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Management Response and Action Plan for the Talent Evaluation

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Context

The Tri-agency Talent Evaluation is a strategic-level evaluation that began in spring 2021 and was concluded in fall 2023. The evaluation was undertaken to inform decisions about agency funding for research training and talent development. It explores student access to funding, the student training experience, and the trajectory of master's- and doctoral-level graduate students who are directly and/or indirectly funded by the three agencies.

The evaluation's purpose is to assess how well the agencies' portfolio of talent-related funding aligns to advance common goals and to identify opportunities to strengthen the agencies' collective efforts for student training to enhance Canada's future research capacity.

Three priority areas were identified for the evaluation: how the agencies' funding enables student access to training opportunities, contributes to a rich and inclusive training environment, and influences student trajectory. The evaluation examined the following themes and questions in support of these priority areas:

- **Relevance and Effectiveness** of the agencies' funding support for students
 - Who does the portfolio reach?
 - How does this portfolio contribute to the research training environment?
 - Does this funding influence student career trajectories?
- **COVID-19**
 - What should the agencies consider in the context of changes in the training environment and/or student experience due to COVID-19?

Comments from Management

Since their inception, the three agencies have attracted and developed some of the most promising new talent, positioning Canada for a bright future of innovative contributions from world-class trainees in the global research ecosystem. These investments have supported trainees directly in their own autonomous research and indirectly by developing their skills as they work alongside research experts in the context of research grants.

Much of the evidence presented in the Tri-agency Talent Evaluation aligns with recommendations from recent reports and other stakeholder engagements, including the [Report of the Federal Advisory Panel on the Federal Research Support System](#), the [Report of the Standing Committee on Science and Research on scholarships and fellowships](#), and [Canada's Fundamental Science Review](#). Some examples include:

- simplifying and harmonizing of programs and policies
- eliminating barriers to equitable participation
- increasing funding levels to alleviate the financial hardships faced by research trainees
- improving support of trainees transitioning into the workforce

This Management Response and Action Plan (MRAP) provides responses to the 14 recommendations of the Tri-agency Talent Evaluation and identifies actions the agencies will take to strengthen and advance tri-agency training programs, policies and processes.

To address the growing complexity of the Canadian research ecosystem, and to meet the changing needs of researchers, this evaluation is one of several coordinated and evidence-informed efforts that have been undertaken by the three federal research granting agencies. These efforts have resulted in key strategies that will underpin the development and implementation of activities within this MRAP to increase equitable access to research funding, to support an increasingly equitable, inclusive and diverse research community, and to improve programs and program delivery.

These include:

- the tri-agency strategic plan, Setting New Directions to Support Indigenous Research and Research Training in Canada, to advance culturally relevant and respectful models of support for research conducted by, and with, Indigenous Peoples
- fostering of a more equitable, diverse, inclusive, accessible research ecosystem in Canada through the Tri-Agency Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Action Plan and the Dimensions Charter
- advancing of fair access to tri-agency research support and equitable participation in the research system for early career researchers (ECRs) through the tri-agency ECR action plan

- a shared commitment through the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA), to strengthening research excellence by ensuring robust, equitable and impactful measures of research assessment.

While work is already underway on multiple fronts across the three agencies that complements the evaluation's recommendations, it is important to acknowledge that more work needs to be done. The agencies' response to the evaluation will, therefore, improve programs and program delivery and will have an emphasis on the foundational principles of EDI to ensure equitable access to funding opportunities, and contribute to the development of a more equitable, diverse, inclusive and accessible postsecondary research ecosystem and culture in Canada, in alignment with the Tri-Agency EDI Action Plan. These principles will be central to these strategies and will be reflected in policies, plans, programs and processes, developed as a result of the evaluation's recommendations.

We are pleased to present this MRAP, which provides specific information on the management response to the recommendations contained in the evaluation report.

Program management 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 inform the implementation of the MRAP.

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Management Action Plan

Recommendation	Agree/ disagree	Proposed action	Responsibility	Target date for completing proposed action
Empowering trainees				
1. Improve agency communications and public reporting about agency investments in training for graduate students. Provide a centralized source for accurate and timely, whole-portfolio information.	Agree	The agencies will investigate and implement viable options for improvement.	Scholarships and Fellowships director(s) or equivalent for each agency.	FY 2025-26 (March 2026)

Recommendation	Agree/ disagree	Proposed action	Responsibility	Target date for completing proposed action
2. Work with academic institutions to improve transparency and clarity of policies and practices related to funding reallocation.	Agree	The agencies will conduct further analysis and propose options on the role that they could play in shaping policies and best practices for institutional funding reallocation practices. The agencies will then work collaboratively with institutions to explore the implementation of options resulting from the analysis.	Scholarships and Fellowships director(s) or equivalent for each agency.	FY 2025-26 (March 2026)
Providing leadership to improve funding practices for students				

Recommendation	Agree/ disagree	Proposed action	Responsibility	Target date for completing proposed action
3. Work with academic institutions to reduce impact of reallocations on students and to address underlying factors driving funding reallocation practices.	Agree	The agencies will conduct further analysis and propose options on the role they could play in mitigating the impacts on students and in addressing the underlying factors driving institutional funding reallocation practices. The agencies will then work collaboratively with institutions to explore the implementation of options resulting from the analysis.	Scholarships and Fellowships director(s) or equivalent for each agency.	FY 2025-26 (March 2026)
Developing a whole portfolio strategy				

Recommendation	Agree/ disagree	Proposed action	Responsibility	Target date for completing proposed action
4. Future development of a strategy for research training should encompass the whole portfolio.	Partially agree	The agencies will develop an approach, inclusive of the Tri-agency Training Strategy, which will consider the whole portfolio (direct and indirect funding) to enhance student access and expand the agencies' reach and impact.	Scholarships and Fellowships director(s) or equivalent for each agency. Research Grant directors or equivalent for each agency.	FY 2025-26 (March 2026)

Recommendation	Agree/ disagree	Proposed action	Responsibility	Target date for completing proposed action
5. Take measures to increase availability and use of data about trainee support across the portfolio, to enhance monitoring, evaluation, and public reporting.	Agree	The agencies will investigate, report on, and implement viable options to address existing gaps in the collection and availability of data to improve monitoring, evaluation, and public reporting of investments in research training, and the use of this data to inform and improve program design and policies.	Scholarships and Fellowships director(s) or equivalent for each agency. Research Grant directors or equivalent for each agency.	FY 2025-26 (March 2026)

Indirect stream funding

6. Clarify training objectives for agency research grants, ensuring that expectations for training are clearly articulated for prospective grant applicants.	Agree	The agencies will revise program literature of relevant funding opportunities to clarify training objectives.	Research Grant directors or equivalent for each agency.	FY 2025-26 (March 2026)
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Recommendation	Agree/ disagree	Proposed action	Responsibility	Target date for completing proposed action
<p>7. Continued investment in the three types of indirect funding is recommended. Consider increasing investment in indirect funding types supporting cross-sectoral and professional skills training (Type 3 and Type 4).</p>	Agree	<p>The agencies agree that continued investment in indirect funding is valuable.</p> <p>The agencies will prepare an analysis of resource requirements for addressing this recommendation, taking into account individual program objectives, existing program strengths, and contextual complexities.</p>		FY 2025-26 (April 2026)

Recommendation	Agree/ disagree	Proposed action	Responsibility	Target date for completing proposed action
8. Consider raising grant levels, alongside measures to encourage proportions of grants allocated to training, and per-student stipend levels, increase accordingly.	Agree	<p>The agencies agree that continued investment in indirect funding is valuable.</p> <p>The agencies will prepare an analysis of resource requirements for addressing this recommendation, taking into account individual program objectives, existing program strengths, and contextual complexities.</p>	Research Grant directors or equivalent for each agency.	FY 2025-26 (April 2026)
Direct stream funding				

Recommendation	Agree/ disagree	Proposed action	Responsibility	Target date for completing proposed action
<p>9. Reassess direct funding and clarify its role as part of the future portfolio.</p> <p>It is recommended that the agencies deliberate carefully on what they want to achieve with the awards going forward, what is realistic for this type of intervention to achieve in the future, and whether the necessary investment of time, focus and money to renew the awards is feasible.</p> <p>In reassessing the direct awards, the</p>	Agree	<p>The agencies will work to better define the role of direct funding in the context of the greater research eco-system, to synergize it with indirect funding and to provide clarity to overall objectives, with the goal of better preparing trainees for a wider range of career paths.</p> <p>The agencies will also review the suite of scholarships and fellowships offered by the agencies to improve, coordinate, and streamline the direct funding portfolio in various aspects, including relevant program</p>	Scholarships and Fellowships director(s) or equivalent for each agency.	FY 2025-26 (March 2026)

Recommendation	Agree/ disagree	Proposed action	Responsibility	Target date for completing proposed action
agencies need to also consider recommendations 10-14 and the availability of resources to implement them.		eligibility (recommendations 11 and 12), transparency and fairness of the review process at institutions (recommendation 14), as well as awards number (recommendation 10) and value (recommendation 13), conditional on new funding.		

Recommendation	Agree/ disagree	Proposed action	Responsibility	Target date for completing proposed action
10. Consider expanding the number of awards at earlier degree levels.	Agree	<p>The agencies agree to consider expanding the number of awards at earlier degree stages.</p> <p>The agencies will review the suite of scholarships and fellowships and analyze options to allocate funding across training levels to optimize the impact of investment in building research capacity, and develop a plan based on the results of the analysis.</p>	Scholarships and Fellowships director(s) or equivalent for each agency.	FY 2025-26 (March 2026)

Recommendation	Agree/ disagree	Proposed action	Responsibility	Target date for completing proposed action
11. Extend doctoral degree stage eligibility windows or eliminate degree stage eligibility restrictions.	Agree	The agencies support the extension of the doctoral degree stage eligibility window or the elimination of the degree stage eligibility restrictions. The agencies will investigate the feasibility of removing these barriers to access, and develop a plan based on the results of the investigation.	Scholarships and Fellowships director(s) or equivalent for each agency.	FY 2025-26 (March 2026)

Recommendation	Agree/ disagree	Proposed action	Responsibility	Target date for completing proposed action
12. Allow part-time students to apply for agency awards without the need to justify their part-time status.	Agree	<p>The agencies support allowing part-time students to apply for agency awards without justification.</p> <p>The agencies will investigate the feasibility of removing the restrictions on part-time trainees applying for and holding scholarships and fellowships and will communicate results and options to the research community.</p>	Scholarships and Fellowships director(s) or equivalent for each agency.	FY 2025-26 (March 2026)

Recommendation	Agree/ disagree	Proposed action	Responsibility	Target date for completing proposed action
13. Address insufficiency of awards funding	Agree	<p>The agencies recognize the financial challenges faced by graduate students.</p> <p>The agencies will prepare an analysis of resource requirements for addressing this recommendation, taking into account individual program objectives, existing program strengths, and contextual complexities.</p>	Scholarships and Fellowships director(s) or equivalent for each agency.	FY 2025-26 (April 2026)

Recommendation	Agree/ disagree	Proposed action	Responsibility	Target date for completing proposed action
14. Work with institutions to address transparency and perceived fairness of review processes, and to protect privacy of students with respect to self-identification / special circumstances.	Agree	The agencies will analyze how best to monitor the transparency and fairness of review processes at institutions and will then work collaboratively with institutions to explore the implementation of options resulting from the analysis.	Scholarships and Fellowships director(s) or equivalent for each agency.	FY 2025-26 (March 2026)

From:

- Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council

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