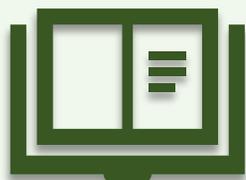


Summary of the Evaluation of ISED Funding to Let's Talk Science

Audit and Evaluation Branch

Senior Management Committee – January 2022

Let's Talk Science (LTS), a national, not-for-profit corporation and registered-charitable organization, offers free programs, services and resources to support initiatives that encourage greater youth (Early Years – Grade 12 (EY-12)) participation in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) education.



Background: STEM skills contribute to Canada's competitiveness, productivity, economic growth, and job creation. However, many youth in Canada are dropping STEM courses, which are needed to enrol in post-secondary STEM studies. LTS aims to address this disengagement from STEM participation and the gaps in the talent pool in STEM disciplines with support of ISED's funding agreement to LTS (\$12.5 million from 2015-16 to 2019-20).

Three areas were examined in the evaluation using five data collection methods, covering the recipient fiscal period from September 1, 2015 to August 31, 2020, as required under the *Financial Administration Act*.

Relevance: To what extent is LTS addressing a unique and continued need for youth STEM engagement and awareness?

Performance: To what extent has LTS increased:

- (1) youth, educator, and volunteer engagement and participation in outreach and other LTS programs?
- (2) youth interest in STEM and awareness in STEM careers?
- (3) educator programs/resources and professional learning?
- (4) volunteer training/skill development and employability?

Efficiency: To what extent is the LTS funding model an efficient and effective model for increasing youth STEM engagement and awareness?



Data Collection Methods

- Case Studies
- Document Review
- Financial and Administrative Data Review
- Interviews
- Literature Review



Three findings presented the relevance for supporting youth STEM engagement and resources for educators, and the continued need for LTS within the STEM education ecosystem in Canada.

Finding 1: There is a continued need to support youth STEM engagement in Canada. This need for youth STEM engagement has increased over time, particularly for underrepresented groups. LTS addresses a need for youth STEM engagement by convening education stakeholders and coordinating the delivery of a national scale platform for youth STEM engagement. The delivery platform uses a broad (EY-12), holistic (youth, educators, volunteers, parents), and evidence-based approach to address barriers to youth STEM participation that is very adaptable in meeting diverse needs.

Finding 2: There are a variety of youth-focused STEM programs in Canada; however, LTS is relatively unique in having a larger scale and scope and a highly collaborative delivery model.

Finding 3: LTS is aligned with ISED's Departmental Result, "Canadian businesses and industries are innovative and growing" and supports the objectives of the Innovation and Skills Plan in providing youth with access to formative experiences that promote increased STEM participation.



Three findings demonstrated LTS's effectiveness in supporting youth interest in STEM and awareness in STEM careers, educators capacity to teach STEM, and volunteer outreach and skills development.

Finding 4: LTS increased its reach to youth and increased youth interest in STEM, because of the variety of engaging ways it reaches youth, directly via LTS programming, and indirectly via its partnerships with other youth-serving organizations. To support youth interest and awareness in STEM careers, LTS effectively incorporates career pathways into this programming, via a large and diverse array of career profiles and the use of university volunteer role models.

Finding 5: LTS was effective in increasing engagement of educators and their participation in multiple programs, thereby surpassing targets. LTS's volunteer outreach in classrooms, library of digital content and classroom-ready learning and Professional Learning opportunities were found to have been effective at increasing educator capacity to teach STEM and inquiry-based science, particularly for teachers with less experience in STEM.

Finding 6: LTS grew its outreach program, surpassing most of its targets for outreach sites, registered volunteers, and total volunteer hours. LTS increased its focus on professional development and skills training; with volunteer participation and satisfaction increasing. LTS has contributed to the development of a variety of skills and provided volunteers with career training, such as resume building and skill transference to help them navigate from post-secondary to the job market.



Three findings highlighted the efficiency and flexibility of LTS's program delivery and partnership model to reach a diversity of youth, including underrepresented communities.

Finding 7: LTS is being delivered efficiently, with low administrative costs, centralized operations, and strategic delivery partners. Alternative sources of funding do not offer the same scale, scope, or duration offered by the ISED funding, which enables LTS to focus on its core objectives of delivering on a national STEM education mandate. ISED funding also supports LTS in securing additional financial investments, in-kind support, and partnerships, thereby extending its reach to more youth and educators.

Finding 8: LTS's hands-on, inquiry-based approach is effective in reaching a diversity of youth, including girls, at-risk youth, and Indigenous youth. LTS has a multi-pronged approach to engage Indigenous youth and has increased the availability of French language resources. LTS has also increased its efforts to incorporate equity, diversity and inclusion considerations by establishing an Anti-Racism Task Force and developing an Equity Plan.

Finding 9: LTS pivoted quickly in response to COVID-19, by moving activities online and providing materials for educators, youth, and caregivers and is well-positioned to continue a blended delivery model.



The findings from the evaluation did not produce any recommendations.