




Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada

Evaluation of the Idea to Innovation (I2I) Grants

Management response

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Context

Idea to Innovation Grants (I2I), created in 2003, accelerate the pre-competitive development of promising technologies originating from the university and college sector and promote their transfer to new or established Canadian companies. In accordance with the Treasury Board Secretariat *Policy on Results* (2016), this evaluation satisfies the five-year cycle required given the last evaluation took place in 2018. The evaluation results were consistent with the 2018 evaluation findings confirming that I2I grants are filling an important gap in the research and innovation funding landscape and help to bridge the proverbial “valley of death” in commercialization funding needed to move from proof-of-concept to product development and commercialization. Like in 2018, this evaluation concludes that the I2I grants are an important and relevant mechanism to support the commercialization of intellectual property developed at postsecondary institutions.

Amidst persistent reports of low levels of innovation capacity and productivity in Canadian industry, as well as low levels of investment in research, I2I grants are an important federal policy instrument to help address these challenges.

Some examples of successful outcomes for I2I grants cited in the report include:

- 62% of researchers surveyed indicated that the availability of students to support the project was an important facilitator for its completion.
- The administrative data from the I2I researchers' final reports show that the majority of funded projects (71%) had filed for one or more patents by the end of their grant, and both administrative and survey data suggest this percentage may increase slightly following the grant (up to 88%).
- Almost a third of Phase I projects received financial or in-kind contributions from the partner organizations, while most partners (70%) remained connected with the technology and many projects (57%) managed to attract contributions from new partners beyond the conclusion of the original grant.
- Most funded projects attained patent protection (68%), and a few had filed a Patent Application and/or Provisional Patent Application (PPA) (19%). Time required to commercialize the technology varied with a little more than half the funded projects (56%) being able to achieve this result within one to three years following their grant application.
- When looking specifically at the results of the survey with researchers for I2I projects funded since 2010, that already brought a technology to market (n=25), the data indicate that the majority (60%) created at least one company, while 16% expanded an existing business or company. The majority of this group of respondents (64%) also noted that their projects created an estimated 236 employment opportunities, while almost three-quarters of projects (72%) have at least one technology on the market for a total of 48 products, goods or services.

Comments from Management

While the report recognizes the importance of I2I grants and their significance in the postsecondary funding landscape, the evaluation findings and recommendations also point to the need to update and modernize these grants to better meet program objectives, NSERC's Strategic Plan, and the needs of applicants.

Program management appreciates the time and energy of participants who contributed to the evaluation, wishes to thank those who participated in the interviews and surveys conducted by the evaluation team, and notes the feedback received will be used to determine how to address the recommendations from the evaluation.

This management action plan responds to the findings and recommendations of the program evaluation, where specific implementation plans will include community engagement to improve the achievement of results going forward.

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Management Action Plan

Recommendation 1

Modernize the suite of I2I grants to further align with the needs of the Canadian research community and changing Canadian innovation ecosystem. This includes investigating opportunities to increase the funding amount for the Market Assessment (MA) and Phase I grants, reassess the value-added by the Phase II grants and allowing in-kind supports by partner organizations for Phase I grants.

Management response

Management agrees with the recommendation.

Proposed action

Engage with NSERC senior management, advisory committees and program stakeholders to modernize and streamline I2I grants, including potential changes to Market Assessments, Phase I and Phase II grants. We will:

- a. Reassess the value and relevance of market assessments in consideration of program goals and NSERC priorities;
 - **Responsibility:** Director, Colleges and Networks, RTP
 - **Target date:** Late 2025
- b. Consider changes to grant amounts and durations for Phase I grants;
 - **Responsibility:** Director, Colleges and Networks
 - **Target date:** Late 2025
- c. Re-assess the value-add of Phase II grants and consider possible changes;
 - **Responsibility:** Director, Colleges and Networks
 - **Target date:** Late 2025
- d. Better define the types and roles of partner organizations and eligibility of their contributions to I2I projects.
 - **Responsibility:** Director, Colleges and Networks
 - **Target date:** Late 2025

Recommendation 2

Revise the I2I logic model to improve the alignment between the expected outcomes of the I2I grants and NSERC's strategic vision (e.g., EDI, student training), and revise the program reporting instruments to reflect these new outcomes and improve performance monitoring.

Management response

Management agrees with the recommendation.

Proposed action

- a. Revise and modernize the I2I logic model to better align with intended outcomes of the program and to be more consistent with NSERC strategic priorities, including student training and EDI requirements.
 - **Responsibility:** Director, Colleges and Networks
 - **Target date:** Early 2026
- b. Update I2I reporting materials consistent with the logic model. Revise performance monitoring activities to modernize and be consistent with current best practices.
 - **Responsibility:** Director, Colleges and Networks

- **Target date:** Late 2026

Recommendation 3

Communicate with a focus on clarifying and repackaging information about the I2I grants, as well as identify new and strengthen existing pathways for dissemination amongst key stakeholders. This includes improving the transparency, clarity, and comprehensiveness of the requirements for the application and review processes for the various grants, as well as developing and expanding relationships with complementary programs and other funders.

Management response

Management agrees with the recommendation.

Proposed action

- Update program literature for greater clarity and update formatting to conform to current presentation standards.
 - **Responsibility:** Director, Colleges and Networks
 - **Target date:** Mid 2026
- Ensure clarity and transparency of adjudication process and its consistency with program literature and guidelines.
 - **Responsibility:** Director, Colleges and Networks
 - **Target date:** Mid 2026
- Develop updated communication and outreach strategy.
 - **Responsibility:** Director, Colleges and Networks
 - **Target date:** Late 2026
- Work to establish links with complimentary funding programs and other funding organizations.
 - **Responsibility:** AVP, RTP
 - **Target date:** Ongoing

Modified: 2025-05-12