizes the evaluation's key findings for each of the three questions.

Q1. Has the way that KMb is described at SSHRC changed since Connection Grants was launched? If so, in what way and what are the implications for CG?

Summary of findings:

- SSHRC's public-facing descriptions of KMb have changed in subtle ways since CG was launched in 2011, for example:
 - SSHRC's descriptions of KMb have long included the idea of co-creation; however, co-creation has become less prominent over time.
- In 2015, a definition of KMb was published on SSHRC's Definitions of Terms webpage, and the Guidelines for Effective Knowledge Mobilization appeared on a separate page.
 - The Guidelines more clearly express the flow of information from outside academia into academia than the definition of KMb does.
 - Descriptions of KMb on the Definitions of Terms and Guidelines pages may not have kept pace with changes in SSHRC's corporate priorities, such as SSHRC's support for Indigenous research or developments in KMb scholarship.
- There appear to be inconsistencies in the way the term KMb is used in different public-facing documents SSHRC produces, and in relation to specific initiatives such as the IRCR Special Call documented below. Ensuring consistency could contribute to the agency's support for KMb initiatives.

Knowledge mobilization as an evolving concept

Conceptualizations of how KMb "works" have shifted over time. Early models, sometimes described as "knowledge transfer" models, depicted the flow of research knowledge as linear and unidirectional, from researchers to "knowledge users"⁷ (Briggs et al. 2015). The term "knowledge exchange" was

⁷ "Users" can refer to anyone who accesses and applies knowledge, such as policy-makers, program designers, practitioners, patients, the media, the general public and, importantly, researchers themselves.

introduced to describe a two-directional flow of knowledge between researchers and practitioners. From there, theories incorporated the notion of “knowledge mobilization” as a process where knowledge can be informed by multiple, diverse sources and shared multidirectionally. Ward, Smith, House and Hamer (2012) described KMb as “a dynamic and inherently social process which incorporates distinct forms of knowledge which come from both research and practice” (298). Over the last 10 years, conceptualizations of KMb have been increasingly influenced by systems thinking. This approach proposes that social and organizational systems can influence the flow and uptake of information, with the understanding that information becomes knowledge when it is put into practice within a specific context. This has implications for other-sector partners involved in KMb initiatives, including those involving Indigenous Peoples and equity-deserving groups.

Knowledge mobilization at SSHRC

SSHRC’s public-facing descriptions of KMb have changed in subtle ways since CG was launched in 2011. In 2015, a definition of KMb was added to SSHRC’s “Definitions of Terms” webpage.⁸ At the same time, SSHRC also released the Guidelines for Effective Knowledge Mobilization, which complement the definition by listing a range of activities related to the production of research and the use of research results, including synthesis, dissemination, transfer, exchange, and co-creation or co-production.

SSHRC Definitions of Terms: Knowledge Mobilization (KMb)

The reciprocal and complementary flow and uptake of research knowledge between researchers, knowledge brokers and knowledge users—both within and beyond academia—in such a way that may benefit users and create positive impacts within Canada and/or internationally, and, ultimately, has the potential to enhance the profile, reach and impact of social sciences and humanities research. Knowledge mobilization initiatives must address at least one of the following, as appropriate, depending on research area and project objectives, context, and target audience:

Within academia:

- informs, advances and/or improves:
 - research agendas;
 - theory; and/or
 - methods.

Beyond academia:

- informs:
 - public debate;
 - policies; and/or
 - practice;
- enhances/improves services; and/or
- informs the decisions and/or processes of people in business, government, the media, practitioner communities and civil society.

The **KMb definition** is centred on the flow and uptake of **research** knowledge, which can be interpreted as information produced through research (outputs and dissemination). While it could also include

⁸ See [Definitions of Terms](#).

information pertaining to the research process (including inputs to research), this element may be less obvious to some readers, given the wording of the definition.

“Flow” and “uptake” imply knowledge moving between actors, and the intentional adoption of knowledge. The different categories of actors can be situated in any sector, including academic, not-for-profit, public and private sectors, implying the intersectoral dimension of KMb. The definition also highlights benefits and impacts for all parties.

Although the definition describes a reciprocal and complementary flow of research knowledge, the three groups identified (researchers, knowledge brokers and knowledge users), together with other language in the definition, imply a more linear flow. For example, although “knowledge user” could include researchers (who themselves use research), identifying a separate “researcher” group in the definition suggests that knowledge users are a distinct group. Also, outcomes are listed separately for initiatives taking place within academia and initiatives that include participants beyond academia. KMb initiatives within academia may inform research agendas, for example, while KMb initiatives beyond academia may improve services or the decision-making of actors working in other sectors. Reciprocal flow in the other direction, from beyond academia into academia, is not reflected in the list.

SSHRC’s **Guidelines for Effective Knowledge Mobilization** are presented on a separate webpage under Application Regulations. Under the heading “What is knowledge mobilization?” the following description appears:

Knowledge mobilization is an umbrella term encompassing a wide range of activities relating to the production and use of research results, including knowledge synthesis, dissemination, transfer, exchange, and co-creation or co-production by researchers and knowledge users.

Effective knowledge mobilization includes plans to store data in the public domain, where appropriate.

See SSHRC’s definition of knowledge mobilization.

The description of KMb that appears in the Guidelines differs from the KMb definition in that it refers to KMb as an umbrella term that encompasses a wide range of activities, reflecting both the production and use of research results. It goes on to provide example activities: “knowledge synthesis, dissemination, transfer, exchange, and co-creation or co-production.” The terms “co-creation or co-production,” reflecting exchanges at the beginning of a research project, are present here, but are not included in the definition.

Like the KMb definition, the Guidelines refer to researchers and knowledge users as the actors involved, but, in later sections of the document, the Guidelines reference partners and audiences.

By referring to co-creation and co-production, the Guidelines more clearly express the flow of information from outside academia into academia than the KMb definition does. For example, the Guidelines state that research can benefit from audience involvement, and that in cases of co-production of knowledge, research partners and research users “are in the best position to guide the course of research.”

KMb featured prominently in SSHRC's strategic plans early in the time frame for this evaluation and prior to it. SSHRC's [strategic plan](#) at the time CG was created (2010-12) included co-creation in its description of KMb, as well as an explicit reference to the two-way flow of knowledge:

“Knowledge mobilization” refers to a range of processes that help move research results into society, as well as bring new ideas into the world of research. From knowledge-brokering and outreach, to more effective dissemination through new technologies, to the “co-creation” of knowledge, these processes help ensure that public investments in social sciences and humanities research have the greatest possible impact—intellectually, socially and economically (p. 12).

Similarly, the 2016-20 strategic plan⁹ references KMb as part of efforts to “bring diverse perspectives to bear on the research process.”

KMb is briefly mentioned in SSHRC's most recent strategic plan (2020-25).¹⁰ That plan links KMb to communications as an area for skills development among students and early career researchers (ECRs).

The participants in a focus group with agency staff discussed the results of the review. The focus group included 11 participants who are involved in CG or are familiar with the funding opportunity from the RPP, Indigenous Strategy and the Future Challenges Division.¹¹ Several focus group participants agreed that co-creation should be recognized as part of KMb. They also agreed that there may be inconsistencies in the ways different agency communications use the term, with some program language and merit review criteria equating it mainly with the dissemination of research results.

One focus group participant raised the point that SSHRC's KMb definition may not align with some of SSHRC's corporate priorities, such as support for Indigenous research capacity and reconciliation. For example, centring research knowledge in the definition may unintentionally marginalize other forms of knowledge, such as Indigenous ways of knowing. If the flow of information between academic researchers and other groups is intended to be complementary and reciprocal, it may be important to recognize knowledge other than research knowledge. In contrast, it was pointed out that research knowledge is prioritized at SSHRC because it is a research funding agency. The focus on research knowledge could be retained but clarified to recognize inputs to the research process from outside of academia, including Indigenous ways of knowing, as well as outputs of the research process.

The tri-agency Indigenous Research Strategy,¹² led by SSHRC, was co-developed with Indigenous Peoples in a series of KMb events and engagement activities between July 2018 and March 2019. Although co-creation is not as apparent in some of the agency's more recent messaging on KMb, this initiative offers a tangible example of how SSHRC incorporates co-creation as a key element in producing, sharing and using knowledge. Additional information about this initiative is provided in the summary of findings for Q3 below.

⁹ For more details, see [SSHRC's Strategic Plan to 2020](#).

¹⁰ For more details, see [SSHRC's Strategic Plan 2020 to 2025](#).

¹¹ Includes staff involved in Knowledge Synthesis Grant and priority research areas, which share some common interests with CGs in KMb.

¹² For more details, see [Setting new directions to support Indigenous research and research training in Canada](#).

To summarize, SSHRC clearly values how a variety of other-sector partners contribute to research. However, this is not clearly expressed in SSHRC's public-facing descriptions of KMb, including the KMb definition and the Guidelines.

Implications for CG

A draft logic model for CG was developed in collaboration with the EAC to help guide this evaluation (Appendix E). The logic model describes three broad ways that KMb activities may contribute to SSH research: as a catalyst, as enrichment and for dissemination. Discussions with the EAC about terminology led to the adoption of the terms "academic researchers" and "research partners" to describe actors involved, rather than "researchers" and "knowledge users," which are used in some other SSHRC documentation. The term knowledge user is intentionally *not* used in the logic model, as it can infer a group separate from researchers, and any group can be a knowledge user.

The evaluation results reported below indicate that grantees are using CG funding in the ways depicted in the logic model, i.e., that CG is performing the role anticipated in the model.

If SSHRC's conceptualization of KMb is intentionally moving away from co-creation, as indicated in this review of public-facing documents, then CG's logic may need to be revisited, so that CG can remain aligned with SSHRC's overall direction for its support to KMb.

Conversely, if the changes observed in SSHRC's descriptions of KMb were not intentional, then the current public-facing descriptions of KMb should be reviewed for internal consistency (e.g., in terminology), and for updates to reflect SSHRC's support for including other sectors in the research process, along with possible updates for alignment with developments in KMb scholarship since the 2015 KMb definition and Guidelines were created. A review could also consider the extent to which updates can or should align with other SSHRC corporate strategies, including strategies on Indigenous research.

A possible implication of separating the content into the KMb definition and the Guidelines is the potential for misunderstanding among CG applicants as a result of needing to consult information about KMb in two places. A clear understanding of KMb among applicants to SSHRC funding opportunities and their collaborators and partners, as well as within the agency itself, is important.

CG program staff are well positioned to participate in discussions on descriptions of KMb at SSHRC, and on how KMb is presented to the research community and broader public. These findings could be referenced in such discussions.

Q2. Does Connection Grants continue to make a distinct contribution to SSHRC's objectives for knowledge mobilization?

This evaluation question was addressed in four subquestions.

Q2a. To what extent and in what ways do initiatives funded by Connection Grants contribute to research funded by other SSHRC funding opportunities, specifically by Research Partnerships program grants and Insight Grants?

Summary of findings:

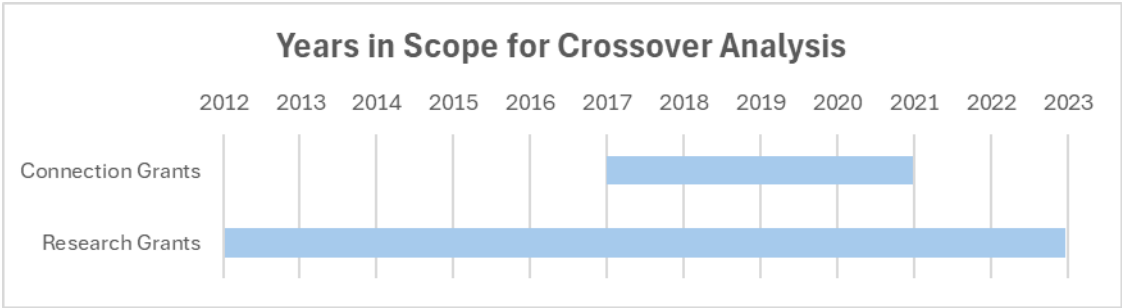
- CGs are an important complement to research funded by other SSHRC funding opportunities, contributing in multiple (sometimes unanticipated) ways.
- CGs contribute to KMB in a variety of ways, including by acting as a catalyst for new research, partnerships and collaborations, by enriching concurrent research and by supporting the dissemination of research results.
- A majority (but not all) of CG recipients have received research funding from SSHRC through Insight Grants or RPP grants, and it is more common to hold a research grant prior to a CG than after.
- There is not always a direct correspondence between a CG and a research grant. Often, a CG-funded activity is contributing to a research project in more than one way and/or to more than one project. For example, a CG event may bring researchers and others together to share research findings, which can have a catalytic effect, leading to the development of new partnerships and research directions.
- The CG logic model recognizes the many ways that researchers use CG for KMB. The model could more clearly show how these contributions overlap and intersect, as part of an ongoing research program.

The majority of CG participants are also participating in SSHRC research funding opportunities, especially Insight.

Agency data for CG and SSHRC research funding opportunities were compared to identify CG participants who had also participated in Research Partnerships and Insight funding opportunities. The participants were applicants and co-applicants, both funded and unfunded. The time frame in scope for CG for this comparison was 2017-21, while records for research grant funding opportunities were reviewed over a longer time frame to identify research grants held by CG participants prior to their CG and/or after their CG, as shown in Figure 1.¹³

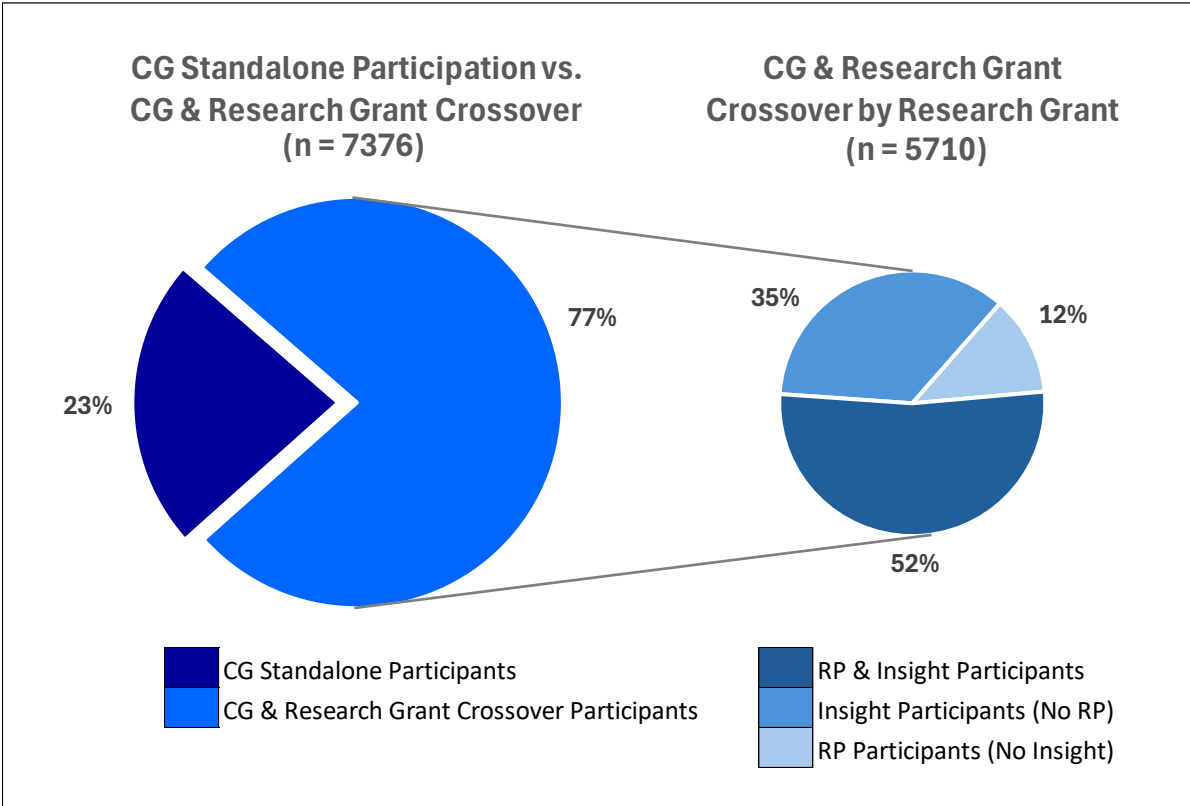
¹³ The time frame in scope for RPP and Insight funding opportunities extends back to 2012, because the grant periods for some of the relevant opportunities in these programs are longer; grants awarded in 2012 could therefore overlap with a CG awarded in 2017. An individual who received a CG grant in 2017-21 may have received a research grant prior to 2012. However, as the focus was on how CG funding may be contributing to a research project, we assumed that the contribution may be limited if the previous participation was more than five years prior to the CG time frame of study, given that the average duration of research grants is between one and four years.

Figure 1: Time frames in scope for CG and research grants



As shown in Figure 2, 77% of the total number of participants in CG between 2017 and 2021 had participated in one or more research grant competitions prior to or after their CG. For the purpose of this evaluation, these participants are referred to as crossover participants. The remaining 23% of CG participants showed no participation in research grant funding opportunities during the time period and are referred to as standalone participants.¹⁴

Figure 2: CG applicant and co-applicant participation in SSHRC research grants, 2017-21¹⁵



¹⁴ Note: Standalone CG initiatives were not assumed to be less valuable. They were considered as a subgroup for the purpose of assessing the extent to which Connection Grant participants also participated in other SSHRC funding opportunities, and to provide additional perspectives. For example, these standalone CG grants may be contributing to research funded by other (non-SSHRC) funding actors or may offer insight into the range of ways CGs are used.

¹⁵ The scope for crossover participation in SSHRC’s research funding opportunities is between 2012-23.

Overall, 87% of CG crossover participants have participated in Insight funding opportunities, while 64% participated in RPP opportunities. About half (52%) participated in CG and research funding opportunities from *both* Insight and RPP (Insight Grants or Insight Development Grants *and* at least one of Partnership Grants, Partnership Development Grants, Partnership Engage Grants) (see Figure 2).¹⁶

Among CG participants who have also participated in either Insight *or* RPP research grants (but not both), 35% participated only in Insight, and 12% only in RPP.

The data indicate that most CG participants have active research programs, given the high proportion of CG participants also participating in SSHRC research grant funding opportunities. More than half of participants appear to be seeking multiple types of research funding (i.e., CG, Insight, RPP), indicating the breadth of their research programs. Finally, the higher percentage of crossover participants participating in Insight funding opportunities than RPP research grants indicates the value of the Insight + CG pairing.

A substantial percentage of all CG participants have applied to the funding opportunity more than once. This indicates that CG holds value and relevance for the research community, despite the time and work involved in applying. Yet very few individuals engage with CG more than once within a two- to three-year time frame.¹⁷ This fact suggests that researchers are using CG for specific purposes, for example, to carry out activities at semi-regular intervals, spaced around their projects, and to support work with collaborators. This pattern is consistent with several of the ways interview participants reported CG contributing to longer-term research programs, as indicated below, including developing and sustaining long-term collaborations.

Previous participation in CG appears to increase the likelihood of subsequent participation. For instance, among those who participated in CG in 2017 for the first time, 41% had participated in CG again by 2022. Among those who participated in CG in 2017 as a repeat participant (not for the first time), 59% had participated again by 2022.

Participation of CG grantees in other funding opportunities

The results above include all applicants and co-applicants to CG and SSHRC research grants (successful and unsuccessful). Narrowing the analysis to grantees only, most CG recipients have also received research grant funding from SSHRC. Specifically, 70% of CG recipients received funding from RPP or Insight funding opportunities between 2012-23.¹⁸

Of the 30% (n = 1,661) of grantees who did *not* receive SSHRC research grant funding:

- About 1/3 (35%, n = 581) applied to Insight or RPP but were unsuccessful. For these individuals, CG represented their only known funding among the grants included in the analysis.
- About 2/3 (65%, n = 1,080) did not apply to any of the RPP or Insight program funding opportunities in scope during this time frame. This represents almost 20% of CG grantees overall. These individuals appear

¹⁶ Of note: fewer than a quarter of researchers funded by SSHRC through Insight and RPP's research grants (22%) participated in both programs during this time period.

¹⁷ Part of the peer review process is to ensure that SSHRC is not funding the same project twice and that subsequent applications for funding are substantially different from earlier funded projects.

¹⁸ As previously mentioned, the scope for crossover with SSHRC research grants is longer to capture relevant grants of longer duration.

to have limited participation in SSHRC funding, i.e., CG may be reaching beyond SSHRC's core applicant community. This is revisited below with results on how population subgroups used CG.

A majority of CG recipients held a SSHRC research grant before their Connection Grant

Among crossover recipients, 85% had already held at least one SSHRC research grant when they received their CG award. Only 15% of crossover participants held their CG grant first, followed by a research grant.¹⁹ Given that the proportion of standalone CG grantees was also relatively small (20% of all CG grantees), the results suggest that CGs are not often functioning as a “starter grant.”

The crossover analysis focused on SSHRC's flagship research programs, RPP and Insight, but there is evidence of cases of CG contributing to research funded by other programs, including the prestigious, large-scale New Frontiers in Research Fund (NFRF) program. Although this evaluation did not include analysis of crossover with other programs, it highlights the use of CG to complement research projects of various kinds, including interdisciplinary research.

How Connection Grants-funded events and activities contribute to research

The following sections draw on analysis of qualitative data from two sources: a sample of 1,385 grantee achievement reports that explicitly referenced SSHRC research funding opportunities (e.g., Insight or RPP), and interviews with 41 CG applicants, grantees and representatives of sponsoring organizations.

The results indicate that KMB activities contributed to research at a variety of different phases of a project. At least three types of contributions (catalyst, enrichment and dissemination) appear in the CG draft logic model. As reported below, all three of these types of contributions were clearly observed in CG grantee accounts, indicating that CGs are functioning as depicted in the logic model.

All but one of the crossover interview participants (i.e., interview participants who had received both a CG and a research grant), reported that the CG enriched related research, making enrichment the most commonly reported type of contribution among interview participants. Over two thirds of crossover interview participants reported using their CG for dissemination activities, while just under half used their CG to catalyze research. In open comment boxes in achievement reports, around 15% of grantees in the sample referred to other research funded by SSHRC. There was a similar distribution across the three types of contributions in these achievement reports, but catalyst was the most common, followed by enrichment and dissemination.

In addition, both interview participants and achievement reports described CG contributions to research that cut across the three types. For example, CG events or activities designed to enrich research that was already underway were often described as also acting as a catalyst for new research (an unintended secondary effect). Dissemination activities, as described below, often occur near the end of a project and can include enriching and refining results. Dissemination activities were also reported to contribute to the initiation of new research projects and collaborations. Many interview participants described involving student trainees in their CG-funded projects, contributing to the development of KMB-related skills and developing research capacity. This included opportunities to disseminate research results, for

¹⁹ This difference is partially due to the time frame in scope, which as explained above starts in 2012 for research grants and in 2017 for CG. CG recipients between 2017 and 2022, especially those in the last two years of this period, have not yet had much time for success in research grant competitions.

example through a presentation or publication, and networking opportunities leading to collaborations and potential career development.

Pre-project catalyst

In both achievement reports and interviews, CG recipients reported developing new research directions and connections as a result of CG-funded activities. Some reported that these activities later became a foundation for proposals when applying to other funding opportunities at SSHRC. These instances highlight how CG can act as a catalyst in initiating new research, and the data indicate that this is one of the primary uses of CG.

Written responses in grantee achievement reports provided details about how CG-funded events and activities contributed to the development of projects that received other SSHRC funding.²⁰ For example, in the following statements, grant recipients explained that collaborations initiated in CG-funded projects contributed to subsequent funded research:

“Many collaborations that started in this [CG] project were further developed through the Insight Grant [project name], which in turn gave rise to the [second CG project name]” (CG Grantee Achievement Report).

“Relationships among the participants were formed, and these allowed us to work towards a SSHRC Partnership Engage Grant and now a SSHRC Partnership Grant” (CG Grantee Achievement Report).

In other cases, grantees referred to CG activities as a way to identify or explore challenges that a particular community or the broader society were facing. The following quote is an example of this:

“I think largely stemming from the original Connection Grant that I held where we brought together people from around the world to talk about [topic] and conversations that started there looking at [topic] and all of the things that go with that, we realized that in Canada there was no specific legislation or even understanding of that issue” (Standalone Recipient 18).

Enriching concurrent research

During interviews, the majority of crossover participants described how the CG event or activity was enriching research that was already underway. They talked in general terms about bringing researchers together or bringing together researchers and representatives of other-sector organizations to network, collaborate, or share and discuss findings, which often also had implications for future work.

Coming together with collaborators, including those from other sectors, was described as an opportunity to refine a project’s direction, assess progress or preliminary results, and plan next steps for the research. The last of these could also lead to work on a new project.

²⁰ CG achievement reports do not explicitly ask grantees to report about research grants, but some CG recipients referred to SSHRC research grants in open comments.

“The work of the colloquium really supports my IDG and as well, of course, networking and learning from senior scholars always supports your ability to successfully implement the other projects”
(Crossover Recipient 14).

This type of use of CG was also reported as an opportunity to expand an existing research network in ways that benefit research. In most cases, accounts described an effort to involve other perspectives on the research, often from other sectors. At least one grantee noted that using a CG to bring academic specialists together for focused discussion is also important, because it creates the time and space required for a highly specialized discussion.

Post-project dissemination

In interviews, a substantial proportion of CG recipients reported using their funding to disseminate research findings at the end or near the end of projects that had been funded by other SSHRC grants, including in written and other formats. Dissemination-focused activities were described as a way to conclude a research project, but not necessarily with the presentation of a finished work. Dissemination was also described as a way to solicit input on a draft, for example by doing a “trial run” of an output, to ensure it would be useful for collaborators.

“We had this book, which is usually sort of like a knowledge output, right? And all of the research had been conducted and what we wanted to do is get all these collaborators in the same room to make sure that the output that we’re putting out is the best possible for schools, for teachers, for performers” (Crossover Recipient 13).

One CG recipient described using different kinds of publications stemming from CG-funded events, including journal articles and blog posts, as a way of reaching audiences that were not physically present at the events. The recipient said this approach increased the visibility of research conducted on a topic (the focus of the event). In other words, KMB events and subsequent outputs were used to help researchers broaden the impact of their work. Several interviewees also stressed that CG-funded KMB activities involving dissemination of research results targeted both academic and other communities as their intended audiences.

In some cases, accounts suggest that the CG-funded activity was not tied to any specific research project, but rather was one of several intermittent activities within a research network. This way of using CG, which several interviewees reported, appears to play a role in contributing to a network’s vitality by sustaining long-term collaborations and making it possible for new participants to join existing research networks. Some interview participants also stressed that while successful cross-sectoral partnerships are valuable to research, they require mutual trust and take time and effort to establish and maintain. This idea is revisited below.

Interaction of multiple contributions to funded research

The results of data analysis using the REM approach indicated that CG can contribute to research in multiple ways that interact with one another. As noted above, achievement reports indicated that CG aided in disseminating outputs from finished research (e.g., a book or article) while also laying the groundwork for a new research project. Similarly, a CG recipient described a fluidity across stages of research:

“On a tout de suite commencé à planifier les publications. Au départ, on voulait faire un numéro de revue et un ouvrage. Finalement, on a réduit l’ampleur du projet en un ouvrage. Dès l’après-midi de la fin du colloque, on avait une réunion avec l’ensemble des organisateurs pour planifier la suite du projet. Ça a été fluide” (Crossover Recipient 15).

Notably, as part of the participant validation step in the REM, CG grantees were asked to categorize the outcomes they had reported from their CG explicitly by type, i.e., as catalyst, enrichment or dissemination. Most participants reported that their project contributed in more than one of these ways.

Implications for CG

The CG draft logic model could be modified to more clearly express the sometimes dynamic interactions between the different ways CG contributes to research. For example, the “pre-project” and “post-project” descriptors could be removed, as a catalyst doesn’t necessarily only occur before a project starts, and dissemination can begin before the end of a project. Dissemination can also catalyze and enrich other research. These small changes would help the logic model better represent the complex and varied interactions between KMB activities and research.

Q2b. To what extent does Connection Grants attract and fund proposals for activities and events to encourage an exchange of knowledge between groups of academics, as well as between academics and non-academics?

Summary of findings:

- CG attract and fund more proposals for activities between groups of academics than between academics and members of other-sector organizations.
- Participants from other sectors appear somewhat more often as collaborators than as co-applicants. Only 9% of sampled CG proposals included a co-applicant from another sector. One quarter (25%) listed a collaborator from another sector.
- Where they exist, collaborations with other-sector partners require time to build. Interview participants reported that collaborations that were developed and maintained over a long period of time tended to be more successful.
- Other-sector involvement in formal roles on a CG application was reported to be limited in part due to an application process that is designed for academics, a lack of resources to enable other-sector participation, and a perceived lack of benefits for some types of other-sector actors when they do participate.

Other-sector involvement in CG

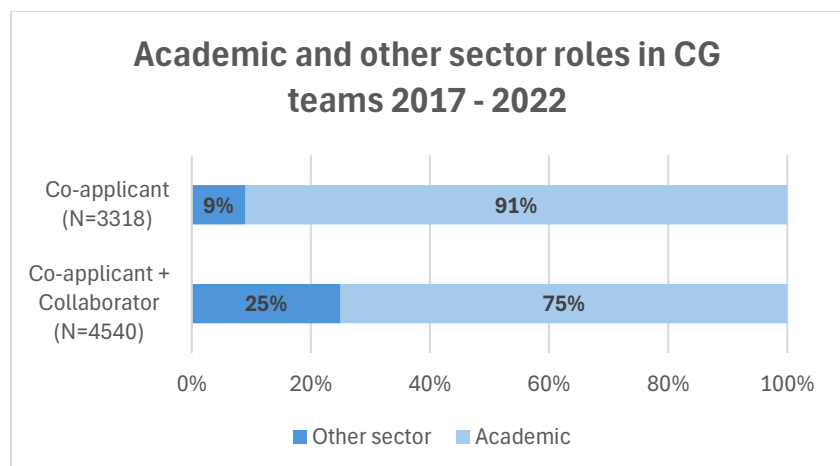
Between 2017 and 2022, the proportion of funded proposals from teams composed entirely of academics ranged from 89% to 92%, while the proportion of funded proposals by academic+ teams (i.e., teams composed of academic and other-sector co-applicants²¹) ranged from 8% to 11%, with an average of 9%. When collaborators were also included, the proportion of CG academic+ teams rose to 25%.

²¹ Federal government entities and private sector organizations are not eligible to be co-applicants.

Notably, the proportion of academic+ teams was larger than in Insight but smaller than in Partnership Grants. The smaller proportion relative for Partnership Grants may be due to the much smaller team sizes of CG projects compared with Partnership Grant projects, as well as differences in program design.

Academic only and academic+ teams had roughly equal success rates in CG competitions, averaging around 55% over the time frame in scope.²²

Figure 3: Overall academic and other-sector participation in CG teams by role, CY 2017-2022



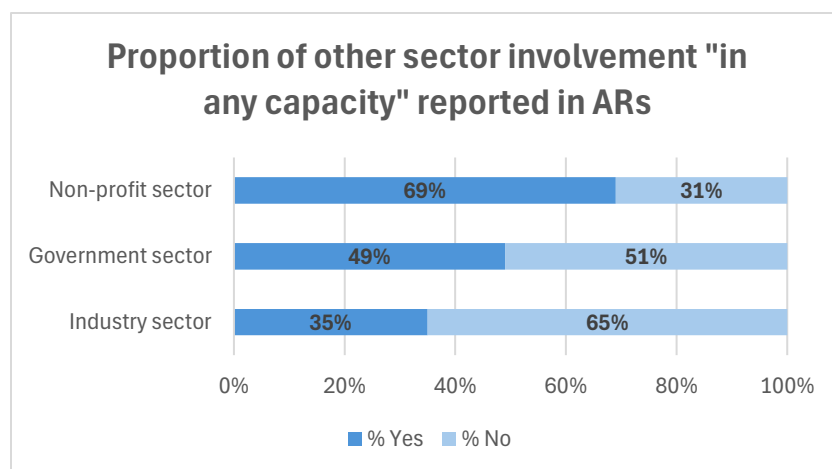
CG grantee achievement reports also provided information about other-sector participation. These reports contained answers to the yes/no question, “Were individuals or organizations from the following sectors involved in your initiative (in any capacity, e.g., attendee, collaborator)?”²³ Of all achievement reports submitted by CG grantees, 69% reported other-sector involvement in this broad sense. Not-for-profit sector participation was most commonly reported, followed by government sector participation, although industry (private) sector involvement was also reported by more than one third of grantees (see Figure 4).

The achievement report data indicate a much higher proportion of other-sector involvement in informal capacities compared to formal capacities (i.e., co-applicant or collaborator). Formal participation as a co-applicant or collaborator requires contributing to the CG application, while informal participation does not (see “Applicant eligibility” section in Appendix B for more details).

Figure 4: Proportion of other-sector involvement reported in achievement reports by percentage in response to the following question: “Were individuals or organizations from the following sectors involved in your initiative (in any capacity, e.g., attendee, collaborator)?” (N=1385)

²² The success rate was higher during the COVID-19 pandemic when the funding opportunity budget increased and fewer applications were received.

²³ The achievement reports do not ask grantees to distinguish between formal roles (e.g., co-applicant and collaborator) and informal roles (e.g., attendees, audience members).



Another way that other-sector organizations participated in projects funded by CG was as a sponsoring organization. Sponsoring organizations provided support in the form of cash and/or in-kind contributions. While almost a third of sponsoring organizations were academic institutions, other-sector organizations represented the majority, at 70%, for both funded and unfunded applications. Academic+ teams (representing under 10% of all grantees) were more likely than academic-only teams to leverage sponsorship support from other-sector organizations, with 89% of academic+ teams receiving support from at least one other-sector organization. Although CG does not classify sponsoring organizations as partners, some participants in interviews described sponsoring organizations as having an active role in CG-funded projects and noted concerns about the costs of their participation, as explained below.

Factors shaping other-sector involvement in CG-funded events and activities

While researchers and other-sector representatives value cross-sectoral partnerships, they require mutual trust if they are to be successful, and they take time and effort to develop and sustain. Initiating new cross-sector partnerships sometimes presents challenges.

Some interviewees working closely with partners in the not-for-profit sector reported a reluctance to ask them to take on the responsibilities that come with joining the grant in an official capacity. Several interviewees specifically referenced the work involved in the application process as a barrier, because it is “onerous” (Standalone Applicant), “obscure” (*difficile à comprendre*) (Crossover Recipient), and even a “nightmare” (Standalone Recipient). More specifically, interviewees indicated that this is because the application requirements are academic in nature, even for co-applicants, and not geared toward not-for-profit organizations, even though these organizations are eligible to participate in this capacity. The CV requirements in particular were mentioned as not appropriate for some other-sector partners. As one standalone CG recipient put it, the CG application process:

“[d]oesn’t lend itself to non-academics or community partners who are on the ground and dealing with life-or-death situations on a daily basis. It’s very ableist, also, in many ways” (Standalone Recipient 20).

Interview participants also explicitly stated that application requirements, including CV formats, can be a barrier specifically for Indigenous partners, or that they approach them with reticence. A few interviewees pointed out that this is relevant to the Canadian context of reconciliation and

decolonization. This element is noteworthy given the inclusion of support for Indigenous research in SSHRC's corporate priorities.

"On est dans un contexte de décolonisation, toute la lourdeur bureaucratique, ça fait partie de l'approche coloniale. Il y a toujours une réticence à aller sur le site du gouvernement remplir des formulaires et tout ça. Ils le font, mais ce n'est pas de plein gré" (Crossover Recipient 10).

The application requirements appear to be one factor leading researchers to involve other-sector collaborators in informal rather than formal capacities, even if researchers would like these collaborators to have a more formal role. There was also evidence of some confusion around the eligibility requirements for CG, including whether not-for-profit organizations can be co-applicants.

Asymmetries between academic and other-sector partners

Interviews with sponsoring organization representatives indicated that asymmetries between academics and representatives of other-sector organizations may exist when it comes to involvement in CG-funded initiatives. Specifically, the costs and benefits of participation varied for these differently situated participants. A number of interviewees pointed out that grants may benefit academic applicants by helping to advance their careers, including through recognition that contributes to tenure and promotions within an academic institution—a benefit that does not apply to other-sector team members. In interviews, sponsoring organization representatives highlighted their limited budgets, pointing out that participating in CG-funded initiatives often involves a contribution of time (an "in-kind" contribution) but that this has financial ramifications, because it may result in lost revenue. Even when compensation is provided, it may not be sufficient to offset all of the time and work involved in preparing for and participating in an event. For example, in the words of one interviewee from a sponsoring organization:

"It's never really just in-kind; it just means that we're not truly out of pocket. But, at times, we will experience the revenue loss... We've said that a few times that it just is important for the granting agencies to realize that in-kind isn't really in-kind (at least for those that are doing the in-kind)" (Sponsoring Organization 22).

Another representative from a sponsoring organization compared it with compensation for academic trainees:

"...so much of [the grant] is dedicated towards paying for students to be assistants and to get research assistants and stuff like that. And in order to have true community participation, remuneration has to flow out into the community, otherwise it's just the community donating time or getting paid minimal compensation" (Sponsoring Organization 11).

As a counterpoint, numerous researchers participating in interviews reported that CG funding enabled them to better engage community partners:

"Without a doubt we relied on the grant to do that. [...] We wouldn't have had those educators there without the Connection Grant" (Crossover Recipient 14).

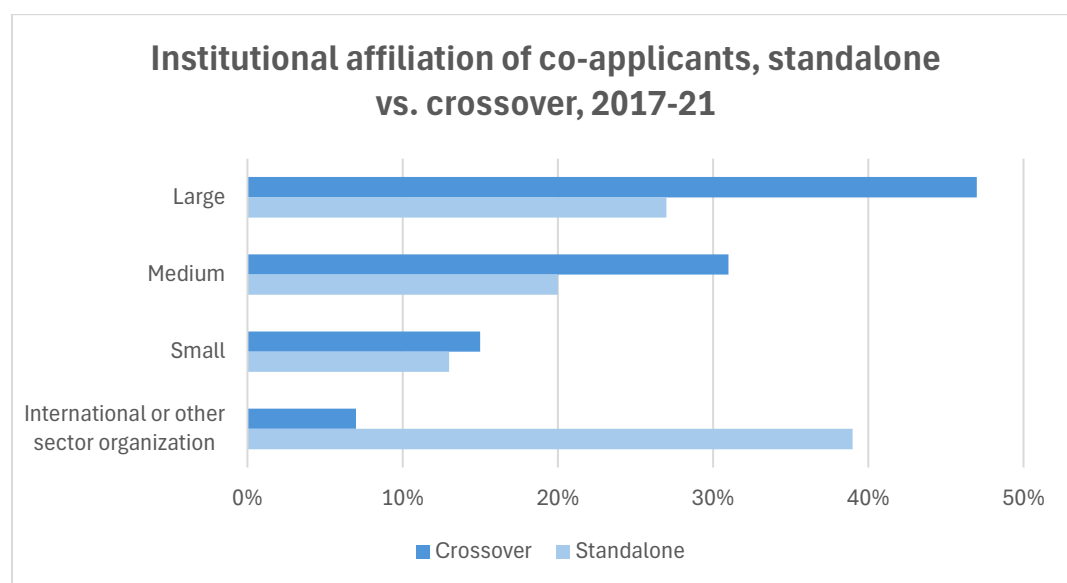
CG participation by population subgroup: institutional affiliation, career stage and EDI-designated groups

Agency administrative data provided insights into how members of different groups used CG, including members of institutions of different sizes, ECRs and EDI-designated groups.

Institutional affiliation. Grants held by crossover recipients (CG recipients who had also held a SSHRC research grant) were more likely to include co-applicants from large Canadian academic institutions²⁴ compared to those held by standalone CG recipients (see Figure 5). From 2017 to 2021, almost half (47%) of co-applicants on grants held by crossover recipients were from large institutions, while less than one third (31%) were from medium-sized institutions, 15% were from small institutions and 7% were from international institutions or other-sector organizations.

In contrast, standalone recipients were much more likely to have co-applicants from international institutions or other-sector organizations.²⁵ During the study period, 27% of co-applicants on grants held by standalone recipients were affiliated with large institutions, 20% with medium-sized institutions and 13% with small institutions, while 39% were affiliated with international or other-sector organizations. This indicates that CG projects held by standalone grantees may play a role in involving individuals beyond the typical Canadian research sphere.

Figure 5: Institutional affiliation of standalone and crossover recipients' co-applicants between 2017-21



²⁴ Large institutions are those receiving in excess of \$16,500,000 per year in federal funding, averaged over three years. Medium-sized institutions receive between \$5,000,000 and \$16,500,000, and small institutions receive under \$5,000,000.

²⁵ I.e., institutions classed as “unknown size” in the dataset, which are those located outside of Canada or other-sector organizations.

Career stage. The vast majority of grantees were established researchers. Only 16% of CG recipients were ECRs, compared to 83% who were established researchers.²⁶ Among the 16% of all CG recipients who were ECRs, 50% had already received a SSHRC research grant before holding their CG.

EDI-designated groups. SSHRC's collection of data about self-reported EDI group membership began in 2018. These data include categories for gender identity, disability status, visible minority²⁷ and Indigenous identity.

In terms of gender identity, there was a slightly higher proportion of women among the crossover recipients than CG-only recipients. Around 58% of crossover recipients identified as women, 35% identified as men and under 2% identified as non-binary, compared to 50% of CG-only recipients who identified as women, 42% as men and 3% as non-binary.²⁸

A growing number of CG participants have self-identified as belonging to a visible minority group²⁹ since 2018. A growth trend of approximately 10 to 15 percentage points between 2017 and 2021 was evident for successful primary applicants and co-applicants who self-identified as a visible minority. Among CG grant holders who held a CG before holding a research grant, the proportion grew from 11% in 2018 to 26% in 2021. From 2018 to 2020, approximately 5% of CG recipients self-reported Indigenous identity.³⁰

Implications for CG

It is apparent that the application requirements for co-applicants, including using an online platform and the academic format of some elements, such as CVs, can act as a barrier for some other-sector partners to participate formally as co-applicants. This may be the case especially for other-sector partners from marginalized communities, as well as those with little prior exposure to academic research. Moreover, sectoral differences may create asymmetries in commitments to and perceived benefits of formal participation in a CG-funded event or activity. More detail about the benefits of CG involvement for other-sector partners is provided in the next section.

Q2c. To what extent does Connection Grants make other, distinct contributions of importance to SSHRC and the research community?

²⁶ For 1%, the career stage was not known.

²⁷ Although this was recently updated to racialized minority in the questionnaire, we used the term “visible minority” in this report to reflect the question asked of respondents during the time period in scope.

²⁸ Approximately 5% of recipients preferred not to answer this question.

²⁹ The term “visible minority” reflects the language used in the self-identification questionnaire.

³⁰ Five per cent did not answer the question about Indigenous identity.

Summary of findings:

- Despite their small dollar amounts, CGs contribute to KMb-related outcomes in ways that would be difficult to replicate with other funding opportunities.
- The benefits of CG funding were shared among academic team members and others involved, including sponsoring organizations and trainees.
- Reported outcomes varied from immediate to long-term and could be far-reaching. They included expanding networks, sharing research results, and developing KMb-related skills among trainees.
- The IRCR Special Call illustrates that it is possible to adapt CG design elements when appropriate and necessary to aid in advancing priorities.
- CG participants valued the elements of CG design that make this funding opportunity easily adaptable, such as flexibility (e.g., frequent calls, diversity of eligible projects), relatively small dollar values, and short durations.

Outcomes at different levels

Outcomes of CG-funded activities and events ranged from immediate to long term and could be far-reaching. Some unanticipated outcomes were reported. CG-funded events and activities were reported to contribute to advancing knowledge in relevant academic fields within Canada and internationally, as well as in other sectors. Interviewees reported that CG-funded events and activities affected not only those who were directly involved but also had ripple effects that continued after the project was over, affecting other people and places. An important area of CG outcomes was the development of research and KMb-related capacity among trainees.

The wide range of types and levels of outcomes reported in interviews with CG recipients and sponsoring organizations is illustrated using an REM (see Figure 6).³¹ On the REM image, outcomes are categorized and arrayed across three concentric circles: transactional (outcomes for those directly involved in the funded activity), transitional (outcomes that involve connections with others), and transformational (changes that may not be directly related to the funded activity but are nonetheless influenced by it). During data analysis, an additional layer of codes was added to data for reported outcomes belonging to the three levels to develop the outcome labels on the REM image. These codes categorized the outcomes as types. Next, a glossary was created to describe the labels for interview participants, who were later surveyed as a validation step. The glossary used examples and explanations from interview data. For example, from the first concentric circle (A. Transactional), “Create a space that allows people to come together” was described as follows: “This includes ways that the funding supports logistics, such as travel or the physical or virtual space where people gather, as well as acting as an impetus for coming together for a common purpose or shared interest.” From the middle concentric circle (B. Transitional), “Collaborations are renewed or strengthened” was described as follows: “Existing collaborations and partnerships are stronger as a result of the CG-funded activity. This may be due to shared goals achieved at the CG event and/or intangible factors, including relationships strengthened through spending time together.” From the outer concentric circle (C. Transformational), “Accessibility of research knowledge” was described as follows: “This includes the availability of research knowledge

³¹ For more information about the approach used for data analysis and development of the REM, see Appendix D.

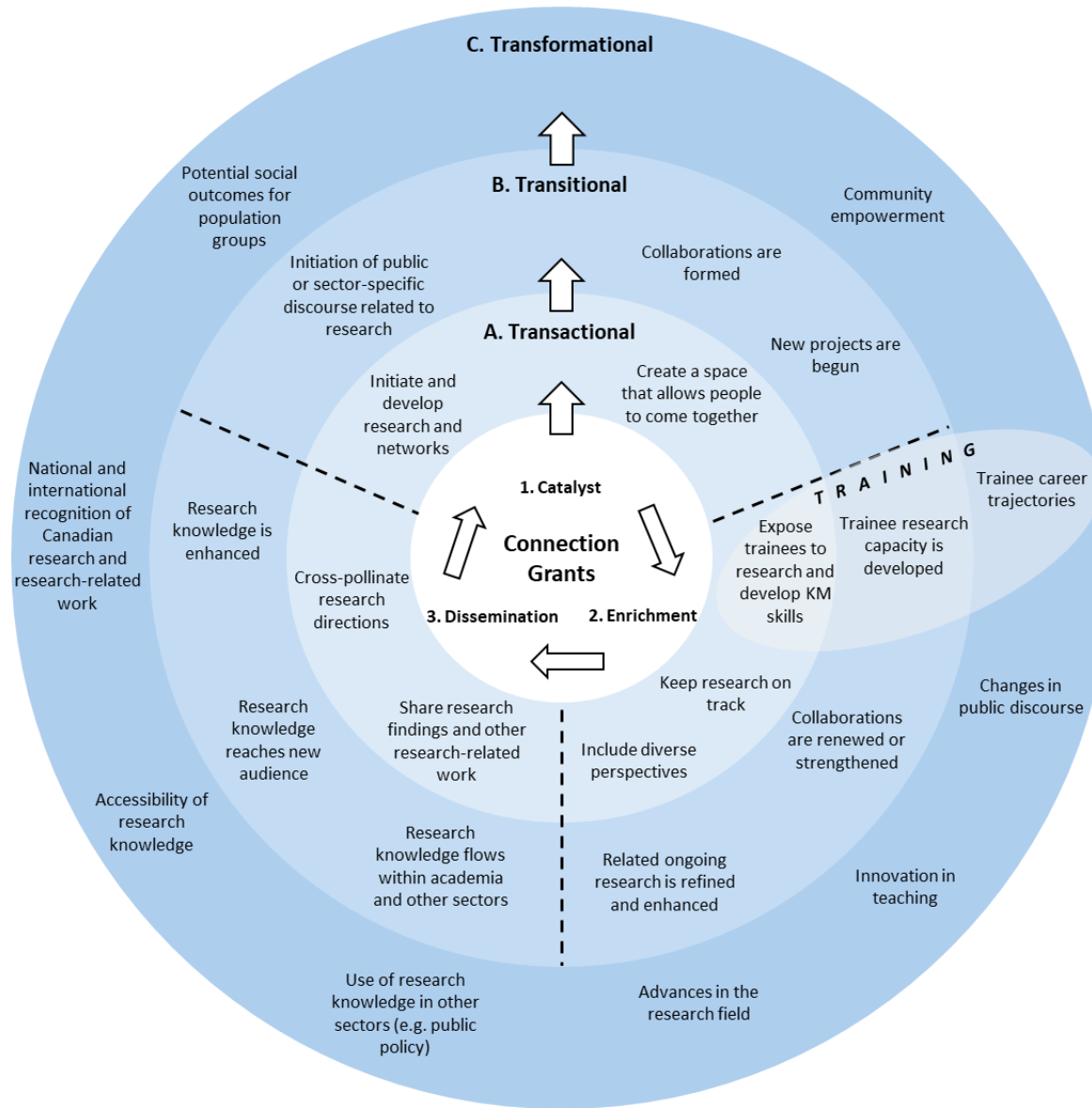
related to the CG-funded activity in formats which are widely accessible and offer continued long-term access, such as online archives, web pages, library holdings, recordings or ongoing media or social media coverage.”

The results of the REM analysis and validation survey confirmed findings from other lines of evidence, including the use of CG for different kinds of KMb activities at different stages of research, for example to catalyze a project or disseminate results. The results also showed the wide range of types and time scales of outcomes, from immediate to long term. When surveyed, a few participants pointed out that there was interaction between the different levels of outcomes. One explained this point as follows:

“I think what is missing [in the REM map] is a feedback loop between the transformational back to the transitional and transactional—that process is much more fluid and circular” (CG Grantee).

This point relates to the finding reported above (see evaluation question 2a) concerning the dynamic and interactive nature of the contributions of KMb activities to research. Likewise, outcomes that extend beyond the actors who were directly involved in a project (transitional, transformational) can also come back to affect actors who were directly involved.

Figure 6: REM based on key informant interview data (grantees and sponsoring organizations, n = 33)



The following example illustrates these different levels of outcomes. In this case, the CG recipient, who worked in a performance-based discipline, used the funding for a summer institute at which recordings and a songbook were produced. These resources incorporated material that had previously only been available as oral folk traditions. The recordings, available via streaming sites, are now accessed in the region and internationally. The summer institute developed the students' skills and knowledge, and a key outcome was extending a minority linguistic cultural tradition to a wider audience, including younger students. The students involved in the summer training institute themselves later used the materials they helped to produce as assessment materials in their own teaching.

Most participants were unable or hesitant to speculate on long-term, transformational outcomes of their projects. When they did specify, longer-term outcomes were reported to include those in the academic sector, with respect to new and experimental findings, as well as in other sectors, including policy. Examples of policy outcomes of CG grants are provided in the following quotes:

"[They] explicitly changed the way they were designing [focus area] policy in the ways that we started experimenting with after the workshop in 2019. So, the research we'd been doing after this workshop really helped to inform how these frameworks would perform in practice" (Crossover Recipient 1).

"I think it's led to engagement with the federal government which I've really appreciated. So, for example, federal officials, not elected officials but staff, have connected with me to discuss [topic]... They mention these pieces and this information [that we produced]" (Crossover Recipient 8).

A small number of interview participants pointed out that their CG-funded events influenced university teaching:

"There's actually new courses on the books at universities or significantly changed courses that take into account the things that came out of this symposium" (Crossover Recipient 6).

Interview participants were asked about existing alternatives to the CG funding they applied for or received. While some surmised that they would have found a way to proceed without it, many indicated that their KMB event or activity would have been greatly reduced in scope or impossible without a CG. For example, attendance at an event would be reduced without the CG because of a lack of alternatives for funding travel expenses. Alternatively, some KMB events and activities might not have been held at all. In this way, some interview participants saw the grant as an essential and irreplaceable support for their projects.

The IRCR CG Special Call

The IRCR Connection Grants Special Call is an example of the way the CG funding opportunity is sometimes used for initiatives that correspond to the agency's strategic priorities. The purpose of the call was to support interdisciplinary events and outreach activities geared toward short-term, targeted KMB initiatives and to contribute to the Canada Research Coordination Committee's priority of a national dialogue to co-develop, with First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities, an interdisciplinary, Indigenous research and research training model that contributes to reconciliation between Indigenous

and non-Indigenous peoples. A total of 116 IRCR grants were awarded, totalling \$5,554,089 (see Appendix C).

The IRCR grants shared some common features with regular CG grants, such as a focus on KMB, but they had a specific thematic focus developed through engagement with First Nations, Métis and Inuit partners and the three federal research funding agencies. The special call featured adjustments of several aspects of the grant competition. For instance, the institutional eligibility process was adjusted to encourage Indigenous-led not-for-profit organizations to participate. Two methods were offered allowing not-for-profit organizations that did not yet hold institutional eligibility to obtain it: the Indigenous Institutional Eligibility process and the Restricted Eligibility process, which was introduced specifically for the IRCR Special Call. This was important, because one of the continuing legacies of colonialism is the underrepresentation of Indigenous Peoples among research staff at universities across the country (Hart et al. 2017). Not-for-profit organizations are embedded within communities and are important voices in discussions of Indigenous-led research, both as partners and leaders. The budget criteria emphasized SSHRC's recognition of the importance of respecting the culture and traditions of Indigenous Peoples and the necessity to incur expenditures in that regard in the conduct of research. Included on the list of eligible expenses were honoraria for Indigenous Elders and community experts, and costs for two members from each project to participate in the National Dialogue in Ottawa. CG applications were submitted via email to make it easier for applicants unfamiliar with SSHRC's online application system to participate. SSHRC's Corporate Strategy and Performance Division supported the adaptation of the CG requirements for the special call.

The IRCR Special Call was launched on June 21, 2018, on National Indigenous Peoples Day. A total of 231 applications were received, double the number that was expected, with just under one quarter (23%) submitted by Indigenous not-for-profit organizations. The success rate for Indigenous not-for-profit organizations (85%) was higher than for postsecondary institutions and other not-for-profit organizations (40%) (see Appendix C). It should be noted that the goal of allocating 51% of the grants to Indigenous non-for-profit organizations was not reached. The final amount was 38%.

The special call had several outcomes, including a co-developed set of strategic directions for the advancement of Indigenous research in Canada, and the Strategic Plan, which is a formal expression of the strategic directions, published by the three federal research funding agencies (SSHRC, NSERC and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research [CIHR]). The call served as a springboard for subsequent changes implemented at SSHRC, including the adjusted Indigenous not-for-profit eligibility process. A less obvious outcome was recognizing that SSHRC policies could be adapted, as these policies were identified in the National Dialogue discussions as a barrier to community participation in funded research; adapting them would enable increased participation from not-for-profit organizations.

The special call illustrative case demonstrates the effective use of CG and the possibilities for adapting CG design elements when appropriate and necessary, including those related to eligibility, budgets and simplified processes. CG features, including flexibility (e.g., frequent calls, adaptability, diversity of eligible projects), grant size, and duration, which are aligned with its focus on KMB events and activities, appear to help in this capacity. Although not an "average" special call, the IRCR CG Special Call is an exemplary case to demonstrate potential. Specifically, it illustrates the value of CG as a smaller, flexible funding opportunity that is geared toward fostering dialogue within and between communities to advance research.

Implications for CG

The CG funding opportunity appears to occupy a unique niche in the Canadian SSH funding landscape. The initiatives it supports could be greatly reduced or impossible in its absence. Interview participants described as valuable the elements of CG design that make it easily adaptable, such as its flexibility (e.g., frequent calls, diversity of eligible projects), relatively small dollar values and short durations. CG's flexibility appears to allow this funding opportunity to both fund a broad range of activities and be occasionally adapted, such as for special calls in areas of strategic importance to SSHRC.

Q2d. Are the tools used for knowledge exchange by the research community changing? If so, in what way, and to what extent does Connection Grants support changing tools?

Summary of findings:

- Overall, minimal change in tools used for knowledge exchange in proposals for CG funding occurred between 2012 and 2022.
- Traditional tools like conferences and workshops were most common, but it is evident that these tools are gradually becoming less prominent.
- Less established tools like online archives and summer training institutes were proposed and funded in small numbers but with increasing frequency.
- The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated a shift from in-person to online interactions in KMb. This trend was enabled by technology.
- Written publications, such as journal articles and books, and face-to-face gatherings are still considered important.
- CG support a variety of tools, both traditional and less common, and have the potential to support newer and less common tools more explicitly.

Changes in KMb tools in CG proposals

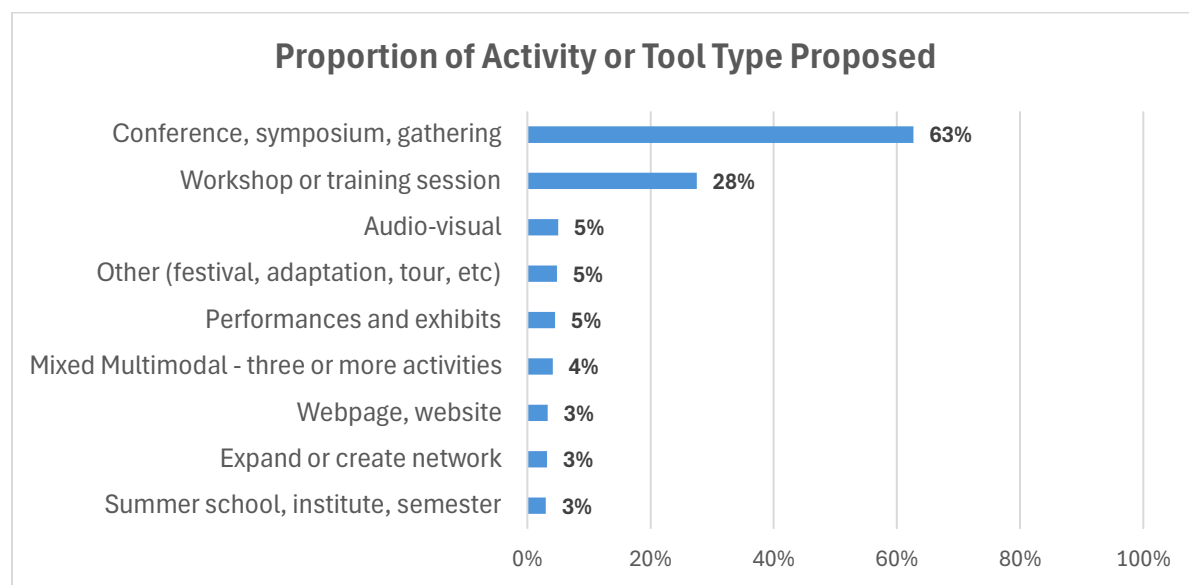
Overall, there was a minimal change in tools³² used for knowledge exchange in proposals for CG funding.³³ Over the period in scope for the evaluation, conferences were proposed in CG applications most often (n = 414), followed by workshops (n = 181) (Figure 7). The KMb activities proposed least often were summer schools or equivalent, expanding or creating networks, and webpages or websites. There was a slight increase in the proportion of proposals that included conferences and workshops in 2015-2018 compared to the three years prior, but this trend did not continue in 2019-22. This may be

³² This evaluation adopted a broad definition of tools, which included methods and formats, such as conferences and websites, and their treatment and use, for example an adaptation of an established tool, or the combination of two tools. The rationale for this broad definition was that it reflects the realities of KMb practices, which are extremely varied and continually evolving, as is reflected in the language used by the funding opportunity and by SSHRC.

³³ Lines of evidence for this question included CG proposals and findings from interviews with CG recipients, applicants and sponsoring organizations. Between the period of 2012-2022, 660 CG proposals were examined by tool type. To analyze trends, the data were stratified into three time frames: 2012-2014 (n = 180), 2015-2018 (n = 240), and 2019-2022 (n = 240). For tool type analysis, the primary tool types proposed were identified by manually coding the proposals. A total of 780 unique tool types were identified, with some proposals including more than one primary tool.

due to restrictions on in-person gatherings during the COVID-19 pandemic. There was a minimal increase in proposed KMb events and activities involving audiovisual tools, focused on expanding or creating networks, performances and exhibits, and “other” tools between 2019-2022. Overall, however, analysis of CG proposals over the time period in scope suggests little change in the tools proposed for knowledge exchange.

Figure 7: Proportion of tool or activity type proposed in CG applications between 2012-2022 (n = 660)³⁴



The influence of the COVID-19 pandemic and technological developments on KMb

In the period from 2019-22, proposed CG events and activities included almost double the number of online/hybrid tools (52) as in the three years prior (Table 1). The acceleration after 2019 is likely due in part to the pandemic.

Table 1: Proposed tools with an online/hybrid component between 2012-2022 (out of a total of 780 primary tools identified in n = 660 proposals)

CG proposals	2012-14	2015-18	2019-22
Number of proposed projects including online/hybrid tools	8	23	52
Online/hybrid as a % of total proposed tools in sample	4.4%	9.6%	21.6%

³⁴ Analysis of 780 unique primary tools, identified by manually coding descriptions of KMb activities in 660 proposals.

Many interview participants described increased online outreach and collaboration driven by technological developments, with the COVID-19 pandemic as an event that disrupted the status quo and accelerated movement in this direction. They also pointed to the growing use of social media and other formats, such as animation and podcasts, for disseminating research beyond the academic sphere, and the importance of ensuring that data is accessible. These developments also reflected changing expectations of KMb on the part of employers and in research funding.

Though restrictions on in-person events have eased, several interviewees stated that they would continue to use platforms for hybrid and online events, under circumstances when these formats are appropriate, for a variety of reasons that include lower costs, increased accessibility of virtual events, and reduced environmental impact associated with travel. Participants also pointed to situations where in-person events continue to be important (see below).

The continued importance of in-person interactions and publications

While most interview participants agreed that options for online collaboration and events have been beneficial, many pointed out that in-person interactions are still important.

“I think it’s changed completely. I’m also mindful that there are different needs with different projects. I think the traditional way of meeting together with people is useful and has benefits. It really does build more intimate, long-term inter-personal relationships that Zoom calls likely can’t do so I think that’s still important” (Crossover Applicant 7).

Participants were quite clear that in-person gatherings cannot be entirely replaced by online interactions. Being together physically enhances the quality of interactions, which fosters relationship-building. Academic culture, including the pressure to publish, was also framed by interviewees as a factor shaping KMb choices and possibilities.

CG support a diverse range of KMb tools

Numerous interview participants made references to CG supporting a variety of types of events and activities with different formats, some of which would not easily find funding elsewhere. Interviewees emphasized that CG’s openness to different perspectives on KMb helps encourage collaborations that involve different disciplines and sectors.

“Just the idea itself. We were looking for knowledge mobilization that isn’t a journal article, that isn’t a book chapter. The openness to what knowledge mobilization means is amazing. And that it’s really fundamentally based in this idea of collaborative working and collaborative partnerships, and cross disciplinary, and inter disciplinary work which is, if we just stayed in our own little silos ... which is part of why we are so late to this decolonization. We are very late to the party. The cross-disciplinary work is so amazing and that is what you are saying. The encouragement for that, I think that’s the hugest strength. And actually, I would say the amount of funding. I mean the mass amount is amazing. Particularly when for my project was going to be a two-day knowledge mobilization creation. That was amazing” (Standalone Applicant 12).

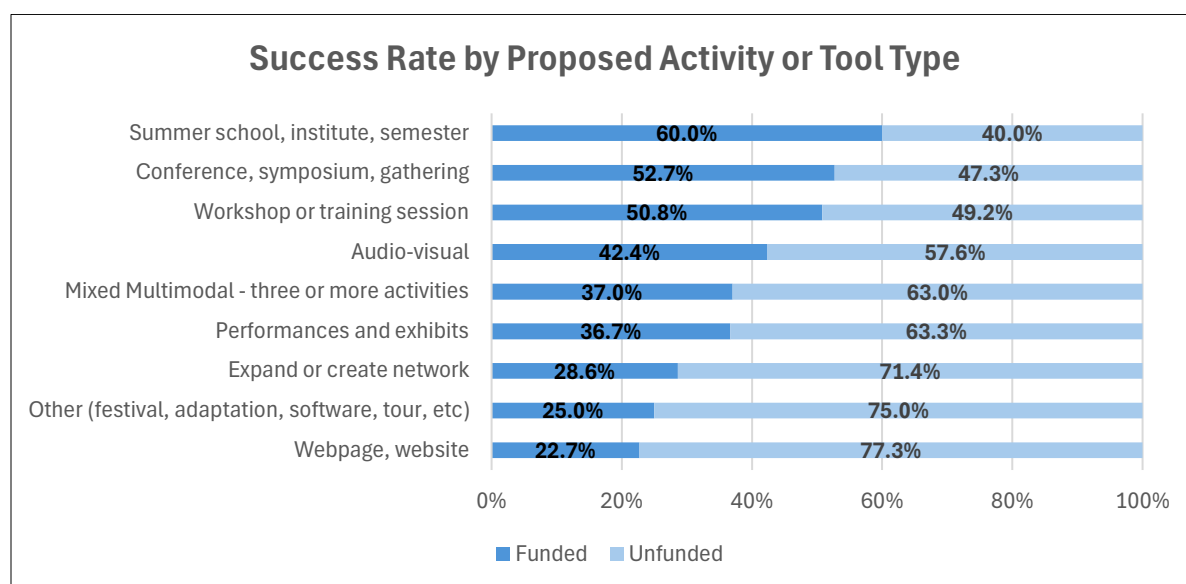
Some interviewees, however, expressed the view that CG is geared toward supporting conferences and workshops. While this is partly true, the design of the funding opportunity does not exclude other

possibilities, and the modest increase in different tools proposed over time points to the possibility of further growth, indicating that CG can support the changing needs of the research community.

Success rates of proposed tools

The wide variety of types of tools proposed and supported by CG means that there are small numbers of some types in the sample. It was not possible to determine statistically whether there were significant differences in success rates among types, due to the nature of the data. Descriptively, tools that involved gatherings (summer school, workshops, conferences) appeared to have higher levels of success (see Figure 8). This appears to be consistent with the focus of CG.

Figure 8: Overall success rate by tool or activity type (780 primary tools in n = 660 proposals) in percentages between 2012-2022³⁵



Implications for CG

CG supports a variety of tools, both traditional and less common, and has opportunities to support new and experimental tools more explicitly, if deemed important. This could be done in various ways, including by incorporating descriptions or examples of less commonly proposed tools into program literature or modifying evaluation criteria. Applicants select and propose KMB tools that meet their needs, given the options available to them. New technologies and the contexts in which KMB activities and events are organized will also continue to evolve.

³⁵ Analysis of 780 unique primary tool type, with n = 376 successful and n = 404 unsuccessful.

Q3. What opportunities are there, if any, to optimize Connection Grants' role and contributions?

Summary of findings:

- Streamlining some aspects of application procedures and exploring options to increase recognition of other-sector partners for participation in CG grants could make it easier to include other-sector partners on CG research teams.
- Grant amounts could be adjusted to reflect inflation.
- Changes to data collection methods for proposals and achievement reports could make it easier to use program data in future evaluations.

Make it easier to include other-sector partners on CG research teams

According to some interviews with grant recipients and sponsoring organizations, other-sector participants in CG grants often have prior experience with the academic funding environment, for instance through past participation in a CG grant, training, or work in academia. Partners of funded CG proposals thus represented a specific group within the wider range of organizations and individuals who might enrich KMB and related research, and they benefit from involvement in CG-funded events and activities. Possible options for fostering greater inclusion of other-sector partners in research teams include exploring ways to recognize the time and work involved in some forms of participation in CG grants, as well as streamlining and adjusting some aspects of the application procedures. Changes that would make it easier for other-sector representatives to participate would help better align CG with SSHRC's KMB objectives, which include exchanges focused on co-creation.

Specific changes that could be considered include alternative CV formats for other-sector co-applicants, modifications to guidelines and instructions for other-sector co-applicants, and an update to the submission process to make it more user-friendly. A review of program descriptions of sponsorship requirements, especially language likely to affect not-for-profit organizations, could also be considered.

Adjusting CG amounts

High levels of inflation, which rose during the pandemic and at the time of this evaluation had only recently begun to stabilize, have resulted in significant increases in event-related costs, including transportation, accommodations and catering. Several interview participants noted the impact of rising costs on grant budgets, explaining that the money does not pay for as much now as it did a few years ago.

“Si on pouvait augmenter un petit peu le financement, parce qu’avec l’inflation et le coût de vie, vingt-cinq mille dollars, c’était bien en 2022, mais actuellement ce n’est plus le cas” (Standalone Recipient 6).

Costs related to publication and other dissemination mechanisms have also increased. CG-eligible expenses include such costs, and they make up a large proportion of grant budgets. Revising grant amounts to account for inflation could make it easier for recipients to include more diverse groups of participants, in terms of geographical origin and background, in CG-funded activities.

Data potential of proposals and achievement reports

Program monitoring data were useful for evaluation purposes. This evaluation invested resources in an effort to make use of a range of existing program data, including from applications and achievement reports. Some challenges were encountered in the use of these data, and it could be possible to adjust how data are collected, to optimize their potential uses. The achievement report format could be updated to make it easier to use, for example by streamlining and reducing the number of questions. Efforts to improve the response rate would also generate more information for the program.

Conclusions and Recommendations

How relevant is CG?

The results of this evaluation make it clear that the CG funding opportunity is relevant to the SSH research community. Its focus and flexibility make it unique among funding opportunities at SSHRC. CG funds a wide range of activities and events with KMb objectives that are important for researchers and for the communities they involve and impact. More specifically, CGs have a close correspondence with research grants, complementing them by facilitating specific KMb activities at different stages of the projects. CG also supports less tangible outcomes that contribute to ongoing research programs and may occur between funded projects, such as growing and sustaining research collaborations and networks. Although research grants include KMb activities as part of merit review processes, the option to apply separately for CG funding to conduct KMb activities that contribute to research has the potential to add value. It also appears to encourage a broader range of KMb activities than might otherwise be present in its absence. Therefore, though KMb is already a feature of other SSHRC funding programs, CG is well positioned to support a diverse array of KMb activities.

CG is uniquely positioned to be used in response to agency priorities, which was evident given the way it was adapted for the IRCR Special Call. CG characteristics, such as short durations of grants, small dollar values and a focus on KMb activities, mean this funding opportunity can be easily adapted to fund engagement activities, like it was on a large scale for the IRCR, in conjunction with other activities and events.

What are the outcomes of CG-funded projects?

CG funds short-term activities and events that can have both modest and short-term outcomes and longer-term outcomes that grantees did not anticipate at the outset of the project. The outcomes may be a direct result of activities at the CG event, in the case of expanded networks and interactions among people with a common interest in a given topic. They may also occur weeks or months after the event, in the case of collaborative work leading to a new research project or finalizing and disseminating research outputs. Longer-term outcomes with implications for advancing knowledge or changing public discourses or policies may also be apparent, though it may not be possible to attribute them directly or entirely to a CG.

Outcomes were also evident for trainees involved in CG-funded events and activities. CG grants provided training opportunities ranging from publishing and communications to recording and broadcasting, public engagement and more. Outcomes for trainees may be immediate, in the case of skills and knowledge acquired and contacts made. They may be longer-term, such as a research output following from participation in an event or future career opportunities.

The future of Connection Grants

CG is relevant and performing as it is intended. It should continue to provide funding in multiple competitions per year. Grant amounts could be increased to account for inflation. The greatest strengths of CG—its flexibility and agility—could be further enhanced by adjusting the application procedures to make it easier to include other-sector partners as co-applicants and collaborators. This could help improve cross-sectoral exchanges and relationships. One interviewee, however, noted a risk associated with the flexibility of CG: it may attract researchers from outside of SSH, which could increase competition for limited funds. This attraction is an indication of CG’s uniqueness and its appeal to researchers.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Continue to provide funding for knowledge mobilization events and outreach activities through Connection Grants in multiple competitions per year to allow for flexibility. Consider adjusting grant amounts for inflation.

CG occupies a unique place in the Canadian SSH research funding landscape. It is used in remarkably varied ways by a diverse range of researchers and their collaborators. In the absence of CG, the scope of many KMb-focused events and activities would be drastically reduced or not feasible. Part of its appeal is its flexibility. Much of what CG funds does not fit elsewhere. The multiple competitions each year give researchers flexibility when scheduling events, which is sometimes challenging with longer competition and grant timelines.

While the CG funding opportunity’s focus and design features should be maintained, the recent impact of high rates of inflation on event-related costs, such as travel and accommodations, has reduced the value of the grant in real terms. CG amounts have remained essentially unchanged since 2012, during which time the cost of goods and services rose 33% in Canada.³⁶ An increase in grant amounts should be considered. A review of grant amounts should take into consideration that increasing the grant amount without an overall increase in the available funding envelope could translate to fewer grants available and lower success rates. This might unintentionally reduce the diversity of CG grants.

Recommendation 2: Continue to recognize and support the wide range of tools used in KMb with a wide range of purposes, including newer and less common options, that have the potential to engage researchers, trainees, other sector partners and communities in meaningful ways.

The range of tools available for KMb activities is growing, and funded CG projects represent this broad spectrum. The COVID-19 pandemic contributed to a shift to online and hybrid options as alternatives and supplements to face-to-face gatherings. CG supports a wide range of tools, including new and experimental tools, as well as more established ones. The evaluation findings show that some activities and events, like conferences and workshops, are proposed more often and have a higher rate of success than others. CG participants valued the flexibility of the program, including its openness to different kinds of KMb activities that are used in different ways in relation to research. It is therefore recommended that CG continue to recognize and support the wide range of tools used in KMb, including new and less common tools. Outreach efforts could help further diversify tools and types of projects by encouraging more first-time CG participants (given the relatively high proportion of repeat CG

³⁶ According to the Bank of Canada inflation calculator, which uses data from Statistics Canada (<https://www.bankofcanada.ca/rates/related/inflation-calculator/>).

recipients) and/or examples in program communications (given an impression among some researchers that CG is intended to fund conferences and workshops).

Recommendation 3: Adopt the draft logic model developed during the design phase of the evaluation of the Connections Grants funding opportunity, with some adjustments.

CG does not currently have its own logic model. During the design phase of the evaluation, a draft logic model was developed with input gathered in stakeholder consultations. Adopting this as the logic model of the CG funding opportunity would be helpful for program planning and evaluation purposes. Findings of the evaluation suggest the need for some adjustments to the logic model. Some possible adjustments are listed below:

- Additional arrows could be introduced to indicate that phases of research may not be linear, but rather iterative.
- The list of types of exchanges (interdisciplinary, cross-sectoral, international) in the model may not account for the diversity of events and activities that CG fund and could be refined.
- Training outcomes should also be present at the intermediate level, not just at the level of activities and long-term outcomes.

Revisions to the CG logic model should also include a review to ensure coherence and alignment with the RPP logic model.

Recommendation 4 (for SSHRC): Review and update SSHRC's public-facing descriptions of KMb, especially the Definition of KMb and the Guidelines for Effective KMb, to ensure consistent framing and use of relevant terminology.

SSHRC has long had in-depth public-facing definitions of KMb, which have changed in subtle ways over time. One change of note was the 2015 formalization of the Definitions of Terms definition of KMb and Guidelines for Effective Knowledge Mobilization, which appear on two separate webpages. The description of KMb in the Guidelines contains different language than the official definition. This may lead to confusion and possibly an unintended emphasis on some activities over others. As the last update was made a decade ago, a review would be timely. With its focus on KMb events and activities, CG is well-positioned to inform discussions about SSHRC's definition of KMb.

Recommendation 5: Seek opportunities to facilitate increased levels of formal participation in Connection Grants projects by other-sector actors by clarifying program language and modifying application procedures for co-applicants. Consider ways to improve recognition of the time and work that go into some forms of participation in Connection Grants-funded activities.

Evaluation findings indicate that CGs were mainly held by teams composed entirely of academics, with a smaller percentage including academics and team members from other sectors. If there is an interest in increasing other-sector participation in CG, potential barriers to involvement should be explored. One such barrier is challenges with the application process. Interview participants reported the benefits of long-term partnerships with other-sector organizations. They also reported encountering barriers to including other-sector organizations in grant applications, especially as co-applicants. A review of the application process to identify areas that could be improved would be a meaningful step toward reducing potential barriers, including for researchers working with Indigenous Peoples, EDI-designated groups and other marginalized populations. Possible changes could include ensuring that policies on the

involvement of other sectors in CG projects are clearly communicated, including available supports such as the salary research allowance and/or other options to improve recognition of their contribution.

More specifically, SSHRC could explore the possibility of compensating other-sector organizations for the time and work that go into some forms of participation in CG projects and recognizing that changes may require getting other agencies involved, since financial compensation falls under the Tri-agency Guide on Financial Administration (TAGFA). Participants may see themselves as having a partnership role in a CG event, regardless of their official classification under the grant. Findings concerning the involvement of other-sector organizations suggest a need to consider that the in-kind contributions provided by some sponsoring organizations, especially not-for-profits, can carry real costs. In some cases, this may represent a burden that influences perceptions about the fairness and value of participating in SSHRC-funded activities. It also speaks to potential asymmetries between researchers and some other-sector participants in SSHRC-funded projects.

Appendix A: Abbreviations

CG	Connection Grants
CIHR	Canadian Institutes of Health Research
EAC	Evaluation Advisory Committee
ECR	Early career researcher
IRCR	Indigenous Research Capacity and Reconciliation
KMb	Knowledge mobilization
NSERC	Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council
REM	Ripple effects maps/mapping
RPP	Research Partnerships program
SSH	Social sciences and humanities
SSHRC	Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council

Appendix B: Connection Grants Program Profile

Overview

The CG funding opportunity currently falls under the broader RPP. In the most recent SSHRC Departmental Results Framework, which includes SSHRC's program inventory, this funding opportunity is housed within RPP along with other partnership-oriented and KMb funding opportunities, including Partnership Engage Grants, Partnership Grants, Partnership Development Grants and Knowledge Synthesis Grants.

The various Partnership Grants fund research, research training, and KMb through new and existing formal partnerships. Knowledge Synthesis Grants fund the mobilization, examination and synthesis of SSH research on specific themes, which are deemed future challenge areas". CG is not intended to fund research but rather provides financial support for events and outreach activities targeting KMb initiatives. The purpose of the funded activities³⁷ is to offer opportunities for knowledge exchange and engagement with participants, specifically around the research issues of interest to participants. The grants support a variety of events and activities, including but not limited to workshops, conferences, summer institutes, forums and colloquiums. Activities are intended to support exchanges and collaboration in SSH, including:

- disciplinary or interdisciplinary exchanges
- scholarly exchanges between those in SSH and those in other research fields
- intersectoral exchanges between academic researchers in SSH and practitioners from the public, private, and/or not-for-profit sectors
- international research collaboration and scholarly exchanges with researchers, students and non-academic partners outside of Canada

CG grant amounts for events range from \$7,000 to \$25,000. The grant amount for outreach activities is \$7,000 to \$50,000. Higher-value grants are awarded when well justified. SSHRC does not fund the full cost of a CG project. Sponsoring organizations must contribute cash and/or in-kind contributions equivalent to at least 50% of the amount requested from SSHRC.

In addition to the above, CG provide funding for some special initiatives, joint initiatives, and special calls.

- CG provides funding for some special initiatives and some joint initiatives that respond to SSHRC corporate priorities. For example, a minimum of 10 CG per competition are currently aligned with SSHRC's Research Data Management Capacity Building Initiative. These Connection Grants aim to support SSH researchers and their communities in developing, adopting and disseminating research data management standards, practices, tools and skills as a special initiative. An example of a CG joint initiative is SSHRC's partnership with Canadian Heritage, in

³⁷ Per the CG online information, events are short-term and typically take place over the course of a week or less (e.g., a conference or workshop). Support can be requested for longer-term activities directly related to the event (e.g., forms of knowledge synthesis). Outreach activities are meant to engage the broader public in SSH knowledge through a range of knowledge-sharing methods (e.g., dissemination, exchange, networking, or co-creation).

place until March 2025, to fund knowledge exchange and engagement on research issues related to online disinformation.

- CG special calls focus on specific themes and areas related to KMb activities and events. For example, in 2016-17, a CG special call was created in view of Canada's 150th anniversary. The grants were meant to support outreach activities organized by postsecondary institutions and their affiliated researchers, underscoring the contributions that SSH research has made to Canadian society.

Additional considerations

While CG was the primary focus of this evaluation, the various Partnership Grants were incorporated to provide information about the RPP family of funding opportunities more broadly.

History of the CG funding opportunity

The CG funding opportunity was implemented in 2011, as an outcome of SSHRC's 2010 program architecture renewal project. The renewal resulted in three new umbrella programs, including the Connection program. The majority of SSHRC's KMb-related funding opportunities were bundled under the Connection program, including CG.³⁸ Under the renewed program architecture, the activities and areas covered by former funding opportunities such as Public Outreach Grants and Aid to Research Workshops and Conferences were encompassed under CG, and those individual funding opportunities were discontinued.

As of 2018, SSHRC decided to change its third umbrella program, the Connection program, into the RPP to align with the program architecture that is part of its Departmental Results Framework.³⁹ CG, along with other Partnership funding opportunities, were bundled under this new umbrella program. As of 2022-23, SSHRC has three umbrella programs, and CG falls under RPP, as per the most recent program architecture.

In terms of changes to CG over time, CG has remained largely the same in its design since 2011. In 2014, CG adopted a model of four funding cycles per year, a change from the initial model of accepting applications on a continual basis. The four cycles continued to support the flexibility offered under the previous approach so that grant recipients could access funds as needed.

Program logic and CG objectives

Under SSHRC's current program architecture, CG objectives are aligned with the objectives of the umbrella RPP. According to the Program Information Profile, the RPP provides funding to enable SSH research collaboration with partners across the academic, public, private and not-for-profit sectors. This program helps stimulate leading-edge, internationally competitive research; fosters strong and productive research collaborations with multisectoral partners; and accelerates the use of research results by organizations that can harness them for Canada's economic, social and cultural development.

CG does not have an official logic model of its own. A draft logic model was prepared in consultation with the EAC for the purposes of this evaluation, but it has not been officially endorsed or adopted. A

³⁸ For more information, see SSHRC. Knowledge Mobilization Strategy, 2009-11.

³⁹ For more information see the 2023-24 Departmental Results Report: <https://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/about-au-sujet/publications/drr/2023-2024/at-a-glance-en-un-coup-d-oeil-eng.aspx>.

general logic model for the RPP was developed in 2017-18. The outcomes associated with the logic model apply to the individual funding opportunities within the RPP in different ways and to differing extents.

Outcomes related to CG can also be found in the Program Information Profile (2018). As per the Program Information Profile, CG is intended to contribute to the following immediate and intermediate outcomes for RPP:

Immediate outcomes

- A. Partnerships are established.
- B. Research trainees are involved in SSHRC-funded collaborative projects.

Intermediate outcomes

- C. Research trainees enhance their research, professional and KMb skills.

However, it is important to note that CG has its own objectives, described above in the Overview section and on the CG webpage (see: [Connection Grants \(sshrc-crsh.gc.ca\)](https://sshrc-crsh.gc.ca)).

Eligibility

Subject matter

CG proposals can include any thematic areas, disciplines, approaches or subject matter areas that are eligible under other SSHRC funding opportunities.⁴⁰ The proposed events or activities must be connected to the subject matter included in the proposal. Additional parameters around proposed events and activities include the requirement that they lead to concrete deliverables (e.g., they should take the form of a knowledge product or culminate in a conference). Eligible events and activities may be a one-time encounter where knowledge is shared, or the purpose may be to create longer-term partnerships or ongoing research programs. Applicants are required to demonstrate that they have active role in the event or activity (e.g., organizing and delivery). The funding is available over a year, and events or outreach activities must be undertaken within that year.

Events or activities can occur in Canada or abroad. However, in cases where events and activities are to be held outside Canada, the proposal must explain why this is the case and how the project will serve to mobilize Canadian research internationally.

A key eligibility consideration is that CG is **not** meant to support research activities or projects with the main goal of undertaking research (e.g., data collection activities). There are also restrictions on events and activities organized to support academic associations. Activities typically paid for by association fees are excluded, as are receptions, annual general meetings and activities like book launches.

Applicant eligibility

⁴⁰ For more information on eligibility, see [Connection Grants](https://sshrc-crsh.gc.ca).

There are two types of eligible CG applicants: individual and institutional. As seen in the table below, the application processes are similar, and both are evaluated using the same criteria and the same adjudication process. It should be noted that teams of applicants can also apply under either stream.⁴¹

Institutional Connection Grant	Individual Connection Grant
Submitted by a Canadian institution holding institutional eligibility (Canadian postsecondary institutions and not-for-profit organizations)	Submitted by an applicant affiliated with a Canadian postsecondary institution holding institutional eligibility (Canadian postsecondary institutions and not-for-profit organizations)
Project director must be affiliated with this institution, apply on its behalf and lead the project	Applicants affiliated with a Canadian postsecondary institution whose <i>primary</i> affiliation is a <i>non-Canadian</i> postsecondary institution are not eligible as applicants (or as project directors)

Co-applicants are eligible if they are formally affiliated with an eligible Canadian postsecondary institution, not-for-profit organization, philanthropic foundation, think tank, or municipal, territorial or provincial government. Co-applicants can also be affiliated with an international postsecondary institution. Any individual who makes a significant contribution to the project is eligible to be a collaborator. Collaborators do not need to be affiliated with an eligible institution. Individuals from the private sector or federal government can only participate as collaborators.⁴²

Competition cycle and review process

Currently, there are four competitions per fiscal year. Applications are adjudicated (and awards distributed) according to a competitive merit review process. They are assessed and recommended by members of a merit review committee. Guidelines are provided for merit review, and CG evaluation criteria are used to score applications.⁴³ The number of committee members in a given competition cycle depends upon the number of applications received; for example, in the 2021-22 fiscal year, a total of 80 committee members served, with 15-23 serving on each of the four competition committees.

CG applications are currently scored and weighted based on three main criteria:⁴⁴ 40% for **Challenge** (e.g., proposal's relevance to Connection program objectives and quality of training and mentoring to be provided to students and other highly qualified personnel), 30% for **Feasibility** (e.g., appropriateness of

⁴¹ Teams include one applicant/project director and one or more co-applicants and/or collaborators. Co-applicants are eligible if formally affiliated with Canadian or international postsecondary institutions, not-for-profit organizations, think tanks, or municipal, territorial, or provincial governments. Collaborators do not require affiliation with eligible Canadian postsecondary institutions and can come from a variety of organizations and sectors.

⁴² For more details on CG applicant instructions, see <https://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/funding-financement/instructions/cg-sc/applicant-candidat-eng.aspx>.

⁴³ For more details on SSHRC's merit review process, see https://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/funding-financement/merit_review-evaluation_du_merite/index-eng.aspx.

⁴⁴ For more details on the evaluation criteria and scoring, see https://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/funding-financement/programs-programmes/connection_grants-subventions_connexion-eng.aspx#6:~:text=Evaluation%20criteria%20and,highly%20qualified%20personnel.

timeline, budget and other supports) and 30% for **Capability** (e.g., the quality and significance of the research team's experience).

Reporting

Grant recipients are required to submit an achievement report at the end of their grant. According to the reporting template, grant recipients are to report on the activities or events they undertook during the grant period, including any knowledge products produced. Reports also require grant recipients to provide information on the collaborations that were undertaken, and on students' and postdoctoral researchers' participation in the project.

Competition results

The following table provides an overview of CG competition results for the last five fiscal years.

Table 2: Connection Grants competition cycles by fiscal year, in terms of expenditure and success rates

Fiscal year	Expenditure	# Applications	# Awards	Average expenditure per award	Success rate (%)
2017-18	\$7,177,907.00	637	294	\$24,414.65	46.2%
2018-19	\$7,090,492.00	691	284	\$24,966.52	44.3%
2019-20	\$9,597,364.00	698	379	\$25,322.86	41.1%
2020-21	\$6,552,586.00	309	237	\$27,648.04	76.7%
2021-22	\$9,017,812.00	396	332	\$27,162.08	83.8%
Total	\$39,436,161.00	2,731	1,526	\$25,902.83	60.4%*

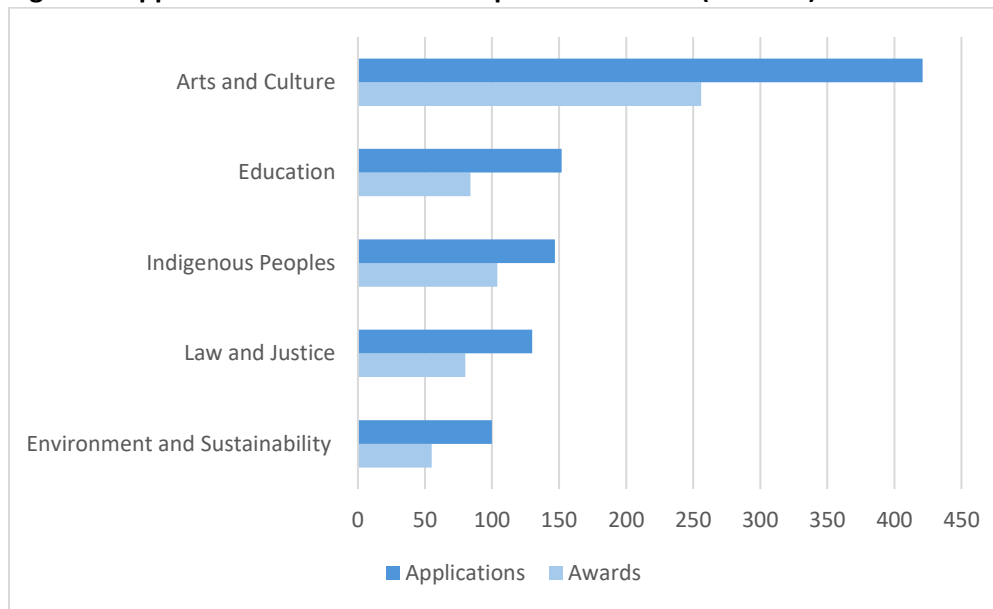
**Note. The total success rate percentage indicates the average success rate of all competitions in scope (not weighted by n of each competition).*

Based on the CG administrative data, for fiscal year 2021-22, 396 applications for Connection Grants were received and 332 grants were awarded (approximately 84% success rate). In total, \$9 million was awarded. Fiscal years 2020-21 and 2021-22 had the highest success rates for applicants (77% and 84% respectively) and the lowest number of applications. This was likely due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Fiscal year 2018-19 saw the lowest applicant success rate, at 41%. There was variability in application and success rates according to area of research as well, as outlined next.

Research areas

Since fiscal year 2018-19, the research area with the highest number of funded projects is Arts and Culture, followed by research related to Indigenous Peoples, Education, Law and Justice, and Environment and Sustainability. Additionally, most applications received were in the area of Arts and Culture. Over the past five years, the average application success rate for Arts and Culture has been 61%. The average success rate for applications in the category of Law and Justice was almost identical at 62%. Applications in the area of Indigenous Peoples have had a higher average success rate of 71%, while those in Education as well as Environment and Sustainability have had a slightly lower average success rate of 55%. Figure 9 shows applicants and recipients per research area.

Figure 9: Applications and awards for top research areas (2018-21)



Appendix C: Indigenous Research Capacity and Reconciliation Program Connection Grants Special Call Profile

Overview

This special call fell under the CG funding opportunity and the broader RPP. The purpose of the call was to support interdisciplinary events and outreach activities geared toward short-term, targeted KMB initiatives and to contribute to the Canada Research Coordination Committee's priority of a national dialogue to co-develop, with First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities, an interdisciplinary, Indigenous research and research training model that contributes to reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples (SSHRC, 2019). The call awarded grants to Indigenous organizations and researchers (or equivalent) to support their leadership in organizing their respective engagement activities and to develop position papers to inform the dialogue on reconciliation and the creation of SSHRC's Indigenous Research Strategy.

History

In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) issued 94 Calls to Action, including #65, which calls for the establishment of a national research program with multiyear funding to advance understanding of reconciliation.

In 2017, the Canada Research Coordination Committee was created to coordinate the efforts of the three federal research funding agencies (SSHRC, NSERC, and CIHR) and the Canada Foundation of Innovation. One of its priorities is responding to the TRC's Calls to Action. In the 2018 budget, the federal government committed \$3.8 million to support this priority and developed a strategic plan that identifies new ways of doing research with First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities, including strategies to grow the capacity of Indigenous communities to conduct research and partner with the broader research community. SSHRC led this initiative in collaboration with and on behalf of the other granting agencies.

An engagement plan with First Nations, Métis and Inuit Peoples was developed to meet the objectives of the Budget 2018 allocation and the Canada Research Coordination Committee's priority. The engagement process had two streams. First, the granting agency held engagement activities with Indigenous organizations and researchers, including regional engagement events and a national dialogue. Second, the special call awarded grants to Indigenous organizations and researchers (or equivalent) to support their leadership in organizing their respective engagement activities and to develop position papers to be shared at the national dialogue event.

This CG special call was launched on June 21, 2018, National Indigenous Peoples Day, and invited applications from applicants affiliated with First Nations, Métis and Inuit not-for-profit organizations, as well as from other not-for-profit organizations and Canadian postsecondary institutions in any discipline. The funding supported community gatherings, workshops, and other events or outreach activities that mobilized existing knowledge, facilitated dialogue and knowledge sharing, and resulted in a position paper created by each grant holder, to be submitted by February 2019. Ninety-six position papers were received from the 116 grants awarded in the competition.

Value and duration

Each grant was valued up to \$50,000 for six months, with the possibility of a six-month extension.

Eligibility

The call was guided by themes that emerged from ongoing engagement with First Nations, Métis and Inuit partners and the three federal research funding agencies. Applicants were encouraged to organize events and outreach activities that addressed one or more of the following interrelated themes:

- Supporting Indigenous Talent and research careers
- Engaging Indigenous knowledge
- Mobilize knowledge and partnerships for reconciliation
- Foster mutually respectful relationships

The leadership and governance of the grants had to involve First Nations, Métis or Inuit communities. SSHRC's definition of community, in the context of Indigenous research, included places or land-based communities, as well as thematic communities and communities of practice. The call encouraged the participation of Indigenous Elders and Indigenous knowledge holders, recognition of their contributions, and observance of knowledge-specific protocols.

Researchers, project directors or the equivalent at eligible Canadian institutions (Indigenous not-for-profit organizations, other not-for-profit organizations and postsecondary institutions) were eligible to apply for grants, in partnership with First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities. Applicants had to be affiliated with an eligible Canadian institution. A minimum of 51% of the grants were reserved for Indigenous not-for-profit organizations, and they formed the majority of grant recipients (Government of Canada, 2020a; SSHRC, n.d.). Like for other funding opportunities, applications could also include co-applicants and collaborators. Co-applicants could be individuals affiliated with Canadian postsecondary institutions, not-for-profit organizations, philanthropic organizations, think tanks, and municipal, territorial or provincial governments. This option was open to band councils. Collaborators could be any individuals who may make significant contributions to the project and did not need to be affiliated with an eligible institution. Individuals from the private sector or the federal government could participate as collaborators only.

Applicants, including Indigenous not-for-profit organizations, were required to obtain institutional eligibility. Two methods were offered for obtaining eligibility. The first was through Indigenous Institutional Eligibility, a process best suited to organizations wishing to administer more than one grant at the same time over the five years following the application for the special call. This process was not open to government departments, including band councils and for-profit corporations. It required two years of audited financial statements, full-time staff, an ethics policy compliant with the Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS 2), and a Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) compliance statement. In place of other required supporting documentation, organizations could submit a research statement including information on current research, staff involved, copies of any published research results, and recent reports, policies, strategies or plans, if available. The normal processing time for this type of institutional eligibility is three to four months, but the program announced to applicants that it would process

applications quickly so as to not impede participation in the competition. The second method for obtaining institutional eligibility offered was through the Restricted Eligibility process. This alternative was made available to Indigenous not-for-profits solely interested in the IRCR CG Special Call only (those not planning on applying for or holding other grants) that were unable to meet certain compliance requirements at the time, or to any other not-for-profit organization. This method, which is also available for the Aid to Scholarly Journals funding opportunity, did not require a Financial Management Risk Assessment Questionnaire, TCPS 2-compliant ethics statement or a RCR compliance statement. It was also announced that Indigenous not-for-profit organizations that pursued restricted eligibility could leverage it to apply for full Indigenous not-for-profit eligibility in the future. At a webinar on August 9, 2018, providing information on the IRCR, support was offered for determining the type of eligibility best suited to participating organizations. Applicants were required to have submitted an application for institutional eligibility by the competition deadline.

Budget requirements were also adapted for the IRCR Connection Grants Special Call, within the framework of the Tri-agency Guide on Financial Administration, to allow for expenditures that recognize the importance of respecting the culture and traditions of Indigenous Peoples. The policy for guiding these provisions is in the Tri-Council Policy Statement, specifically [Chapter 9: Research Involving the First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples of Canada](#). Eligible items included costs related to community mobilization and engagement, including culturally relevant promotional items such as tobacco, cloth, feasting and gift-giving for honouring ceremonies, and cash reimbursements (in a method acceptable to the individual or community being reimbursed) to compensate community participation; honoraria for Indigenous Elders and community experts; contracts and/or consultant fees for knowledge translation and communication activities for Indigenous Elders, community members and other Indigenous knowledge-holders involved in activities related to the Indigenous community; a salary research allowance to help cover the costs to temporarily replace co-applicants from eligible Indigenous not-for-profit organizations and release them from their duties to the organization; and costs for two project members to participate in the National Dialogue in Ottawa.

Application process and adjudication

Applications included a half-page summary of the proposal, descriptions of the proposal of up to four pages, itemized budget, participant list, and overview of participants' experience and contributions.

Applications were adjudicated through a merit review process. Reviewers followed the SSHRC's [Guidelines for the Merit Review of Indigenous Research, launched in 2018](#), which assisted committee members in interpreting SSHRC's specific Challenge, Feasibility and Capability evaluation criteria in the context of Indigenous research (SSHRC 2018). The multidisciplinary committee included relevant expertise and Indigenous and non-Indigenous members from the non-academic and academic sectors that assessed the applications and considered the stated objective of awarding at least 51% of the grants to applications from First Nations, Métis and Inuit organizations.

Successful applicants were to submit a position paper by February 2019 and they (or their delegates) were required to attend a national dialogue event held in Ottawa in March 2019 to share their position paper (SSHRC 2019).

SSHRC received about double the number of applications that were expected. Two subcommittees received and adjudicated 231 applications for an overall success rate of 50% (85% for Indigenous not-for-profit organizations and 40% for postsecondary institution and non-Indigenous not-for-profits). According to sector representation, there were 44 successful applications from Indigenous not-for-profits, four successful applications from non-Indigenous not-for-profits, and 68 successful applications from academic institutions (see Table 3).

Table 3. Number of applications and awards by sector

Category	# of applications	# of awards	Success rate per category	% of total awarded
Indigenous not-for-profits	52	44	85%	38%
Non-Indigenous not-for-profits	8	4	50%	3%
Academic	171	68	38%	59%
Total	231	116	50%	100%

National Dialogue event

Held in March 2019, the National Dialogue was a gathering of 300 IRCR CG holders, Indigenous community members and tri-agency representatives (Government of Canada 2023b). The goal of the Dialogue was to develop, in partnership with Indigenous communities, a strategic plan for an interdisciplinary Indigenous research and research training model that contributed to reconciliation with First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities (SSHRC 2019; Government of Canada 2020a). At the event, the creation of the Strategic Plan was informed by emerging themes in Indigenous research identified through the regional engagement events with Indigenous communities and organizations across Canada, held between July 2018 and March 2019, and the position papers submitted by grant holders. SSHRC funded and conducted the regional events to consult Indigenous partners on building relationships and ways to advance Indigenous research. Key messages and discussions from the Dialogue included research ethics, governance and protocols; building effective community relations and research partnerships; supporting Indigenous research talent, opportunities and infrastructure; and recognizing and respecting Indigenous knowledges and traditions (Government of Canada 2020b).

The analysis of papers and discussions led to four proposed key strategic directions that reflected new models for Indigenous research and research training: self-determination, decolonization of research, accountability, and equitable access. The Strategic Plan and the Strengthening Indigenous Research Capacity (SIRC) initiative were launched in 2020 and set out the four strategic directions objectives and mechanisms to support Indigenous research and research training (Government of Canada 2023a):

1. Building relationships with First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples
2. Supporting research priorities of Indigenous Peoples
3. Creating greater funding accessibility to granting agency programs
4. Championing Indigenous leadership, self-determination and capacity-building in research

The Strategic Plan's objectives included creating an Indigenous Leadership Circle in Research to advise the presidents of the three federal research funding agencies and the Canada Foundation for Innovation on the implementation of the plan (Government of Canada 2023b; Government of Canada 2024). Formed in 2021, the Indigenous Leadership Circle in Research was also tasked with ensuring that activities of the Supporting Indigenous Research Capacity initiative were informed by Indigenous perspectives.

In 2022, the first progress report was published (Government of Canada, 2022). The Message from the Director (Nico Paul, Director of Indigenous Strategy) made the point that although the document implied an end date of 2022, implementing the Strategy was a long-term effort. Paul went on to propose that as engagements and relationships deepen, the initiative would develop a logic model with appropriate ways of assessment. In 2023, the time frame for the implementation of the strategic plan was extended to March 31, 2026. The reasons for the extension were delays caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, to allow time for the process of establishing the Indigenous Leadership Circle in Research, and to ensure that the work was continuing to proceed in partnership with Indigenous Peoples and that meaningful progress was completed (Government of Canada 2023a).

Appendix D: Methodology

Sources of data

The evaluation used a mixed methods approach, using both primary and secondary data sources, and both qualitative and quantitative methods to address the evaluation questions. A multiphase approach was used in which the first phase was largely quantitative while the second phase was qualitative. Some qualitative work was undertaken simultaneously in the first phase. The quantitative work undertaken in the first phase was designed to identify broad patterns relevant to the evaluation questions, and the qualitative work conducted in the second phase focused on explanations for the identified patterns.

A sequential mixed methods design was efficient, because it allowed key areas that needed further explanation to be identified early in the evaluation. As primary data collection was concentrated in the second phase, instrument design (e.g., interview guides) took place during the first phase, along with the procurement process for contracting support for the primary data collection.

The evaluation incorporated five lines of evidence. The lines of evidence were chosen to provide multiple perspectives on CG funding and its role. Primary data were collected through key informant interviews, a focus group and a survey. The evaluation also used secondary data, including agency administrative data, SSHRC webpages and external literature, summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. Lines of evidence included in the evaluation

Line of evidence	Data sources
Agency administrative data quantitative analysis	Agency databases holding administrative data related to CG reported by grant holders (n > 7.3k records)
Agency administrative data quantitative and qualitative analysis	CG proposals of applicants and recipients (n = 660) Achievement reports (n = 1,385)
Document review	Agency documentation, funding opportunities and past evaluations (n = 90) Agency documentation and external literature related to the IRCR CG Special Call (n = 30)
Key informant interviews	Semi-structured interviews with participants who applied to CG (n = 7), who received a CG (n = 24), and sponsoring organizations that supported a CG (n = 10) REM survey of CG recipients who participated in the key informant interviews (n = 8)
KMb focus group	Agency staff with involvement in CG and RPP funding opportunities with knowledge of KMb and its definition (n = 11)

Quantitative administrative data analysis

Agency administrative data was analyzed as a line of evidence to respond to Q2a and Q2b, as well as to identify participant groups for the interviews important for all questions in the study.

Data for RPP funding opportunities (Partnership Grants, Partnership Develop Grants, Partnership Engage Grants and CG) and Insight funding opportunities (Insight Grants, Insight Development Grants) were included.⁴⁵ Data about Knowledge Synthesis Grants were not included because they are reported separately. Non-CG funding opportunities were used as a comparison on some indicators (e.g., EDI subgroup participation) and to describe patterns of CG-applicant participation in non-CG funding opportunities (i.e., percentages, sequencing). This included identifying the proportions of CG recipients who (a) had received funding through other funding opportunities in scope, (b) applied unsuccessfully to these other funding opportunities, and (c) who had never applied to these other funding opportunities, as well as the order in which awards were held (Q2a). In addition to descriptive statistics, inferential statistical analyses were used to determine significance⁴⁶ of differences in subgroup representation between the funding opportunities in scope.

For the crossover analysis, the time frame for CG grants was between 2017-2022, whereas the time frame applied to research grants was larger in scope, from 2012-2022 and 2023, for all funding opportunities in which finalized results for competitions were available at the time of data collection, to identify interaction between CG and other grants. This was to better capture the sequencing of involvement in CG in relation to other SSHRC funding.

Analysis identified funded and unfunded proposals submitted by academics only, as well as academics and non-academics together (Q2b).

Disaggregated data

Data were disaggregated according to several variables to determine whether these correlated with success in the CG competition and timing and use of CG in relation to funded research.

Career stage: ECRs were those applying within six years of the awarding of their highest degree. In case of double degrees of the same level (e.g., two PhDs), the date of the earlier degree applied.

Institution size: SSHRC defines large institutions as those receiving in excess of \$16,500,000 per year in federal funding, averaged over three years. Medium-sized institutions receive between \$5,000,000 and \$16,500,000 and small institutions under \$5,000,000.

Official language: The official language variable referred to applicants that chose to communicate with SSHRC in one or other of the two official languages, English and French.

EDI variables (self-reported disability, visible minority and Indigenous status): Several caveats must be mentioned in relation to EDI data. First, collection of EDI data only began with the 2018 competition. Second, for 2018, approximately 25% of the applicants and co-applicants were missing EDI data. Third, the self-reporting options also included “prefer not to say,” so it is possible that the data did not capture the full extent of participation by members of these categories, if they chose not to report.

⁴⁵ For question 2a, data from 2012-2013 to 2022-2023 was included to increase the likelihood that linked projects were identified. For example, Partnership Grant recipients can hold their awards for up to seven years. A 2019 CG recipient may have held a Partnership Grant up to seven years prior to receiving their CG. Capturing this required extending the evaluation’s time frame further back from 2017-2018.

⁴⁶ As statistical significance may not always reflect a meaningful difference, it may be important to also incorporate qualitative methods as an interpretative step.

Qualitative administrative data analysis

Samples of CG funding proposals and achievement reports were coded and analyzed. Content analysis and thematic analysis were used. Content analysis was applied to identify, classify and quantify “types” (e.g., of linked researchers or research projects, audience types and tool types), and thematic analysis was used to examine phenomena in more depth by identifying patterns of meaning in the data.

Q2a: CG contributions to research funded through other SSHRC funding opportunities under the RPP and Insight.

The quantitative analysis for Q2a identified researchers who had participated in CG as well as in at least one of the other funding opportunities in scope. A sample of CG proposals associated with researchers in this set were selected, along with the proposals the relevant researcher had submitted to other programs. The proposal sets were analyzed qualitatively to identify links between research areas and/or research team members across proposals. A maximum of 150 CG proposals and the associated non-CG proposals were reviewed. A stratified sampling procedure was used to ensure inclusion of the following:

1. CG held before other grants
2. CG held simultaneously with other grants
3. CG held after other grants

Within these three sets, sampling by the principal investigator attribute was undertaken to ensure inclusion of both ECR and established researcher principal investigators in key informant interviews, as researchers in early and later career stages may be combining grant types for different reasons. Last, sampling included CG recipients who have held multiple CG with one or more other awards to determine if multiple CG had been used to support the same project.

Q2b, 2c, 2d

Successful and unsuccessful CG proposals from across the years in scope were reviewed to extract data in response to additional subquestions. About 50% of funded (n = 761) and unfunded (n = 605) applications were reviewed, for a total sample of about 680 proposals. Sampling of successful applications included proposals funded with initial as well as supplementary funding (i.e., 4A funding). For unfunded applications, the sample included unsuccessful applicants on the supplementary list. Sampling strata included career stage (ECRs and established researchers), official language groups and institution size.

The subset represents approximately 10% of successful applications and 15% of unsuccessful applications overall. While successful applications provided information about which tools were supported via CG over time, unsuccessful applications were also important to include, as they provided a picture of the converse (i.e., what was not funded over time).

Analysis of this sample served multiple purposes:

1. To identify, at a high level, proposals for projects in which the target audience was academic only or included a non-academic audience. The results contributed to estimates of overall proportions of proposals received and funded for Q2b and for participant selection for interviews.

2. To identify KMb tool types and any changes over time.⁴⁷ Approximately 60 proposals (30 funded/30 unfunded) from each year were reviewed. These proposals were drawn from the sample set described above with additional years 2012-2013 to 2017-18 added. The sample included some representation of proposals for events and outreach activities from a broad mix of disciplines. To the extent possible, proposals involving academics only as well as those involving academics and non-academics were included. Iterative inductive coding was used to first develop a clearer definition of tools relevant to the funding opportunity, then applied the definition to the whole sample in a second phase of coding. Coding the phase of KMb (design, catalyst or dissemination) for which a tool was being proposed or used was conducted as well (Q2d). Results were compared from year to year to describe any changes over time, including, to the extent possible, potential reasons for any identified changes.

Identifying instances where CG is being leveraged to support research/research use related to EDI was considered for Q2c, but this was not possible with the available data. In addition to CG proposals, CG achievement reports were sampled and analyzed to identify potential contributions, challenges, benefits and unplanned outcomes of CG as described in these reports (Q2c/Q3).⁴⁸ The time frame was for achievement reports received by SSHRC between 2010 and November 2023. A total of 1,385 achievement reports were received.

A preliminary assessment of the achievement reports was undertaken to review the quality of information, verify if the data were useful for qualitative coding, and complement the interview data. After the assessment, it was decided that achievement reports would be used for both quantitative and qualitative descriptive analysis. However, the open comment data did not add great detail to the checklist items from the achievement report survey, so the data were limited. Some descriptive analysis of CG projects was conducted to provide complementary information on the prevalence of:

- Other-sector involvement (government, industry and not-for-profits)
- References to SSHRC's other funding opportunities (Partnership Grants, Partnership Development Grants, Partnership Engage Grants, Knowledge Synthesis Grants, Insight Grants, Insight Development Grants)

Initial findings from the first phase of the evaluation were further explored and validated through interviews in the second phase.

Document review

For Q1, a review of public-facing SSHRC documents was undertaken related to SSHRC's conceptualization of KMb.⁴⁹ Examples of material include agency reports that focused on KMb, corporate reports, previous applicable evaluations, and archived versions of SSHRC's website.

⁴⁷ Since one of the objectives for Q2d was to identify changes over time, a longer timeline was used, and the data review focused on 2012-13 to 2022-23.

⁴⁸ For question 2c, the timeline followed the general scope of the evaluation and concentrated on 2017-2018 to 2022-2023.

⁴⁹ The document review focused on 2011 to 2023 to capture any changes from one year prior to CG implementation until present day.

Once documents were collected and inventoried, definitions and descriptions of KMb were extracted. The resulting dataset was analyzed to identify any changes to descriptions of KMb over time. A preliminary coding system was developed to categorize the type and extent of change that has occurred (e.g., which component of the definition changed and how). Results for Q1 were presented along a timeline. Identified changes and the current definition of KMb were also contrasted with CG logic and objectives to determine the extent of alignment. Any implications for CG were identified through interviews with RPP staff.

To support question 2c, program documentation was reviewed to identify adjustments made to CG for the purpose of the IRCR CG Special Call. The rationale and implications of those changes were discussed with program staff as part of interviews, with the IRCR CG Special Call treated as an example case of the use of CG for special calls related to agency priority areas.

Indigenous Research Capacity and Reconciliation Connection Grants Special Call

The IRCR CG Special Call was included in the CG evaluation as an illustrative example case of the use of CG for special calls related to agency priority areas. A full case study of the IRCR CG Special Call was not pursued, as such an undertaking would have required the adoption of an appropriate methodology informed by Indigenous research and evaluation approaches.

Data sources for this special call were program documentation, administrative data and consultations with SSHRC internal staff. Program documentation was reviewed for information about the purpose and conditions of the special call and to identify adjustments made to CG for the purpose of the special call.

SSHRC internal staff who had knowledge of the special call were contacted using a snowball method. An initial meeting was held with CG staff who in turn recommended other individuals who had been involved in the special call. An additional meeting was held to gather more information regarding the outcomes of the special call and the National Dialogue. The meeting was an opportunity to invite feedback on the approach used to study the special call as part of the overall CG evaluation, and to consider possibilities that this work could also feed into relevant future evaluation initiatives.

Documents were provided for review, including literature on Indigenous evaluation, an overview of an Indigenous evaluation summit held in February 2024, and background material on Indigenous approaches to evaluation.

The approach for this special call was largely documentary to provide insights into the potential for using CG to respond to strategic agency priorities and the needs and interests of the research community.

Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used as a line of evidence for all evaluation questions. Interviews were approximately 45 to 60 minutes in length. Participant groups are identified in Table 5 below and included CG recipients, CG applicants and representatives of sponsoring organizations. A total of 41 interviews were conducted. Participants were purposefully selected⁵⁰ to include the multiple perspectives and experiences of these three groups. A consulting firm, PRA, was contracted to carry out

⁵⁰ Purposive sampling is not random but instead involves using a sampling strategy to identify and intentionally select potential participants or groups/“types” of participants. Sampling strategies are driven by which aspects of a phenomenon researchers are trying to understand. Potential participants are selected based on predetermined criteria and characteristics, including because they are believed to be knowledgeable about or experienced with respect to the phenomena under study.

the interviews, including scheduling, conducting, transcribing, coding and creating a summary of findings. Interview analysis was conducted jointly by PRA and SSHRC evaluators.

Participants were selected for their ability to offer informed insight relevant to the evaluation questions. To the extent possible, pairs of recipients and sponsoring organizations who had worked on the same activity or event were included, to gain both perspectives on the same CG project. Sponsoring organizations were chosen with a view to their level of involvement in the event or activity. Specifically, organizations with a higher and more direct level of involvement were selected to understand in-depth outcomes for sponsoring organizations (i.e., as compared to a group with less involvement).⁵¹ This was achieved by prioritizing organizations with representatives who were co-applicants on CG proposals and/or based on the depth of anticipated involvement as indicated in review of their letters of support to the proposal.

Participant selection also included CG participants who had held other RPP or Insight Grants for related research projects (see “Recipients: Crossover” and “Applicants: Crossover” in Table x). The inclusion of CG recipients who have also held Knowledge Synthesis Grants was considered in the design phase but was not pursued due to feasibility and a lack of available capacity.

Table 5: Participant groups interviewed

Group	Evaluation questions	# of interviews
Recipients: Standalone ⁵²	2a, 2c and 2d	12
Recipients: Crossover ⁵³	2a, 2c and 2d	12
Sponsoring organizations	2c	10
Applicants: Crossover	2b, 2c and 2d	3
Applicants: Standalone	2b, 2c and 2d	4
Total (maximum)		41

Interview guides were designed to capture the information relevant to the evaluation questions while also incorporating components to encapsulate the various chains of events that demonstrated how CG contributed to outcomes. Interviews were transcribed, and the data was analyzed using NVivo qualitative analysis software (or an equivalent). A hybrid coding approach was used.⁵⁴ A coding framework was developed based on the evaluation questions and shared with PRA prior to coding; it included preliminary codes to help identify the sequence of events leading to outcomes. The initial

⁵¹ It should be noted that selecting sponsoring organizations with more direct involvement can introduce bias in selection toward organizations with greater investment in the outcomes and potentially positive accounts. Participants from sponsoring organizations were not fully representative of the experiences of all sponsoring organizations, as the degree and nature of involvement in CGs varied; rather, their perspectives were most valuable for in-depth descriptions and insight into barriers and enablers to outcomes for highly engaged sponsoring organizations.

⁵² “Standalone recipients” were CG recipients who had not applied to RPP and Insight grants during the time frame in scope.

⁵³ “Crossover recipients” were CG recipients who had also received RPP and/or Insight grants during the time frame in scope. Feasibility of including CG recipients who had previously received a Knowledge Synthesis Grant was determined once the size of this subgroup was known.

⁵⁴ Hybrid coding approaches typically rely first on deductive coding and second on inductive coding to further expand on the relevant categories identified in the data.

coding framework was applied to a small set of interviews and then reviewed and revised. This initial set of interviews was coded by multiple coders to ensure intercoder consistency.⁵⁵ Thematic analysis (as described above) was used. The data for each participant group was analyzed first and following this, analysis across the groups was conducted to determine themes in common and to capture differences among groups. Once interviews were completed, PRA provided a technical report on interview data to the SSHRC evaluation team.

REM image and survey

An additional step involved organizing and visualizing the findings from the semi-structured interviews, based on an approach used in REM (Nobles et al., 2022). This applied specifically to data responding to Q2a and Q2c. REM is a method that supports understanding the “dynamic nature and wider impacts of an intervention” (Nobles et al. 2022). REM explores how interventions contribute to outcomes and to influencing wider impact, incorporating participatory elements to allow stakeholders to offer their input and feedback at various points during data collection and analysis.

For this evaluation, mapping was used to visually illustrate CG-related outcomes as indicated across these data. The mapping component was not only useful in visualizing outcomes, but also because it went beyond conceptualizing CG events as generating single and direct outcomes single, i.e., it prompted for attention to indirect outcomes that may be linked with but are further removed from the program.

The REM visually depicted outcomes reported in interviews and was returned to participants for member checking. Once drafted, the REM survey was shared via a weblink, created and administered by PRA, with interview participants (recipients and sponsoring organizations) to invite their feedback on the extent to which the map reflected the types of outcomes they experienced, as well as the extent to which the map offered a clear depiction of causal links leading to outcomes. The results from this member-checking step (n = 8) were summarized and used to feed discussion in the KMb focus group.

Focus group

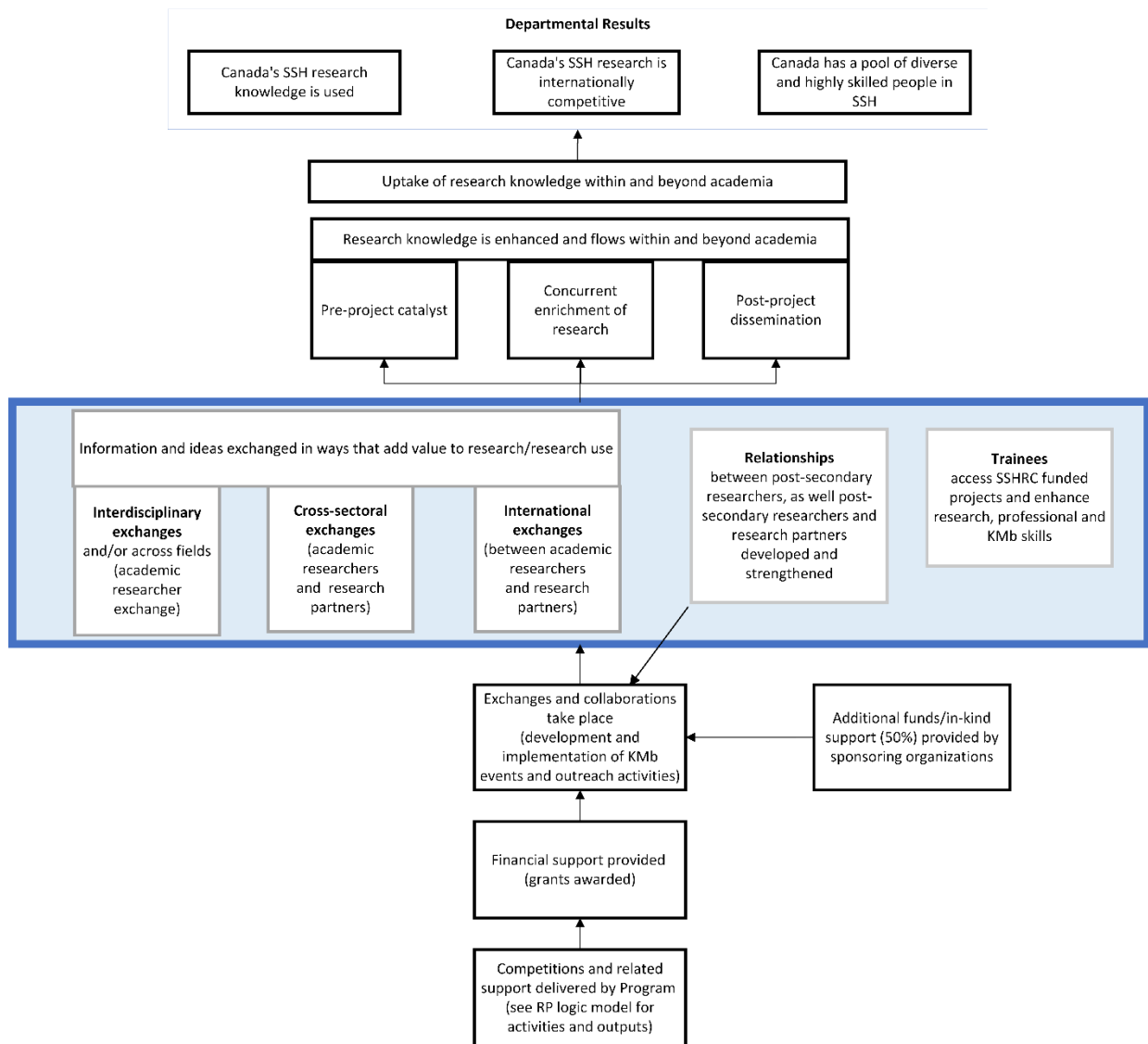
A focus group was held with agency staff on the topic of CG, SSHRC’s definition of KMb, and the results of the REM survey. Agency staff were contacted by email with an invitation to participate in a one-hour focus group. Participants included individuals who were involved in CG, research grant funding opportunities, or whose work related to KMb. Discussions were informal to allow staff to express their thoughts and converse with each other. Notes were taken by the Evaluation Division and used to draft a summary of findings.

Integration of lines of evidence

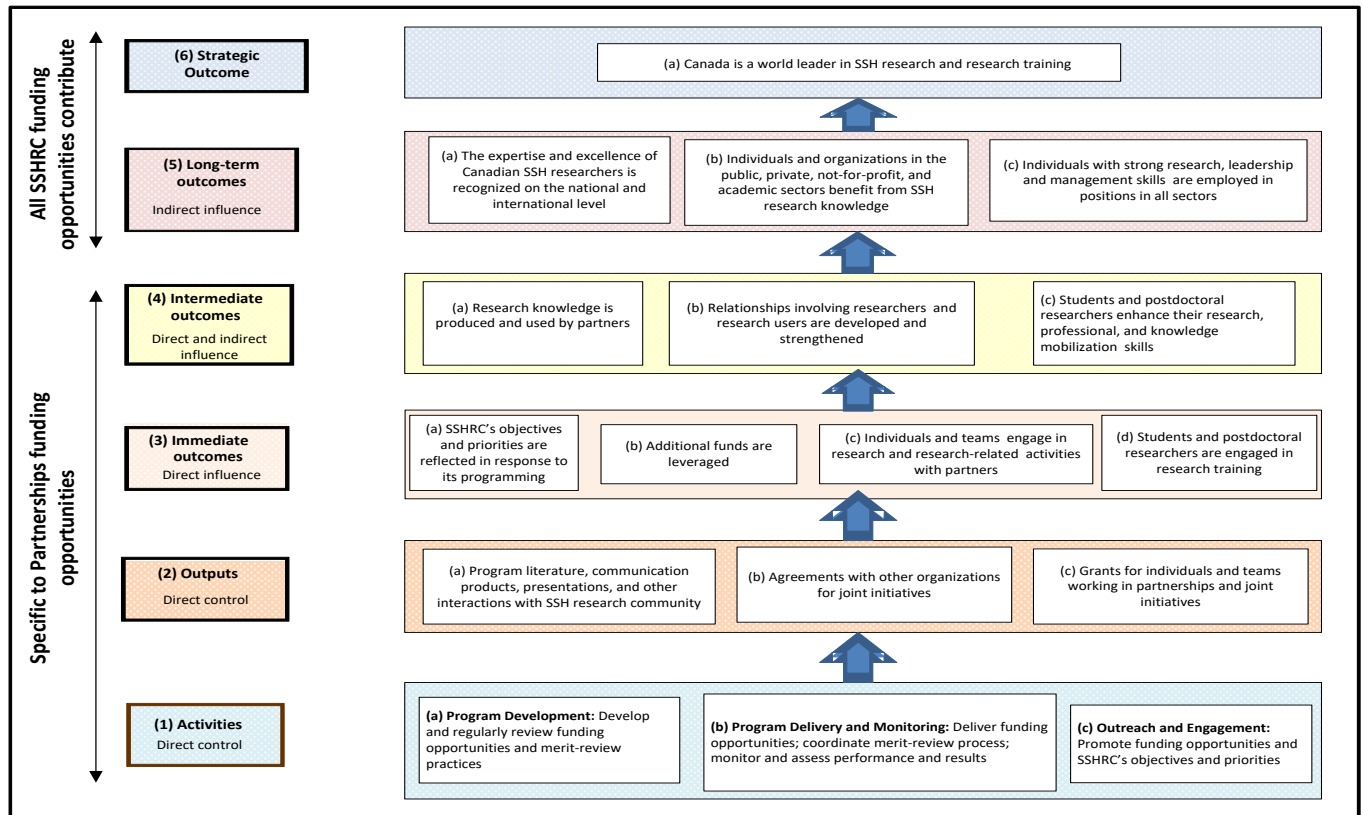
The findings from each line of evidence and each phase were integrated as the final stage of the evaluation process to address each evaluation question. The results from each line of evidence were synthesized using a joint display, followed by a linking process, where related results from the various lines of evidence were compared and contrasted to produce overall findings.

⁵⁵ Intercoder consistency typically involves two or more individuals coding the same set of data using the same framework to determine whether they are coding data similarly. Divergence in coding can indicate problems with the coding framework (e.g., unclear definitions of codes) and signals to the coders that they likely need to revisit and re-assess their coding framework.

Appendix E: Connection Grants Draft Logic Model



Appendix F: Research Partnerships Logic Model (2017-18)



Appendix G: Funding Opportunities

Insight Grants: The Insight Research program funding opportunities support the long-term research initiatives of emerging and established researchers. The grants are intended to enable research that examines and furthers knowledge of complex societal and individual-level issues within and across various disciplines, thematic areas, approaches or subject areas.

Individuals and teams of researchers affiliated with an eligible Canadian postsecondary institution can apply for an Insight Grant. Post-doctoral researchers and PhD candidates can apply under certain conditions. PhD candidates must complete their studies before receiving the grant. Both groups must establish a relationship with an eligible Canadian institution within five months of the grant start date. The funding duration is two to five years, with a maximum allowance of \$400,000 over the total funding period. For more information on the Insight Grants, see [Insight Grants \(sshrc-crsh.gc.ca\)](https://sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/insight-grants).

Insight Development Grants: Insight Development Grants are meant to enable the early-stage research initiatives of emerging and established scholars. The grants support the development of new research questions and methodological, theoretical and/or conceptual experimentation in eligible subject matter areas.

Individuals affiliated with an eligible Canadian postsecondary institution can apply for an Insight Development grant. Postdoctoral researchers and PhD candidates can apply under certain conditions. PhD candidates must complete their studies before receiving the grant. Both groups must establish a relationship with an eligible Canadian institution within three months of the grant start date. A maximum of \$75,000 is available for one to two years. For more information on Insight Development Grants, see [Insight Development Grants \(sshrc-crsh.gc.ca\)](https://sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/insight-development-grants).

Knowledge Synthesis Grants: Knowledge Synthesis Grants support researchers in producing knowledge synthesis reports and evidence briefs that support the use of evidence in decision-making and the application of best practices, as well as assist in developing future research agendas. Knowledge Synthesis Grants are not intended to support original research. Rather, they are intended to support the synthesis of existing research knowledge and the identification of knowledge gaps. Knowledge Synthesis Grants aim to help identify roles that the academic, public, private and not-for-profit sectors can play in developing and implementing robust policies, best practices and tools. Grants are focused on themes associated with SSHRC's Future Challenge Areas.

Applications can be submitted by an individual researcher or a team of researchers. Individuals (including postdoctoral researchers) are eligible to be co-applicants if they are formally affiliated with eligible Canadian postsecondary institutions; not-for-profit organization; philanthropic foundation; think tank; or municipal, territorial or provincial government. International co-applicants must be affiliated with a postsecondary institution. The grants are one year in duration and the value is \$30,000. For more information on Knowledge Synthesis Grants, see [Knowledge Synthesis Grants: Gender-Based Violence \(sshrc-crsh.gc.ca\)](https://sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/knowledge-synthesis-grants-gender-based-violence).

Partnership Grants: Partnership Grants are intended for large teams of postsecondary institutions and/or organizations of various types that work in formal collaboration. These grants aim to enable the advancement of research, research training and/or knowledge mobilization in eligible areas of the social

sciences and humanities by supporting new formal partnerships in their initial stages or existing formal partnerships whereby research activities are new or distinct from previous partnership activities.

Eligible Canadian universities can apply, and applications are to be prepared by the project director, who must be affiliated with the host institution. Postdoctoral researchers and PhD candidates can apply under certain conditions. PhD candidates must complete their studies before receiving the grant. Both groups must establish a relationship with an eligible Canadian institution within five months of the grant start date. There are two stages to the application process. Applicants that move on to and are successful at the second stage can receive four to seven years of funding, with a maximum allowance of \$2.5 million over the four- to seven-year period. For more information on Partnership Grants, see [SSHRC - Partnership Grants \(sshrc-crsh.gc.ca\)](https://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/partnership-grants).

Partnership Development Grants: Partnership Development Grants aim to develop research and/or related activities in eligible SSH areas by supporting new formal partnerships between postsecondary institutions and/or organizations of other types. Partnership Development Grants enable the design and testing of new partnerships that can result in best practices or models with the potential to be scaled up.

Researchers affiliated with an eligible Canadian institution can apply. Applications may be submitted by a team of researchers and prepared by the applicant/co-director on behalf of the partner organizations. Postdoctoral researchers and PhD candidates can apply under certain conditions. PhD candidates must complete their studies before receiving the grant. Both groups must establish a relationship with an eligible Canadian institution within five months of the grant start date. The funding value is \$75,000 to \$200,000 over one to three years. For more information on Partnership Development Grants, see [Partnership Development Grants \(sshrc-crsh.gc.ca\)](https://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/partnership-development-grants).

Partnership Engage Grants: Partnership Engage Grants provide short-term and timely support for partnered research activities that will inform decision-making at a single partner organization from the public, private or not-for-profit sector. The small-scale, stakeholder-driven partnerships supported through Partnership Engage Grants are meant to respond to immediate needs and time constraints faced by organizations in non-academic sectors. In addressing an organization-specific need, challenge and/or opportunity, these partnerships let non-academic organizations and postsecondary researchers access each other's unique knowledge, expertise and capabilities on topics of mutual interest.

Applications can be submitted by an individual researcher or a team of researchers. Students are not eligible to apply or be co-applicants on a Partnership Engage Grant. One partner organization can be involved, and they must be a Canadian or international organization from either the public, private or not-for-profit sector. The funding is for one year and the value is \$7,000 to \$25,000. For more information on Partnership Engage Grants, see [Partnership Engage Grants \(sshrc-crsh.gc.ca\)](https://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/partnership-engage-grants).

Partnership Grants offer support for new and existing partnerships to enable the advancement of research, research training and/or knowledge mobilization. The duration of funding is four to seven years. Partnership Grants are multistaged; if applicants are successful in Stage 1, they can receive up to \$20,000 to prepare the Stage 2 application. If successful, grant recipients can receive up to \$2.5 million in funding. Projects require cash and/or in-kind contributions equivalent to at least 35% of the amount requested from SSHRC. Partnership Development Grants provide one to three years of support to existing or new partnerships to develop research or research-related activities, or to design and test new partnership approaches with the goal of these being adapted by others or scaled up to a regional,

national or international level. Funding amounts are \$75,000 to \$200,000. As with other Partnership Grant funding opportunities, Partnership Development Grant applicants are expected to secure cash and/or in-kind contributions, although there is no minimum required contribution. Partnership Engage Grants provide short-term support for partnered research activities that will inform decision-making in a single partner organization from the public, private or not-for-profit sector. Funding amounts are \$7,000 to \$25,000 and the duration of funding is one year.

Appendix H: Literature Review on Knowledge Mobilization

Purpose and scope

The literature review serves as background context for the evaluation and provides an overview of established KMb theories, with a focus on materials spanning the last 15 years, to capture the changes to theory over time. This literature review was conducted in May 2023.

Results

Reviewing the literature on KMb theory highlights that as a concept, KMb is broadly defined and understood, including its application in practice. Past reviews of the KMb literature have identified over 100 distinct terms (McKibbin et al. 2010) and more than 60 frameworks (Tabak, Khoong, Chambers and Bronwson 2012). Typically, those referring to KMb and closely related terms are denoting the flow of research results into “practice or policy settings, with an aim to improve existing practice or establish “evidence-based practice.”

Conceptualizations of how KMb “works” have shifted over time and can be understood as encompassing three generations of ideas (Best and Holmes 2010). Early thinking about KMb perceived the flow of research knowledge to be linear and that knowledge moved from researchers to knowledge users⁵⁶ in a unidirectional manner (Briggs et al. 2015), sometimes described as “knowledge transfer” or “knowledge implementation.” The term “knowledge exchange” was introduced to describe a bi-directional knowledge flow between academics and practitioners. From there, theorists in the field incorporated the notion of “knowledge mobilization” as an “iterative social process” whereby knowledge can be informed by multiple, diverse sources and shared multidirectionally. Ward, Smith, House and Hamer (2012) described KMb as “a dynamic and inherently social process which incorporates distinct forms of knowledge which come from both research and practice” (298). This description highlights the social process involved and is in line with a more recent interest in integrated and systems approaches.

The following provides an overview of three key stages in the evolution of KMb conceptualization from linear to more complex systems.

- 1) **Knowledge transfer/knowledge implementation:** A common early approach focused on unidirectional transfer of research evidence from an academic environment to a non-academic practice setting. Davies, Nutley and Walter (2008) referred to this as the “knowledge parcels for grateful recipients” approach (189). An assumption behind this view of KMb was that decision makers, policy-makers and/or practitioners would use research findings if they were made available, particularly if the findings were provided in a well-packaged and easy-to-understand way. This viewpoint assumed that a lack of use was due to unawareness of the research or because the research was not understood by decision makers, policy-makers and/or practitioners.

Research in the field of KMb has identified multiple factors influencing uptake of research findings in practice, however. For example, research findings need to be highly relevant to “real world” situations, and there needs to be a relative advantage in the practice setting to undertake the risk and cost of change. Sufficient resourcing and risk tolerance at the practice level to support trial are

⁵⁶ “Users” can refer to anyone who accesses and applies knowledge, such as policy-makers, program designers, practitioners, patients, the media, the general public, and even researchers themselves.

also important (Best and Holmes 2010; Ferlie et al. 2012; Mitton 2007). Sustaining change over time and avoiding misinterpretation are further challenges.

An additional critique of early linear models focused on their assumptions that knowledge can or should be applied universally, when many knowledge types are strictly contextual and based on localized circumstances (Powell et al. 2018). Disseminated research output—conducted without input from others—is often at odds with informal knowledge and experiences of users (Powell et al. 2018).

- 2) **Knowledge exchange/collaborative research:** After the mid-1990s (Best and Holmes 2010; Estabrooks and Glasgow 2006), there was a movement toward relational (i.e., *bidirectional*) methods of knowledge sharing (Ferlie et al. 2012). Knowledge exchange theories and models put emphasis on the value of practice-based knowledge and on social interaction between people, based on an understanding that different professional groups value different forms and sources of “knowledge” and have different perspectives on how research evidence might be used. These approaches emphasized a dynamic element in which knowledge contributed by researchers is influenced by others, such as community members and other agents of change (adding a bidirectional element to KMb; Mosher et al. 2014). Under exchange- and collaborative-type KMb models, so-called knowledge users became increasingly involved in the research process, adding their insight and experience into knowledge development (Skipper and Pepler 2021).

Co-production of research is understood to improve the likelihood of its use outside academia, to the extent that the involvement of non-academics during the research stage increases the relevance of the research to practice and practitioner readiness to implement findings (Phipps et al. 2016). Exchange is further supported through strategies that support opportunities for linkages between groups (e.g., collaborative learning events). Generally, there is a focus on facilitating and increasing information flow between groups.

A challenge with knowledge exchange models of this period is that although associated frameworks took a more nuanced view of knowledge flow, they still generally viewed the problem as a “gap” between two communities that needed to be bridged, similar to the earlier transfer models (Davies, Nutley and Walter 2008). Further, co-production or co-creation of knowledge was often presented as “transactional and extractive,” and it perpetuated the idea that research is an activity undertaken outside of the contexts that shape the meaning, value and acquisition of knowledge (Latulippe and Klenk 2019).

- 3) **Systems KMb:** This conceptualization of KMb asserts that change is a result of complex social issues with multiple origins and therefore proposes a systemic, iterative approach to KMb (Burns 2014). Notably, this conceptualization implies that knowledge is heavily context-based; there can be no “one-size-fits-all.”

This shift in thinking includes a focus on the social and organizational systems in which people live and work, and a view of these systems as complex (e.g., Berta et al. 2014; Ferlie 2012; Finegood 2012). The approach proposes that social and organizational systems can influence the flow and uptake of information. There has been movement away from an understanding of knowledge as encompassing “research” and “evidence” in the traditional senses, to capture the idea that “policy and practice are necessarily informed by a fusion of locally interpreted information, ideas and values

from multiple sources, only some of which stem from academia” (Haynes et al. 2020). Further, a key distinction is made between knowledge and information, i.e., recognizing that it is *information* that is being mobilized and not knowledge per se, given that information only becomes knowledge once it is interpreted and applied to a purpose. From this perspective, knowledge is embedded in practice (Liyanage et al. 2009) and is difficult to transfer out of context (Ferlie et al. 2012). Although sharing ideas between sectors can result in the development of innovative products or processes, this does not happen in isolation of the system in which the actors are embedded. A call for more distinction between “data,” “information” and “knowledge” in the practice of KMb is based on concerns that the traditional focus on “moving knowledge around” as a “commodified asset” ignores this distinction and everything that is involved in the process of information being applied and sustained as knowledge (Ferlie et al. 2012, p. 1,300).

The systems approach also proposes that the relationships between individuals and groups are characterized by interdependencies, which can be described as “the structures and processes through which people interact, exchange information, and interpret observations... [They] influence how individuals organize to accomplish tasks, and how they use and share information” (Lanham et al. 2013). Taken together, from a systems point of view, KMb initiatives can target relational interdependencies, as well as the structures, processes and environments within the system(s). Information in this case is not only directed at individuals and at influencing/changing behaviour among individuals, as was a primary focus in earlier KMb theories and models, nor are individuals understood to assess and adopt information independently of the various structures, processes and environments within the system(s) to which they belong. Those structures, processes and environments also determine whether the capacity exists to support change (for example). As such, the system itself may need to be an explicit focus of KMb initiatives (Berta et al. 2014; Best and Holmes 2010; Estabrooks and Glasgow 2006; Finegood 2012).

The approach recognizes that KMb and KMb processes do not occur in a stagnant system. Contexts are complex, with multiple changes co-occurring, of different magnitudes, at different rates, and at different levels in the system (in families, neighbourhoods, governments), all of which are part of a co-evolution over time (Edwards et al. 2011). Accordingly, KMb and its outcomes will vary due to the influences of the context and as such, approaches to KMb likely necessitate:

- openness to adaptation of innovations over time (Behrens and Foster-Fishman 2007; Berta et al. 2014);
- patience, because effects may only be observable over long periods (Edwards et al. 2011; Jansson et al. 2010); and
- anticipation of outcomes that are different in kind or size than expected (Behrens and Foster-Fishman 2007; Berta et al. 2014).

As with the other theories, the systems approach is not without challenges. Implementation of a systems approach may not always be feasible, and addressing complexity requires the capacity and willingness to do so.

Considerations for KMb

The various approaches to KMb captured in the literature on KMb theory and models also capture some of the considerations that may affect the ability or capacity to mobilize knowledge.

As discussed, as approaches shifted from knowledge transfer and collaborative research, questions of how knowledge is produced and who participates increasingly became a focal point. The roles of researchers in knowledge production were reconsidered, along with implicit assumptions that they control the knowledge process (Gontcharov et al. 2021). A potential barrier stemming from this shift is that it is at odds with common expectations and reward systems in academia (Sá et al. 2011). Incentive systems within academia have been identified as a barrier to adopting more collaborative approaches to KMb, as academic researchers are often rewarded by individual work (e.g., publications, promotions, professorships) (Fazey et al. 2014). Academic success is competitive and still based largely on metrics that run counter to collaborative and co-produced research (e.g., frequent research output), as research involving larger research teams (and those involving different actors in the process) typically take longer to complete (Skipper and Pepler 2021). The onus often falls to academic researchers to choose between potentially higher-quality research involving collaboration and input, or a quicker output resulting in more personal academic success (Gontcharov et al. 2021).

Collaborative efforts are not without challenges as well. The question of who should be involved in collaboration can be challenging. Academic and non-academic relationships are forged over time, and collaborations for new projects can often stem from already established relationships between the two groups, rather than choices of potential collaborators based on the research itself (Gagliardi and Dobrow 2016). Existing relationships may be relied on for the purposes of collaboration even if these do not make for the optimal collaboration for contribution to and use of results.

In practical terms, practitioners and researchers' responsibilities are not always conducive to collaborative efforts. Practitioners' everyday work demands often need to take priority over their involvement in projects with researchers (Driedger et al. 2010). Researchers similarly face multiple priorities and can only spend so much time on a project before moving to new ones (Jansson 2010). Practitioners' experiences as collaborators on research projects may also influence their decision to work on future projects. Practitioners, particularly those who are incentivized to participate in research with the expectation that it will produce results they can apply practically, may be less inclined to participate in future opportunities if a project does not, in the end, produce useful results (Kothari and Wathen 2013). Researchers may not have the capacity to know when, how or to what extent to involve partners, and existing resources for guidance can be ambiguous. Additionally, researchers are not able to guarantee at the outset what results will be produced through a project, nor can they predict how useful the results will be to practitioners. Results and utility of results may only become evident toward the end stages of a project.

In short, planning for when and how to collaborate can be difficult for academic researchers and non-academic partners alike. The frequency, mode and nature of interactions or exchanges among collaborators may need to be adapted as relationships develop and a project advances.

The definition of knowledge mobilization adopted by SSHRC reflects a broad understanding of KMb as a complex social process, with a focus on benefits to users of research. SSHRC defines KMb as "[t]he reciprocal and complementary flow and uptake of research knowledge between researchers, knowledge brokers and knowledge users—both within and beyond academia—in such a way that may benefit users and create positive impacts within Canada and/or internationally, and, ultimately, has the potential to enhance the profile, reach and impact of social sciences and humanities research" (SSHRC 2021). SSHRC further provides a variety of potential contributions of KMb initiatives, including advancing and/or

improving research agendas, theory, and/or methods; informing public debate, policies and/or practice; enhancing or improving services and informing decisions and/or processes of people in business, government, the media, practitioner communities and civil society (SSHRC 2021).

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