Fisheries and Oceans Canada
Canadian Coast Guard

Pêches et Océans Canada
Garde côtière canadienne

EVALUATION OF GRANTS AND CONTRIBUTIONS PROGRAMMING IN THE ECOSYSTEMS AND OCEANS SCIENCE SECTOR

FINAL REPORT

June 26, 2020
Project Number: 96265

Evaluation

Canada

Table of Contents

Cover photo credit: Canadian Scientific
Submersible Facility/ROPOS, Oceana Canada and
Fisheries and Oceans Canada

Evaluation Purpose, Context and Scope

Purpose of the evaluation

This evaluation assesses the relevance, performance, and design and delivery of Fisheries and Oceans Canada's (DFO) Ocean and Freshwater Science Contribution Program (OFSCP), which includes the Partnership Fund. It also examines components of eleven other grant and contribution (G&C) programs within the Ecosystems and Oceans Science (EOS) sector (see Annex A). Finally it covers the activities of the secretariat within the EOS sector that supports all G&C programs delivered under the Ecosystems and Oceans Science Contribution Framework (EOSCF) terms and conditions[1].

Evaluation Context

In order to inform Senior Management, this evaluation was undertaken early and was designed as an implementation evaluation to help determine whether activities are being implemented as intended and to provide evidence on what is working well and if any adjustments are required. The Partnership Fund was the primary focus of the evaluation, but challenges are also highlighted for the other G&C programs listed in Annex A.

Evaluation Scope

The evaluation was conducted by DFO's Evaluation Division between April 2019 and June 2020. It covered the years 2016-17 to 2019-20 and included all DFO regions: Newfoundland and Labrador, Maritimes, Gulf, Quebec, Ontario and Prairie, Pacific, Arctic[2], and National Headquarters.

The evaluation was conducted in accordance with the Policy on Results and *Financial Administration Act*, which require departments to measure and evaluate performance and use the resulting information to manage and improve programs, policies and services.

Information gathered from multiple qualitative and quantitative lines of evidence (interviews, document and websites review, literature review, file review, a survey to recipients, a survey to DFO staff and a site visit) was triangulated to respond to the evaluation questions. Details on the evaluation methodology are found in Annex B.

Table 1: Evaluation Questions

Relevance
1. What needs does the Partnership Fund address?
2. To what extent do the Partnership Fund and other programs using the OFSCP/EOSCF terms and conditions align with the core responsibilities of the department?

Performance (Effectiveness & Efficiency)
3. To what extent is the Partnership Fund contributing to its intended outcomes?
4. To what extent is the Partnership Fund program operating efficiently?
5. What has been the impact on the secretariat of the increasing number of contribution programs using the terms and conditions of the OFSCP/EOSCF?

Design and Delivery
6. Are there practices that can improve the delivery of the contribution programs using the OFSCP/EOSCF terms and conditions?
7. To what extent do the contribution programs using the OFSCP/EOSCF terms and conditions support equitable opportunities to diverse groups of eligible recipients?

[1] The Ecosystems and Oceans Science Contribution Framework (EOSCF) terms and conditions, formerly known as the Ocean and Freshwater Science Contribution Program (OFSCP) terms and conditions before being revised in 2019.
[2] The creation of DFO Arctic region was announced in October 2018.

Program Profile
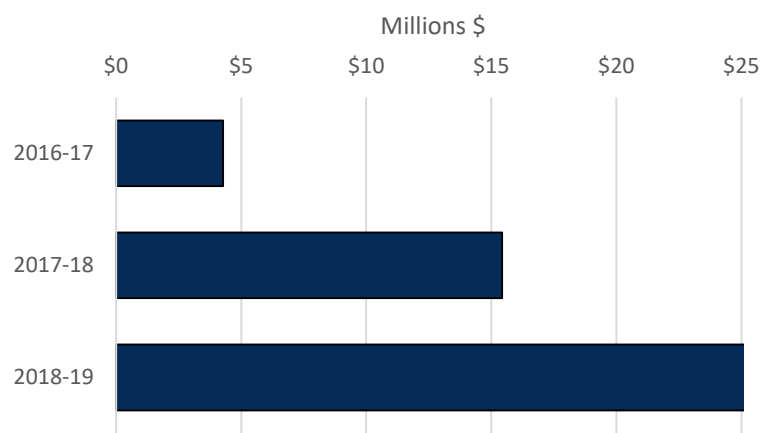
The Ocean and Freshwater Science Contribution Program (OFSCP) was created in 2016 with $4,470,000 in the first year and $5,170,000 in 2017-18 in ongoing funds. The objective of this contribution program is to increase the pool of scientific knowledge aligned with DFO science priorities.

The Partnership Fund component of the OFSCP, was allocated $3,500,000 in 2016-17 and $2,500,000 in ongoing funds to promote and facilitate the development of scientific knowledge and related science activities by external organizations in areas aligned with DFO priorities. As of December 2019, there were approximately 118 Partnership Fund projects totalling just under $18,000,000.

Over the period of the evaluation, many new G&C programs within the EOS sector have brought the total sector contribution funding to approximately $25,000,000 as of 2018-19. More funding has since been added bringing the total value of sector G&Cs to around $35,000,000. Due to the high increase, a G&C secretariat was created within the sector to help support the exponential increase in contribution funding. It is staffed with approximately seven full-time equivalents (FTEs).
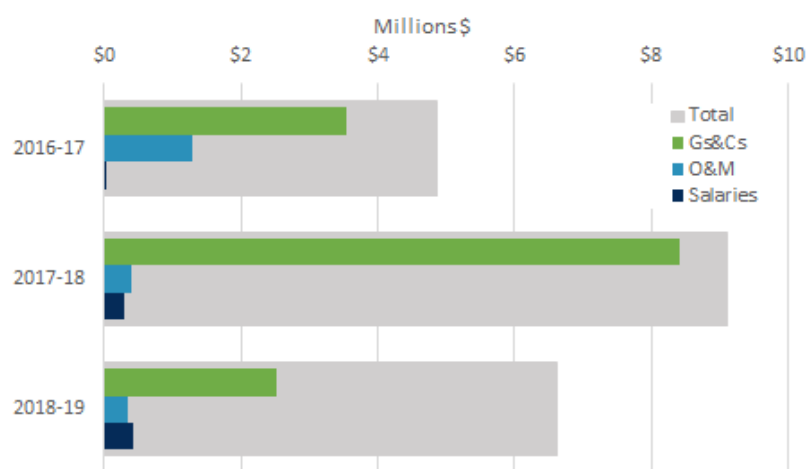
All the contributions are delivered under the Ecosystems and Oceans Science Contribution Framework (EOSCF) terms and conditions, formerly known as the Ocean and Freshwater Science Contribution Program terms and conditions before being revised in 2019.

Figure 1: Publicly reported spending under the OFSCP reflects the exponential growth in G&C funding in the EOS sector.

Source: Public Accounts of Canada (https://www.tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca/recgen/cpc-pac/2019/index-eng.html)

Figure 2: Actual financial resources for the Partnership Fund for the years 2016-17 through to 2018-19.

Source: Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Chief Financial Officer sector
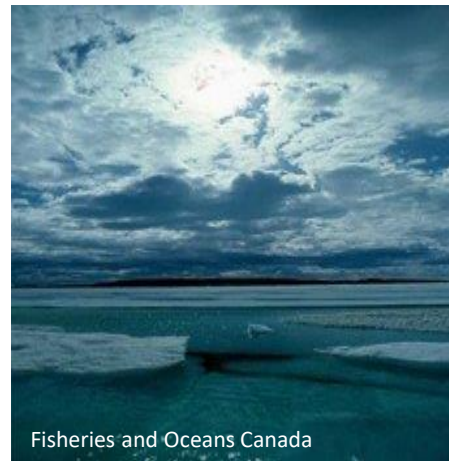
Evaluation Findings

Funded projects are addressing gaps in the ocean and freshwater science community

The ocean is of key importance to Canada's culture, environment, public health, and economy. It is also integral to the culture of many Indigenous and coastal communities. Although research in ocean science has made steady progress, certain areas remain poorly understood. A 2012 report[3] highlighted **40 priority research questions** that, if answered, would have the greatest impact on **addressing future opportunities and challenges** relating to **ocean science** in Canada. These research questions can be grouped under the four areas indicated below.

Table 2: Interview data revealed most Partnership Fund projects align with one or more of these broad research areas.

	Categories	%
1	Fundamental scientific understanding	75%
2	Improving the quality of monitoring, data, and information management	17%
3	Informing management and governance	25%
4	Understanding the impact of human activities	17%

Although most projects align with **fundamental scientific understanding**, respondents to both surveys perceive that the **greatest gaps** are related to the **management and access to scientific data** as well as **understanding the impact of human activities**.

Fisheries and Oceans Canada

Fisheries and Oceans Canada

When recipients were asked if their **organization faced gaps** for **conducting activities and/or research**, most who answered **yes** (58%) elaborated that **lack of funding** was a gap.

Interviews and survey results indicate most projects would **not have taken place** or would have taken place on a **smaller scale** (e.g., lower spatial coverage, longer timelines, less frequent sampling) in the absence of contribution program funding.

Further, just over half the respondents to the recipient's survey feel that there are **no alternative sources of funding** for this type of work; 30% said there were some, including provinces, industry and possibly the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, but not all would be a good fit.
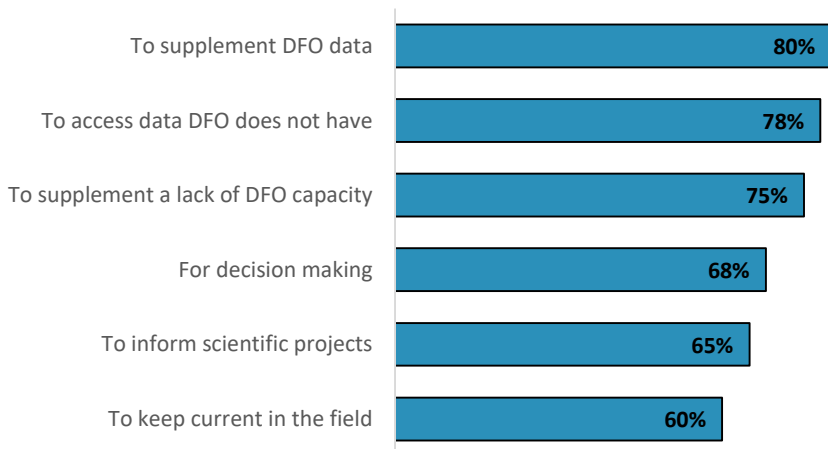
[3] CCA (Council of Canadian Academies). (2012). 40 Priority Research Questions for Ocean Science in Canada. Ottawa, ON: CCA, The Core Group on Ocean Science in Canada.

Partnership Fund projects align with the core responsibilities of the department

Proposals submitted to the Partnership Fund are evaluated by the Science Executive Committee on the extent to which they contribute to knowledge in key program areas of the department. The file review found that **98% of projects clearly align** to **program areas** of the department, which in turn **align to the DFO core responsibilities** of Fisheries and Aquatic Ecosystems. **Forty-three percent** of the projects **aligned** with **multiple program areas**. These findings were supported by interviews.

Projects funded under the Partnership Fund generate more scientific data and results in the **public domain** which can be accessed by DFO staff for management decisions. Most EOS staff indicate they **regularly access** science research and data from **external sources**, including to support decision-making.

Figure 3: DFO staff utilize external science research and data to support their work.

To supplement DFO data	80%
To access data DFO does not have	78%
To supplement a lack of DFO capacity	75%
For decision making	68%
To inform scientific projects	65%
To keep current in the field	60%

Table 3: Alignment of Partnership Fund projects with DFO program areas.

Program area	# of projects	Total Contributions
Aquaculture Science	3	$80,250
Aquatic Animal Health	3	$136,548
Aquatic Invasive Species	1	$15,000
Biotechnology and Genomics	1	$78,000
Fisheries Science	29	$4,175,971
Hydrography	8	$1,014,620
Oceanography	6	$379,585
Oceans and Climate Change	5	$375,743
Species at Risk	9	$1,138,888
Multiple programs	51	$9,801,009
Unknown	2	$612,298
Grand Total	**118**	**$17,807,912**

Partnership Fund projects are supporting intended results

The Partnership Fund projects, as of December 2019[4], supported one or more intended results.

> **There is an increase in scientific research and related scientific activities conducted by external organizations (immediate outcome).**

- **Contribution agreements support** an **increase in scientific research** that aligns with DFO science priorities.
- **61%** of **projects** funded under the **Partnership Fund** were related to **research** and **data transfer.**
- **63%** of **all survey respondents** said that the **Partnership Fund supported this result** from a considerable to a great extent.

A group of projects funded in DFO's Central and Arctic region (renamed the Ontario and Prairie region June 1, 2020) **supported research related to the recovery of Species at Risk (SAR) in freshwater habitats.** A network of scientists was established with Partnership funding in 2016. The network conducted a scoping exercise which identified there was a lot of research available on Species at Risk population ecology and habitat but not much on threats to species and reintroductions (i.e. recovery). Projects funded in years two and three of the Partnership Fund were informed by this gap analysis.

External partners with expertise and access to special laboratory environments, not readily available to DFO, were able to produce results aligning with the responsibilities of DFO under the *Species at Risk Act*.

Fisheries and Oceans Canada

Area for improvement

Although the template for project reporting collects project performance information, it does not support the identification of results that are non-research related. Specifically the reporting template for the Partnership Fund is oriented towards research but does not allow for results from conferences, and outreach-focussed projects to be well described.

---

[4] As of December 2019, 118 projects had been funded by the Partnership Fund. Of those, 89 were complete and 29 were in progress.

Partnership Fund projects are supporting intended results *(continued)*

Canadians have increased access to enhanced scientific results and data from funded scientific activities (immediate outcome).
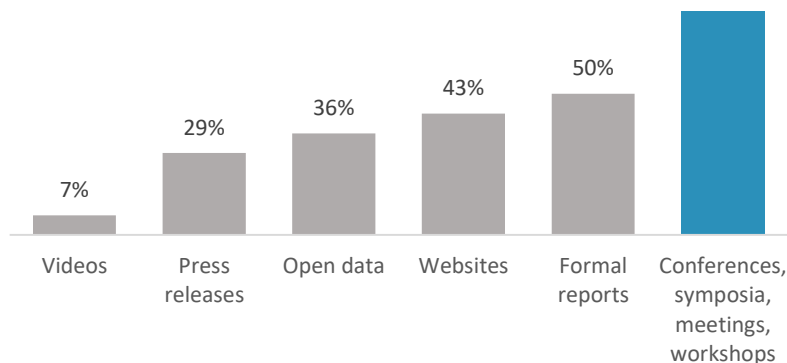
- **96% of respondents** to the recipient survey said that they had **plans to share**, or **results were already being shared** with the **scientific community** through various means.
- **Respondents (81%)** are also planning to **disseminate** their research more **broadly** with the **Canadian public**.
- **Researchers engage** in a variety of **knowledge mobilization strategies**. The **most common** form of **knowledge dissemination** are **workshops** or **symposia**.
- Research teams are also **utilizing publications** and **social media** to share project findings.

Figure 4: Most recipients use conferences, symposia, meetings, and workshops to disseminate information to Canadians.

7%	29%	36%	43%	50%	79%
Videos	Press releases	Open data	Websites	Formal reports	Conferences, symposia, meetings, workshops

Oceana Canada/Neil Ever Osborne

One recipient utilized videos and social media to disseminate information to classrooms and the general public about a funded research expedition in the Gulf of St Lawrence.

Oceana Canada, symposia attendees watching presentations

Individuals from government, fishing communities, First Nations, not-for-profit and non-governmental organizations, and academia were invited to a symposium focused on rebuilding fisheries.

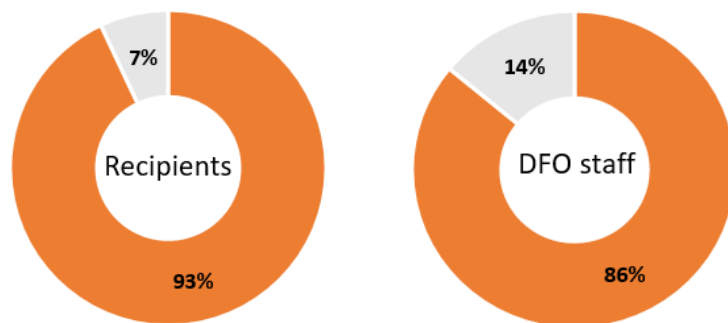# Partnership Fund projects are supporting intended results *(continued)*

The Canadian ocean and freshwater science community has increased capacity and resources to conduct ocean and freshwater science (intermediate outcome).

All contribution programs are **supporting capacity building** to some extent.

Highly qualified personnel[5] are being trained from each of the following groups:
- Post-doctoral researchers
- Doctoral and Masters students
- Undergraduate students
- Community researchers
- Indigenous community members
- Technicians

Figure 5: Survey respondents, felt that yes, funded projects are contributing to the development of highly qualified personnel.

Recipients — 93%, 7%

DFO staff — 86%, 14%

Moreover, recipients said that these projects helped to train the next generation of researchers (i.e., highly qualified personnel).

Recipients are benefitting in many ways from funded activities

- Survey evidence shows recipients have **strengthened their networks** through collaboration
- **78% of recipients** felt that they had **expanded their professional network** through their funded work
- Survey evidence revealed that recipients **expanded their knowledge (73%), skillset (70%), and developed new skills (42%)**

Some projects delivered results for all three outcomes!

Highly qualified personnel were tracked for a group of 14 research projects funded in DFO's Central and Arctic region. From 2017 to 2019, 39 highly qualified personnel were trained through their involvements.

Outputs were also tracked for the same time period. For the same 14 projects, about 100 products were created or were in progress as of November 2019 and numerous public outreach activities took place.

---

[5] Highly qualified personnel may include undergraduate and graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, research technicians, research associates, and other technical or research personnel. It does NOT include faculty members.

Recipients provided positive feedback about the support and experiences they have had

Most recipients of the contribution programs are **positive** about the support they have received during different phases of the funding cycle.

- ✓ Guidance received during the preparation of proposals was easy to understand

- ✓ They knew what activities and expenses were eligible

- ✓ Templates were easy to use

- ✓ 67% of survey respondents felt that reporting requirements were reasonable to a considerable or great extent

- ✓ Partnership Fund recipients noted reporting is not onerous and is well-aligned with the amounts being funded

---

There is no evidence to suggest widespread delays

- Based on a review of 118 Partnership Fund projects, the **average number of days to sign contribution agreements** was **16 days** (the range was 0 to 77).
- Some interviewees from academic institutions mentioned that administrative processes can be cumbersome at their end.

About half of the academic recipients interviewed indicated there is **a mismatch between the DFO and the academic calendar years** which may be why some recipients reported that funds are not transferred in a timely manner.

Overall, **recipients are satisfied with the level of communication** they have with both national and regional DFO staff throughout the funding process. Communication was effective at:

- ✓ the drafting of contribution agreements;
- ✓ the notification of approval;
- ✓ the transfer of funds; and
- ✓ during reporting.

Some Partnership Fund recipients said communication **challenges** occurred when contribution agreements were being drafted by staff in the G&C secretariat. This might reflect a **break in their communication with regional staff** that were no longer involved in this stage.

"The people that we worked with at DFO to help alleviate the issues with approval and funding transfers were incredible. They were accommodating and I have found them to be incredible contacts"
- Funded Recipient

30% of recipients made suggestions about where the financial aspects of the contribution programs could be improved:
- There is a mismatch with the academic year impacting the ability to carry funds over between years which, in turn, makes it harder to begin projects or complete objectives as planned
- Too much detail is required in budgets (e.g. related to travel)
- There is a lack of flexibility in funding categories

Recipients complained that it is hard to find information on the EOS G&C programs

Recipients mentioned **they do not know about the range of funding opportunities** available in the Ecosystems and Oceans Science sector and that it is hard to find information about them. With only a couple of exceptions, most Partnership Fund recipients interviewed had not heard about any of the other contribution programs.
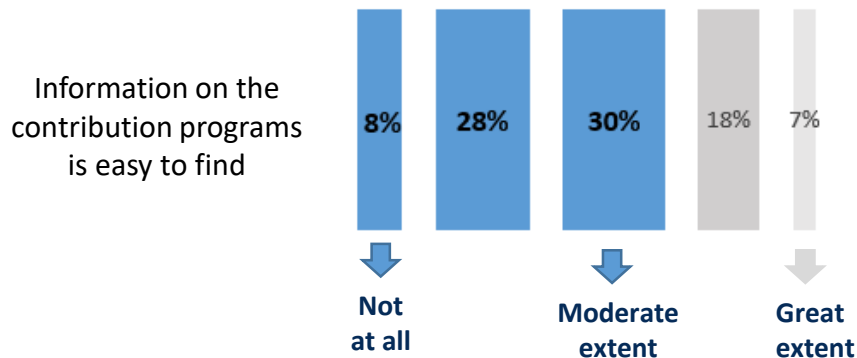
One issue is a lack of online presence. It is **cumbersome** to publicly **locate information** on **funding opportunities** within the **EOS sector.** A review of websites for **12 other federal government departments** found that **G&C information** was typically **easy to find**.

Most departments reviewed had a "button" on their home page to direct people to funding opportunities. It then took two to three clicks to access G&C program pages where there was a **wide range** of **information available.** The most common information items provided were:

- ✓ frequently asked questions
- ✓ glossary
- ✓ eligibility criteria
- ✓ eligible projects
- ✓ activities and expenditures
- ✓ application toolkits
- ✓ contact information
- ✓ program description
- ✓ deadlines
- ✓ expected results

> Having an online presence is one way to engage with applicants and recipients.

Figure 6: Recipients found it difficult to find information on the contribution programs.

Information on the contribution programs is easy to find

| 8% | 28% | 30% | 18% | 7% |

Not at all   Moderate extent   Great extent

In 2019, DFO did a review of its grant and contribution programs and found there is **limited G&C information available to potential recipients** globally at DFO. The review **recommended** the **department develop an online tool** to search for information such as: **contribution program descriptions, eligibility criteria, targeted recipient groups, application processes, and intake models.** The Chief Financial Officer sector, where the G&C Centre of Expertise resides, supports this recommendation; like the EOS sector, the **department has had exponential growth in G&C budgets** over the last few years.

Web renewal is coming!

In 2019, the **outreach group** in the **EOS sector** initiated a process with corporate communications to **renew their webpages**. There is a plan to centralize information on G&C programs so that interested applicants can access them.
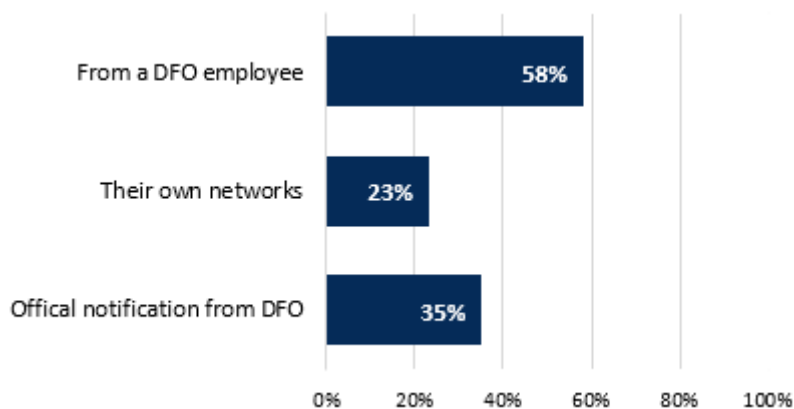
Most recipients heard about the contribution programs through informal networks

Under the **Directive on Transfer Payments**, departmental managers who have been assigned responsibilities for the management of transfer payment programs are responsible for "ensuring that **potential recipients have ready access to information about transfer payment programs** and that a description of each program is **made public**, including application and eligibility requirements and the criteria against which applications will be assessed."

The evaluation **did not find evidence** of **standardized tools being used to communicate** with **recipients** at different touchpoints in the funding cycle. When recipients were asked how they heard about the contribution programs, **many replied** they had heard through **word of mouth.**

Internal staff identified that most eligible recipients were made aware of contribution programs through **direct/targeted calls** to specific eligible recipient groups or individuals, and **through word of mouth**.

Figure 7: Recipient responses to: "How did you learn about the funding opportunities?"

From a DFO employee	58%
Their own networks	23%
Offical notification from DFO	35%

Practices that support transparency and equitable access

- Conduct **open, unrestricted calls** at least occasionally. Response rates can provide information about contribution program issues, or alternatively, greater need.
- Provide robust online information about contribution programs.
- Identify funding available.
- Conduct webinars with eligible recipient groups to describe funding programs and opportunities.

A commonly voiced concern about **open calls** is they can place a **burden on staff** to review a **high volume** of **proposals.** One government department suggested this challenge can be managed by using **expressions of interest** as a filtering tool. Applicants can submit short letters of interest which can be reviewed quickly and used to identify projects to be developed into full proposals.

Service standards are being met

The Treasury Board Secretariat's Guideline on Service Standards specifies service standards for three aspects in the funding process:
1. receipt of application
2. notification of funding decision
3. issuance of payment

As a **good practice**, some other government departments have **additional service standards**, for example one business day to respond to general inquiries.

The Treasury Board Secretariat's **Directive on Transfer Payments** requires managers to ensure "transfer payments are paid to recipients in a **timely, prudent and efficient manner**."

Service standards were reviewed for 13 other government departments. **None of the department**s, including DFO, had a **service standard notifying G&C recipients of approval of deliverables**, i.e., for reviewing and approving deliverables on a timely basis.

Within the EOS sector, **timely approval** appears to **happen in practice**, but it is not an integral part of a formal service standard, against which performance is reported.

Figure 8: Service standard targets were met or exceeded in 2017-18 and 2018-19.

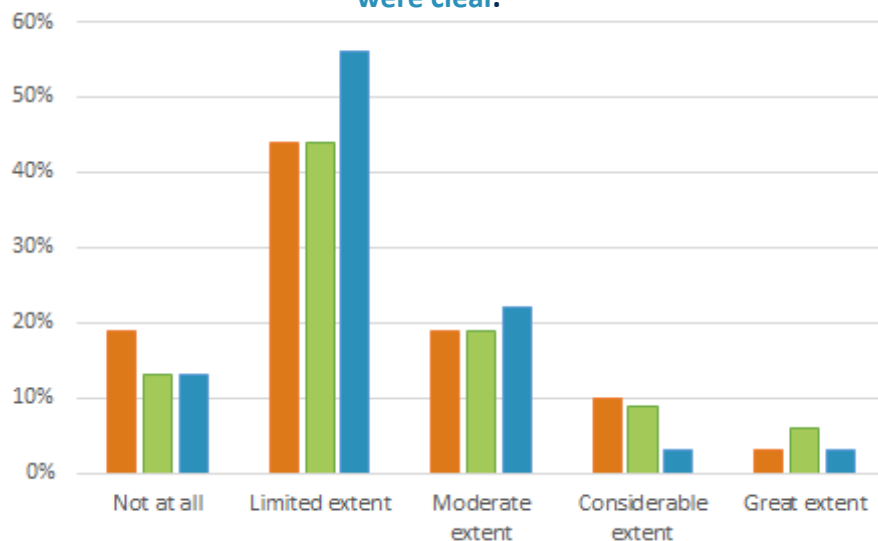| Service standard for OFSCP	Target	2017-18	2018-19
Acknowledgement of the receipt of an application or proposal: 5 business days	90%	99%	100%
Notification of the funding decision: 45 business days	90%	95%	100%
Requisition for payment: 15 business days	90%	90%	100%

Source: https://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/standards/index-eng.htm

Better communication and guidance are needed to support the delivery of EOS contribution programs

Staff in the EOS sector generally feel that **roles and responsibilities are clear** regarding the **delivery** of **contribution programs**. The secretariat is responsive in answering questions and is making continuous improvements. A few key informants noted that **more staff** are likely needed to handle the workload.

In terms of **challenges**, there are **internal communication breakdowns** both between staff associated with different contribution programs and also between National Headquarters and the regions. Some staff find it **hard to get information outside of their contribution program**. There is **inconsistent messaging**, and a **lack of cohesion** amongst the different programs in both **G&C administration and literacy.** The different contribution programs operate in **silos** which leads to duplications in the **creation of tools** (e.g. templates) or in processes such as **financial tracking**. Many employees feel they do not have access to the **guidance** they need to **work efficiently**.

Figure 9: Extent to which DFO staff agree it was **easy to find information on contribution programs****, the** **process to deliver contribution programs was well-documented****, and** **instructions to deliver contribution programs were clear**.

According to responses provided in the DFO staff survey, two of the changes that would most help improve the delivery of the contribution programs are **clear, step-by-step guidance documents**, and **standardized templates** for use across all the EOS contribution programs.

88% of staff surveyed said that step-by-step guidance would help to improve the delivery of contribution programs.

84% of staff surveyed said that a webpage with information on EOS G&C programs would help to improve the delivery of contribution programs.

81% of staff surveyed said that standardized and centralized templates would help to improve the delivery of contribution programs.

Note: Percentages combine respondents that agreed to a considerable and great extent.

Recent initiatives support improvements

Over the period of the evaluation, the G&C secretariat within the EOS sector has conducted **reviews** to highlight **results** and **accomplishments**, and to **identify challenges, lessons learned** and **recommendations** to address issues. Two recent initiatives that could address some of the current challenges are:

National Coordinators Committee

The first meeting has taken place with membership from regions and contribution programs in the EOS sector using the EOSCF terms and conditions. The committee is currently drafting terms of reference. The objectives are broad in scope, but are oriented towards improving:

- communications;
- overall G&C literacy; and
- standardization of guidance, practices and tools.

The delivery of training

The G&C secretariat within the EOS sector delivered their first training early in 2020. It was attended by regional representatives and contribution program leads. The focus was to clarify the application process and provide consistent, standardized messages to improve proposals' compliance with the terms and conditions. The secretariat reports, anecdotally, that the training helped increase the compliance rate of the most recent batch of proposals. The next training will be related to the SharePoint database that is being used as a central repository for projects funded under the EOS sector contribution programs.

Another significant change was **a revision of the terms and conditions in July 2019**. Among other changes, the name was updated to better reflect the range of G&C programs using them and to avoid confusion with the similarly-named contribution program (i.e. Ocean and Freshwater Science Contribution Program).

While the number of contribution programs within the EOS sector have **greatly increased**, the **capacity** of the G&C secretariat within the sector has not. There are **seven full-time equivalents** on the current organizational chart within the secretariat, however positions have not been fully filled since it was created. This presents challenges, especially at particularly busy times in the funding cycle. **Insufficient human resources** could **limit** the secretariat's ability to make changes that are needed, for example to improve services to all contribution programs and/or to recipients through outreach and communications.

The database in place to support the contribution programs needs improvement

Currently, the secretariat collects, and stores information related to funded projects in a database housed in **SharePoint**. The database was created as an interim system to **support staff** managing and administering contribution programs. While it provides a single storage space for data enabling access to information (e.g. project descriptions, contact information, project value, leveraging amounts, and contribution agreements), the following **issues** were identified:

1   A limited number of staff have access to the database.

2   Some information is stored outside of SharePoint (e.g. financial information, dates to support service standard reporting).

3   There are inconsistencies, particularly with financial information: contribution programs tracked their own information and it did not always match the information being tracked by the secretariat.

4   Some information in SharePoint is incomplete (i.e. missing documents, empty fields) reducing reliability.

These issues lead to overall **inefficiencies**. Staff are not able to quickly or confidently **access information** they require, leading to some duplication in processes and excess time investments as staff need to access more than one source for their needs.

The SharePoint database **lacks data fields** for **performance-related data**, making it difficult to assess the results of the projects. Performance information is available in some documents (e.g. final reports) however, based on the file review, only **69%** of final reports and **56%** of the evaluation reports (prepared by DFO scientists who review project final reports) were available in SharePoint for completed projects.

The secretariat recognizes some of the **issues** with the **SharePoint** database, and as a result has asked each contribution program to identify one person who will have "read and write" access. They will also expand the number of staff who have "read access" and the next training session will focus on the use of SharePoint.

As a possible **long-term database solution**, the G&C secretariat is examining the system used by the Atlantic Salmon Fund program. The information management system, called **CFISH**, is endorsed by the Chief Financial Officer's Centre of Expertise for grants and contributions; they may eventually consider establishing this enterprise-wide system to support the management and administration of transfer payment programs across the department.

Benefits of a department-wide G&C database

- Having all G&C recipient information in one place supports risk assessment (i.e. do they have an excellent, good or poor track record?) It also helps to ensure stacking limits aren't exceeded.
- Access to results information streamlines program reporting.
- Standardizes internal requirements for data entry and management.
- Streamlines the need for requiring repetitive information from recipients ("tell us once").
- Could allow for ability to generate contribution agreements with standard language thus providing a consistent recipient experience.
- Improves overall program efficiencies.

O&M funding available through the Partnership Fund is benefitting G&C programming in the EOS sector

The Partnership Fund was created with both a **contribution component** and an **operations and maintenance** (O&M) component. This model allocates funding to DFO researchers to facilitate projects, as well as provides funding to external recipients. Evidence shows that O&M funds were transferred to **support 48 projects** during the first three years of the Partnership Fund. Only 24 O&M reports were available in SharePoint for completed projects.

DFO staff could not think of any drawbacks of the O&M funds; they reported the following benefits:

1. Helped align projects with contribution program objectives.

2. Facilitated communication with recipients.

3. Allowed DFO staff to provide an advisory role in projects.

4. Enhanced their ability to understand project results.

Staff reported they **used O&M funds** to:
- **Support recipients** (e.g. providing samples for their analysis)
- **travel** to project-related workshops
- **fund** project management and administration

Table 4: Utilization of O&M funds for Partnership Fund projects decreased over the last three years.

	Planned	Actual	% Utilized
2016-17	$1,895,182	$1,274,667	67%
2017-18	$686,002	$401,652	59%
2018-19	$1,207,723	$354,430	29%

The analysis of O&M spending associated with the Partnership Fund shows that its use **decreased** over the last three years. Financial information obtained from the Chief Financial Officer sector indicates that **actual** amounts **were less** than **planned** expenditures.

Only **30%** of those involved in the Partnership Fund who responded to the staff survey used O&M funding. Based on evidence collected, some internal staff facilitating Partnership Fund projects were **not aware** of the **O&M component.**

Surpluses of O&M funds **were used to support the functioning** of the G&C secretariat **to help manage the exponential growth** of G&C programming in the Ecosystems and Oceans Science sector and related Partnership Fund expenses.

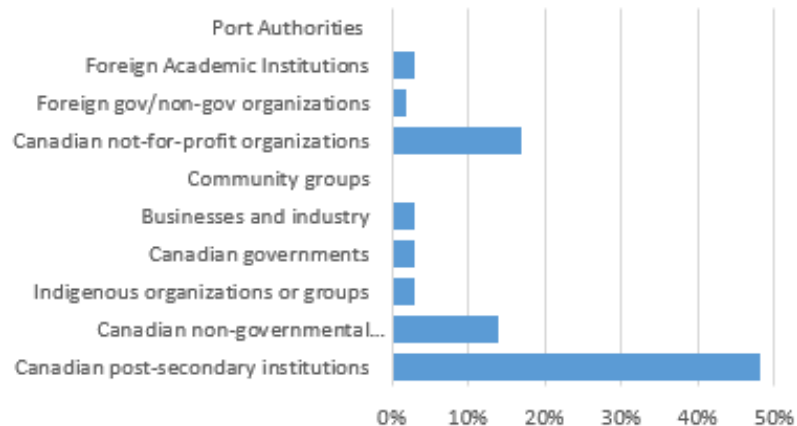# Contributions reach all recipient groups through collaboration with others

Since 2016, about **80%** of the projects and **84%** of the funding for the **Partnership Fund** have gone to three of the 10 eligible recipient groups (see Annex C): **academic organizations**, followed by **not-for profit groups** and **Canadian research organizations**. As shown in Figure 10, all groups, except Port Authorities and community groups, have had some projects **funded by the Partnership Fund**. It is interesting to note however, that in the recipient survey there were no respondents from Port Authorities or community groups, yet 17% and 19% of respondents said that Port Authorities and community groups, respectively, were involved as partners in their projects.

The contributions have greater reach than to funded recipients. Figure 11 shows that the contribution programs, including the Partnership Fund, **reach all recipient groups** to some extent through collaborations with others.

Figure 11: All eligible recipient groups were reached through collaboration with funded recipients.

Figure 10: Three eligible recipient groups received most of the Partnership Funding.

For the Partnership Fund, **185 unique collaborators were identified**. Engagement with other stakeholders or partners was evident in 62 (53%) of the 118 projects reviewed. About half of the 62 projects had one partner and about half had 2 to 5 partners.

Canadian not-for-profit recipients had the widest range of partners.

Canadian governments, businesses, and Indigenous partners were **more likely to be involved as partners** rather than recipients:
➢ Three contribution agreements were signed with Indigenous organizations, and twelve Indigenous partners were identified with other recipients.
➢ There were two unique business recipients, and 21 business organizations represented that were identified as partners in other projects.

Some eligible recipients could face barriers

Interviewees suggested that academic organizations have **greater capacity** to apply to G&C programs (e.g. past-experience, infrastructure) which improves their **success rate**.

Recipients felt that Port Authorities, international and Indigenous organizations might experience **barriers** to accessing contribution programs funding due to a lack of capacity (staff and time) and/or **lack of networks** to make them aware of funding opportunities.

The **survey of recipients** shows there are **perceived barriers** for all the contribution programs examined in the evaluation based on geographic location of work and size of organization.

Recent revisions to the terms and conditions added criteria to support **100%** funding to **Indigenous groups, small NGOs** and **community groups**. These changes could address some barriers by improving these groups' **willingness to apply** as it removes the necessity and effort to find funding from other sources.

"Smaller recipient organizations have less staff and therefore less capacity to complete applications and reporting requirements." - *DFO staff*

Using direct calls for proposals and word of mouth methods to disseminate information could create unintended obstacles for some eligible recipients. For example, when recipients were asked if there were any barriers based on **career status**, **18%** answered **yes** and elaborated that **early career researchers would not have well developed networks** affecting their ability to find out about or be approached about funding opportunities.

"The funding would not be accessible without established contacts within DFO who can notify of funding available, and help navigate the application process" - *Funded recipient*

"As these networks tend to develop over a career, it is likely that early career individuals may not have the same opportunities. Enhanced advertising and notifications would address this issue." - *Funded recipient*

Early career female researchers have been found to be less successful in research funding competitions than male applicants and seasoned researchers. A review of federal science research programs in Canada completed in 2017 found that the community of early career researchers in Canada tends to be quite diverse, including more underrepresented populations such as immigrants, Indigenous people, and those with disabilities.[6]

---

[6] Reference Fundamental Science Review 2017; Office of the Chief Science Advisor, Dr. Mona Nemer, "Promoting diversity in STEM," Speaking notes from Gender Summit, November 7, 2017; Government of Canada, Budget 2018.

Some Partnership Fund projects consider Gender-Based Analysis Plus factors

Some Partnership Fund projects considered Gender-Based Analysis Plus factors

A review of all Partnership Fund projects (as of December 2019) showed that the contribution program approved a "handful" of projects where applicants considered **GBA+ factors** in their project design or objectives. One project was oriented towards empowering women in marine management of small island states; but most of these projects were focussed on Indigenous groups:

- **Three** projects were focussed on building capacity in Northern, remote Indigenous communities.
- **One** project covered the cost of travel from remote communities to allow 16 Indigenous persons to participate in a symposium focussed on rebuilding abundant fisheries.
- **One** project funded expensive analysis in remote communities where there would be direct benefits to Indigenous communities.
- **One** project was oriented to increasing First Nations Engagement in Fisheries Science and improving the integration of Indigenous knowledge.
- **One** project proposed the translation of deliverables into the relevant Indigenous language.

In the context of grant and contribution programs, gender-based analysis plus (GBA+) seeks to understand if diverse groups of individuals in target populations (i.e. recipient groups) experience government programs equitably. It is difficult to answer this question without reliable data.

In 2018, the federal Tri-agencies[7] and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency began collecting self-identification data through the application process to their funding programs. A total of 39,326 forms were filled out. Responses were provided for an average of 94% of the applications (6% preferred not to answer). Data was collected on gender, Indigenous status, visible minority, and disability. This information will be used to [understand the population using and accessing their programs] and to inform decision-making for their programs to increase equitable participation in the research system.[8]

---

7 Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council and Canadian Institutes of Health Research
8 Strengthening Canadian Research. Progress Report 2018-19. Canada Research Coordinating Committee. https://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/CRCC-CCRC/pdf/SSHRC_CRCC_progress_report_2019-eng.pdf

Good practices for the delivery of Grant and Contribution programs

To understand good practices in the delivery of G&C programs, the evaluation assessed G&C websites and reviewed **service standards** for **12 other government departments (OGDs);** reviewed federal government materials related to G&Cs and documents from Natural Resources Canada's G&Cs Centre of Expertise; reviewed the findings of 12 evaluations of OGD G&C programs; and interviewed five program managers from G&C programs.

Good practices in delivering G&C programs fall into five categories:

| 1 | **Pursue excellence in service delivery and client-focused G&C programs.** |

| 2 | **Provide internal support at G&C program level.** |

| 3 | **Develop streamlined, consistent and standardized processes and tools.** |

| 4 | **Establish a process for risk-based assessment of projects.** |

| 5 | **Support performance management and reporting.** |

Annex D details the good practices in delivering G&C programs.

Conclusions

As an implementation evaluation, evidence indicates that Partnership Fund **activities are being implemented as intended**. The Gs&Cs within the Ecosystems and Oceans Science sector are **addressing gaps** in the Canadian oceans and freshwater science community. Projects **align well with DFO core responsibilities** and there are early signs that immediate and intermediate outcomes are being achieved. As a result of funded projects, there is an increase in scientific research and related scientific activities conducted by external organizations; Canadians have some increased access to enhanced scientific results and data, and the Canadian ocean and freshwater science community is developing some increased capacity and resources to conduct relevant science.

Recipients are generally satisfied with their experiences with the contribution programs. Most indicated that they are not aware of other comparable funding programs for the types of projects they have undertaken. The **main challenge** is that eligible recipient groups **are not aware** of the **funding opportunities** in the Ecosystems and Oceans Science sector. There is a **lack of publicly available, online information**. Further, the methods used to inform potential recipients of funding opportunities, mostly by word of mouth, impact eligible recipients not connected to existing networks.

There are some **internal challenges** associated with the delivery of the contribution programs within the Ecosystems and Oceans Science sector. Staff associated with different ones feel they operate in silos. They indicate **they would benefit from step-by-step guidance documents, standardized materials and templates** to help them with many aspects of G&C program delivery. Further, staff experience **inconsistent messaging** and difficulty finding the information they need. For example, the database currently being used to centralize contribution program information is not fully available to all those who need access. This leads to duplication in some administrative processes.

The G&C secretariat within the EOS sector is investigating a more permanent **database solution** to support its contribution programs. The database being explored has the capacity to not only tackle the issues described above, but it would also **support multiple good practices**:

- ✓ wide access to more consistent, reliable information reducing duplication of internal processes;
- ✓ more consistent experiences for applicants (e.g. "tell us once") and recipients of DFO funding (e.g. ability to generate standardized contribution agreements); and
- ✓ more centralized and comprehensive information to support risk management and results-reporting.

Conclusions *(continued)*

A current initiative that will help address the difficulty eligible recipients have in finding information on EOS funding programs, is the collaboration between the EOS sector outreach team and DFO communications to renew **public webpages**, including information on G&C programs. Recipients will be more likely to find online information when they conduct web searches for funding opportunities. DFO staff will be able to provide better client service as they will be able to orient potential recipients to online information on EOS contribution programs.

Finally, two recent initiatives, the introduction of a G&C coordinators committee and training sessions will provide internal support to contribution program staff by providing consistent guidance and improving communication and G&C literacy.

Overall, the **G&C secretariat** within the Ecosystems and Oceans Science sector is **responding well** to the increase in transfer payment programs that have been added to the sector since 2016. It is demonstrating continuous improvement by identifying lessons learned and initiating changes to address internal issues, most of which align with challenges uncovered by the evaluation. Continuing to advance these initiatives will improve the delivery of grant and contribution programs across the EOS sector.

Annexes

Annex A: Contribution programs[9] examined in the evaluation

i.   Ocean and Freshwater Science Contribution Program – including the Partnership Fund

ii.   Freshwater Research Contribution Program

iii.   National Contaminants Advisory Group Contribution Program

iv.   Whale Protection and Recovery Initiative Contribution Program

v.   Coastal Environmental Baseline Program Contribution Program

vi.   Reducing the Threat of Vessel Traffic on Marine Mammals Contribution Program

vii.   Marine Environmental Quality Regulatory/Non-Regulatory Measures Contribution Program

viii. Multi-partner Oil Spill Response Research Contribution Program

ix.   Ocean and Climate Change Science Contribution Program

x.   Marine Spatial Planning Contribution Program

xi.   Freshwater Habitat Science Contribution Program

xii.   Terrestrial Cumulative Effects Initiative Contribution Program

---

[9] The evaluation examined the Partnership Fund as well as components of eleven other contribution programs delivered under Ecosystems and Oceans Science Contribution Framework terms and conditions, formerly known as the Ocean and Freshwater Science Contribution Program terms and conditions before being revised in 2019.
.

Annex B: Evaluation Methodology

File review

- Analyzed the SharePoint database. The full body of data and documentation associated with **118 Partnership Fund projects** was examined to provide insights into project administration and contribution program performance and efficiency.

Surveys

- A survey to **248 recipients of funding** was administered. **Ninety-nine responses** were received representing all but one of the 12 contribution programs examined in the evaluation. This represents a response rate of approximately 40%.
- A survey to **254 DFO staff** involved in G&C programs was administered. Received **50** responses representing national headquarters and all regions and all 12 contribution programs examined in the evaluation. This represents a response rate of approximately 20%.

Interviews

- Conducted **interviews** with **27 internal DFO** staff in national headquarters and all regions.
- Conducted **interviews** with **25 external recipients** from various eligible groups, and representing all regions, regarding their experiences with the Partnership Fund.
- Conducted **interviews** with **5 program managers** of G&C programs.
- Conducted **interviews** with staff from **three other government contribution programs** regarding good practices in the delivery of G&C programs.
- Conducted **discussions** with the Chief Financial Officer sector center of expertise, DFO communications and the EOS outreach team.

Limitations

- The file review included all Partnership Fund projects, however during the conduct phase of the evaluation, new projects may have been added. The file review consisted of the 118 projects included in the SharePoint database as of December 2019.

- It was not possible to calculate a specific response rate for the survey to recipients since access was through a unique link and recipients were invited to send the link to other participants in their projects.
- The launch of the survey to DFO staff coincided with the COVID 19 pandemic when employees were requested to work from home. This affected the response rate.

- Interviews with DFO staff and external recipients were conducted by telephone for all DFO regions except for the Central and Arctic region (renamed the Ontario and Prairie region June 1, 2020) where in-person interviews were conducted during the site visit. All interviews in National Headquarters were in person.

Evaluation

Annex B: Evaluation Methodology *(continued)*

Literature review

- A literature search was conducted related to good practices in the delivery of G&C programs, however no academic articles were found. A few reports and assessments of the federal government transfer payment program context were found and reviewed.

Site visit

- A site visit to the Central and Arctic region (renamed the Ontario and Prairie region June 1, 2020) was undertaken to conduct interviews and discussions with DFO staff and external recipients, such as Academia and NGOs.

Document and websites review

- Reviewed a variety of **relevant internal documents** related to the relevance, performance, and design and delivery of the Partnership Fund. Documents included: performance information, planning documents, communications, meeting minutes, presentations, tools and templates.
- Reviewed **websites of 12 other federal departments and agencies** who deliver G&C programs as well as **federal government materials related to G&C's** to identify **good practices** and **common issues.**
- Reviewed **documents from Natural Resources Canada's Centre of Expertise for Gs&Cs,** as well as other relevant documents generated from literature and website searches for best practices for managing G&C programs.

Limitations

- Because the literature review did not contribute to the examination of good practices, the methods were modified to include: interviews with managers of other G&C programs; a review of other federal government G&C websites and service standards; a review of evaluations of G&C programs and other relevant documentation.

- A second site visit to the Maritimes and Gulf regions was planned in Autumn 2019. This visit was cancelled as a result of the Prime Minister announcing the Federal election. Many of the interviews were then conducted by telephone.

- While reviewing G&C delivery within other government departments, the evaluation team could only access information that the departments chose to make publicly available. This review might not be a comprehensive examination of G&C delivery within these departments.

Evaluation

Annex C: List of eligible recipients

The following groups have been identified as eligible recipients for the Ecosystems and Oceans Science Contribution Framework Terms and Conditions[10]:

i.   Canadian post-secondary academic institutions;

ii.   Canadian non-governmental organizations;

iii.   Indigenous organizations or groups;

iv.   Canadian provincial, territorial, and municipal governments;

v.   Businesses and industry, including business and industry associations;

vi.   Community groups;

vii.   Canadian not-for-profit organizations;

viii.   Foreign governments and international non-governmental organizations;

ix.   Foreign Academic Institutions; and

x.   Port Authorities.

---

[10] Ecosystems and Oceans Science Contribution Framework (EOSCF) terms and conditions, formerly known as the Ocean and Freshwater Science Contribution Program terms and conditions before being revised in 2019.

Annex D: Good practices for the delivery of Grant and Contribution programs

Good practices in delivering G&C programs can be summarized in **five categories**:

1. Pursue excellence in service delivery and client-focused G&C programs:

- Develop robust, client-oriented information and provide it on web-based platform.

- Provide online access for eligible recipient engagement processes (e.g. for applications).

- Minimize how often recipients are asked to provide the same information (i.e. support a "tell us once" experience) by collecting basic applicant/recipient information for access later. Prefill up-front sections of application forms.

- Offer support services to applicants during application process (e.g. guidance on what constitutes a strong application). Allow applicants to address questions raised by reviewers and support those who are not successful. Provide constructive feedback on applications offering areas for improvement.

- Develop thorough understanding of target groups i.e., potential applicants, including sub-groups (e.g. early career researchers who are women). Develop profiles to support targeted outreach strategies. Targeted outreach strategies may help small and medium-size enterprises navigate funding environment as they have limited capacity, time and experience in applying for funding.

- Promote funding programs and support services.

- Develop knowledge about other contribution programs, both internal and external to department. It may be beneficial to know about provincial/territory funding as well. This information can be provided to target groups to help them navigate similar federal science and research funding to achieve a good fit between project objectives and federal funding programs.

- Consider addition of services standards for timely response to questions and internal timely review of deliverables.

The National Research Council concierge service for the Industrial Research Assistance Program (IRAP) program is perhaps the most **comprehensive** advisory service for clients (15 advisors in total in 2016-17). The service is intended to help clients identify government programs and services that best serve their needs. In the 2017 evaluation of the IRAP program[11], "a large majority of interviewees highlighted the benefits of receiving advice… on proposal preparation and detailed project planning, including the clarification of their ideas".

Aside from the science and research work itself, awareness, learning, networking and collaboration feature as key aspects of some of the other transfer payment programs reviewed for the evaluation.

[11] https://nrc.canada.ca/sites/default/files/2019-03/irap_evaluation_report_2017_en.pdf

Annex D: Good practices for the delivery of Grant and Contribution programs *(continued)*

2. Provide internal support at G&C program level

- Ensure well-defined roles and responsibilities for all groups involved in the delivery of G&C programs.

- Develop and provide:
  - ✓ various guidance documents (e.g. application guides, monitoring projects and reviewing project reports, interpretation of Transfer Payment Policy, when to use Grants versus contribution versus contract; stakeholder engagement)
  - ✓ training (e.g. for use of standardized templates and tools)
  - ✓ a community of practice to support consistent messaging and facilitate information sharing.

3. Develop streamlined, consistent and standardized processes and tools to:

- Support internal and external efficiencies, and a common recipient experience.

- Reduce administrative and reporting burden on recipients.

- Provide training on how to use them.

- Standardize the process for generating contribution agreements.

Important context: what is happening at the Departmental level at Fisheries and Oceans Canada?

Some guidance documents are appropriate to develop at a departmental level (e.g., interpretation of Transfer Payment Policy). The Chief Financial Officer sector at Fisheries and Oceans Canada is in the process of staffing the Centre of Expertise for transfer payment programs, and has plans to develop tools over the next several years to support those at the program level delivering G&Cs. In the meantime, they provide in-person, ad-hoc advice to those staff.

The Centre of Expertise within the Chief Financial Officer sector is developing a department-wide Community of Practice with membership from several departmental programs areas including the EOS sector. They have draft Terms of Reference with the following purpose statement: to set vision and direction, define design elements, endorse products going to Financial and Investment Management Committee (FIMC), and serve an oversight and challenge function on the work prepared by working groups.

4. Establish a process for risk-based assessment of projects so:

- ✓ High-risk projects are identified and managed appropriately;
- ✓ An appropriate balance between flexibility and control is supported; and
- ✓ Cost-effective oversight, innovation and sensible risk-taking are supported.

- Establish risk management across all contribution programs based on criteria related to recipients (e.g. past experiences with them) and proposals (e.g. compliance with program objectives).

- Create standard templates to summarize risk information.

- Use results to support planning as well as flexibilities (e.g. reporting requirements, level of approval).

- Share risk information across programs.

5. Support performance management and reporting

- Use a systematic approach to documenting long-term results and close-ended questions in reporting templates to help increase the clarity and availability of performance information.

- Ensure performance data availability, validity and accessibility.

- Standardize the amount of information required and format in which it is to be presented.

- Establish performance management across all programs and use results to support planning and reporting.