

Standing Committee on Science and Research Study on the Mission, Mandate, Role, Structure and Financing of the New Capstone Research Funding Organization Announced in Budget 2024

Brief submitted
by the
Canadian Association of Research Libraries

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Introduction

The Canadian Association of Research Libraries (CARL) is the leadership organization for Canada's research library community. The Association includes the 29 largest university libraries across the country, and aims to foster a sustainable, inclusive and effective Canadian research ecosystem.

CARL would like to thank the Standing Committee on Science and Research for consulting with Canadians on the Government's proposed capstone research funding organization announced in Budget 2024. The information provided in this brief reflects many of CARL's positions as outlined in an earlier letter written to the Presidents of the Tri-Agencies.

While CARL commends the government on seeking new strategies to support research innovation and overcome bureaucratic obstacles that may interfere with or inhibit multidisciplinary research and collaboration, we urge the government to ensure that any new body will not undermine or complicate the current policies and procedures that are in place to fund research in Canada. Tri-agency efforts over recent years have already fostered substantial cooperation and coordination through a committee of the presidents, working committees, and common policies. We believe it is imperative that this work continues and is not disrupted by additional administration.

We hope that, in keeping focused on its goals, the capstone organization will be "light and lean" in terms of its own structure, staff levels, and introduction of new processes and requirements. If the capstone organization is perceived as taking funding away from research, or as increasing government bureaucracy, it will be difficult to become trusted or valued by its key stakeholder communities.

Below, we expand on our four key recommendations, which include:

- 1) Structure the new organization as an open, whole-of-science framework
- 2) Deliver 'early win' administrative efficiencies
- 3) Foster coherent and sustained support to infrastructure
- 4) Strengthen policy, as well as policy monitoring and compliance

Recommendations

Structure the new organization as an open, whole-of-science framework

Research libraries believe that Canadian research can be well served by fostering stronger harmonization across the existing agencies under a broad framework of open science. Many countries, including France and the UK, have a coherent, strategic research funding framework (and a single overseeing government agency) that judiciously balances disciplinary funding with multi-disciplinary cross-cutting research, and that reflects the need to invest in projects, people, and infrastructure. By absorbing lessons from, for example, the Agence nationale de recherche (ANR) and the Comité pour la science ouverte in France, the new organization could be better positioned to traverse discipline-based and jurisdictionally-based silos. In addition to finding its internal and federal synergies, the new organization would need to forge strong ties with other funders such as the Fonds de recherche du Québec (FRQ). We hope that the overall framework will be developed and guided by those with research and innovation expertise, and with representation of the Indigenous research community as well as other equity-seeking and rights-holding groups to foster diversity across the research and innovation ecosystem.

Deliver ‘early win’ administrative efficiencies

Reducing researcher administration burden allows more of researchers’ time to be focused on research. Streamlining the federal granting agencies’ web presence and the grants application, management, adjudication, and monitoring/reporting system could serve all disciplines better. As part of that, there is opportunity to implement both a narrative CV approach and persistent identifiers (“PIDs”) for researchers, their organizations, their grants, their research activities, and their outputs. Integrating machine-actionable identifiers with other jurisdictions’ systems, including campus systems, publishing systems, repositories, and discovery tools. A functioning ecosystem is the goal, and Canada already has a national PIDs strategy in play.¹ Canada’s research funders and research libraries play a key role in this strategy, alongside universities, platform providers, and others.

Foster coherent and sustained support to infrastructure

A third opportunity is to find ways to better and more sustainably fund common, necessary research infrastructure. This challenge does not all rest with the new organisation; in addition to the three current granting agencies, CFI, ISED, Health Canada, the Digital Research Alliance of Canada and CANARIE all invest in infrastructure, as do universities. But at present, key research infrastructure providers often contort themselves to fit research funding programs’ eligibility. It is also clear that project funding cycles are not appropriate for sustaining and operating vital long-

¹ <https://www.crkn-rcdr.ca/en/developing-canadian-pid-strategy-results-and-next-steps>

term research infrastructures that researchers rely upon at various stages of the research life cycle. A more coherent infrastructure environment could facilitate interdisciplinary research and cross-disciplinary collaboration and knowledge exchange, while at the same time minimizing tax-payer supported system costs as a whole. It is important to extend sustained support to the development of online platforms and other digital tools that foster best practices and enable researchers to share data and collaborate remotely.

Strengthen policy, as well as policy monitoring and compliance

The new organisation must not lose sight of the harmonised policy progress that has been made under the tri-agencies (such as the Research Management policy, and the Publications policy currently under review), although compliance has been notably uneven and this should be addressed. The Advisory Panel on the Federal Research Support System Report notes that “a mechanism with a clear mandate to facilitate urgent, international, multi- and interdisciplinary, and mission-driven research, as was required during the pandemic” is necessary, and it is worth reiterating that much of the international collaboration fostered during the pandemic was facilitated through open access to research outputs.² Any endeavour undertaken by the government to facilitate greater innovation in science and research will be strengthened by a commitment to openness. Research libraries – as enablers of open science practices, disseminators of scientific knowledge, and being actively engaged in ethical, security and misinformation issues – fully recognize the challenges of open science. Nevertheless, research libraries advocate that bold policy is essential for maximising research impact. The new organisation must commit, through policy and program mechanisms, to ensuring that Canadian society fully benefits from the enormous public investment directed to scientific research.

In addition to the above recommendations, we wish to highlight the submissions made by the Canadian Association of University Teachers, U15 Canada and others from the academic community. While academic libraries are crucial to the research endeavour, graduate students and research faculty are likely to be most directly impacted by any changes made to national funding infrastructure. We suggest the government seek ongoing opportunities to consult with these groups as planning for the Capstone organization moves forward.

² <https://ised-isde.canada.ca/site/panel-federal-research-support/sites/default/files/attachments/2023/Advisory-Panel-Research-2023.pdf>