

Summative Evaluation of the Industrial Research Chair Program

This document constitutes the NSERC management response to the report on the Summative Evaluation of the Industrial Research Chair Program. The evaluation was prepared by the consulting firm Goss Gilroy Inc.

Introduction and Background

The IRC program is part of a cluster of programs belonging to the Building Critical Mass stream of programs in NSERC's Research Partnerships Programs (RPP). In order to address gaps in major research capacity in areas of interest to industry, the IRC program provides significant, long-term funding to foster collaboration between university researchers and industrial partners.

The objectives of the Industrial Research Chairs (IRC) program are as follows:

- assist universities in building on existing strengths to achieve the critical mass required for a major research endeavour in science and engineering of interest to industry; and/or
- assist in the development of research efforts in fields that have not yet been developed in Canadian universities but for which there is an important industrial need; and
- provide an enhanced training environment for graduate students and, where appropriate, postdoctoral fellows, by exposing them to research challenges unique to industry and the opportunity for significant ongoing interactions with the industrial partner(s).

The evaluation concluded that the program was highly relevant in addressing the priorities of both the federal government and NSERC, and the complementary needs and priorities of the academic and industrial sectors. The program was felt to be distinct from other university research funding programs, with salary support, shared costs and the long term funding commitment seen as being critical and desirable elements. Overall the evaluation was very positive; no significant issues were uncovered and few modifications to program delivery were recommended.

Recommendation	Response	Comments	Action Plan	Responsibility	Timeline
<p>1. Identify and implement additional efforts to further augment the visibility and prestige of the IRC program.</p> <p>The evaluation report noted that the prestige and visibility associated with an IRC is of value to researchers and is viewed as an important factor in leveraging new or additional funding from the partner organizations that can be used to enhance or further enhance the Chair's research program. An increased awareness of benefits to industry would further the industrial partner's level of commitment and support for the Chair. In addition, it was found that the Canada Research Chair's</p>	Agree	<p>NSERC has recognized this issue and has already adopted measures aimed at increasing the visibility and prestige of the IRC program. These include: the searchable Chairholders' database on NSERC's online website which describes each of the active IRCs; congratulatory plaques for new Chairholders; regular feature articles in NSERC's Contact publication; and letters from NSERC's President congratulating the CEO's of the industrial partner organizations. It should also be emphasized that the IRC program has shown steady and constant growth over the years. In the past seven years, NSERC's funding has grown from \$7,300,000 in 2000-</p>	<p>The Research Partnerships Program (RPP) division of NSERC has recently hired a full-time RPP Liaison Officer. Part of the responsibility of this position will be to work with Communications to develop a marketing plan for the RPP division as a whole, including actions aimed at increasing the visibility and prestige of the IRC and other RPP programs.</p>	RPP/ Communications	Ongoing.

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program has the potential to overshadow the IRC program in terms of visibility and prestige.		2001 to \$20,400,000 in 2007-2008. As a result, although it is recognized that the IRC program can benefit through increased visibility and prestige, at present time it is not viewed to be a high priority issue.			
2. Consult with non-participating universities and industrial organizations to assess the opportunities and challenges with respect to IRC involvement. The evaluation report has focused its study on those universities and industrial organizations which have already subscribed to the IRC program. As a result, there may be challenges and barriers faced by some Universities and potential industrial partners that may have not been identified through this report. The report points out that there may be barriers and challenges that could be addressed through adjustments to the program or improved marketing and outreach. Therefore, to better assess these challenges, consultation with non-participating universities and industrial organizations is recommended.	Agree	NSERC recognizes that the university-industry relationship that leads to the establishment of an IRC often starts small through other funding mechanisms, such as the Collaborative Research and Development (CRD), and the Strategic Project Grants (SPG) programs, and builds over time culminating in the participation of the IRC program - a significant long term commitment. As a result, it is important to increase: (i) the visibility of other RPP programs to initiate new research relationships that may one day develop into a new Industrial Research Chair; and (ii) the visibility of the IRC program to those organizations that are already involved in RPP's other partnership programs.	The Research Partnerships Program (RPP) division of NSERC has recently hired a full-time RPP Liaison Officer. Part of the responsibility of this position will be to work with Communications to develop a marketing plan for the RPP division as a whole, including actions aimed at assessing the challenges and opportunities for the adoption of the IRC program by potential industrial partners. Possible courses of action may include working with NSERC's regional offices and current Chairholders to increase the visibility of the IRC program to companies that are already involved in RPP's other partnership programs and to determine what barriers, if any, a company or university might perceive to furthering an existing collaboration through a possible chair.	RPP & Regional Offices	2008-09 and onwards.
3. Consider a special funding mechanism, linked to the IRC program, to provide for administrative and capital costs of research in specific circumstances. The evaluation report concluded that in certain circumstances, the administrative and infrastructure support for IRC programs was inadequate. The report recommends that, given a special set of circumstances, NSERC should create a special funding mechanism to provide for the administrative and capital costs of an IRC program.	Disagree	NSERC agrees that the provision of appropriate lab space and administrative support are very important factors in the ultimate and timely success of an IRC. These are considered to be indirect costs of research and as such are the responsibility of the university. As the federal government has already increased the available funding for these types of expenses through its Indirect Costs Program, NSERC will not be considering a special mechanism to fund these expenses. NSERC has revised its literature to ensure that it is clear that such support is part of the university's commitment to an IRC and will follow-up with the universities to confirm that such commitments are being met.	Develop a clearer upfront funding agreement with the university to ensure compliance with the requirements of the IRC.	RPP	2008-09.

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<p>4. In the case of 2nd term renewals, NSERC should consider providing full salary support for the first two years with salary support provided on a declining scale for the remaining three years of the renewal, for those universities who can adequately demonstrate need.</p> <p>The evaluation report found that the five-year time frame is insufficient for some universities to find adequate resources for salary replacement. Full support for the first two years of the IRC second term would create more university support for IRC renewals.</p>	Disagree	<p>In applying for an IRC, a university is aware that the program requires that they provide a tenure track position and the phase-in of the salary starting in year six of the Chair. Therefore NSERC is not proposing to adopt this recommendation as a two year extension would only postpone the university responsibility and would have a very minor impact on a university's ability to assume the full salary commitment by the end of the second term. The eventual assumption of full salary support by the university is seen by NSERC as a key element in ensuring that the university views the establishment of the IRC as a long term strategic commitment on their part to an industrially relevant area of research.</p>	None.	NA.	NA.
<p>5. NSERC should consider adopting a two-step application process.</p> <p>The evaluation report found that the preparation of the application and approval process requires a considerable investment in time and resources from both the university and the IRC sponsors. The predominant reason for an unsuccessful IRC application is generally due to the proposed chairholder not meeting the expected very high standards of excellence in research stature. The report recommends that NSERC develop an additional application step that will provide the university with an assessment of the Chair candidates stature prior to undertaking the task of preparing a full application.</p>	Agree	<p>NSERC management agrees with the evaluation report's recommendation and has implemented a pre-application process for assessment of a potential candidate's stature. The process is optional and at the discretion of the university so that turn around times for strong candidates are not impacted.</p>	Completed.	RPP	NA.
<p>6. Modify performance reporting tools to ensure that environmental and social outcomes of the IRC program are adequately monitored.</p> <p>The evaluation report found that the current tracking of the IRC program outcomes does not fully track environmental and social outcomes.</p>	Agree	<p>The formats for the IRC final reports have been revised to ensure that NSERC tracks environmental and social impacts.</p>	Completed.	RPP	NA.

