

Evaluation of Aid to Scholarly Journals

About the funding opportunity and the evaluation

- ASJ's primary objective is to increase dissemination of Canadian research in the social sciences and humanities (SSH). ASJ seeks to achieve this through funding to Canadian scholarly journals in SSH, recognizing these journals as a primary tool for research dissemination.
- ASJ currently provides more than \$3M in funding annually to about 160 journals. Funding is awarded through periodic competitions. This evaluation covered the period of 2008-17 for performance-related and 2008-18 for relevance, cost-efficiency and alternatives questions.
- Program relevance and performance were identified as priority areas for evaluation, including how the design of ASJ contributes to its performance.
- This was a joint evaluation of two funding initiatives: Aid to Scholarly Journals (ASJ) and Awards to Scholarly Publications (ASP). Two reports were produced. This summary presents highlights from the ASJ report.

Questions:

1. Is there a need for the federal government to provide direct financial support to journals and publishers in the scholarly publishing sector to increase dissemination of Canadian SSH research results?
2. Do ASJ and ASP objectives align with federal roles and priorities?
3. What contribution has ASJ/ASP funding made to quantity, quality and dissemination of published Canadian SSH research?
4. Are ASJ/ASP delivered in a cost-efficient manner?
5. Are there viable alternative approaches SSHRC should consider to increase dissemination of original Canadian research results in the social sciences and humanities?

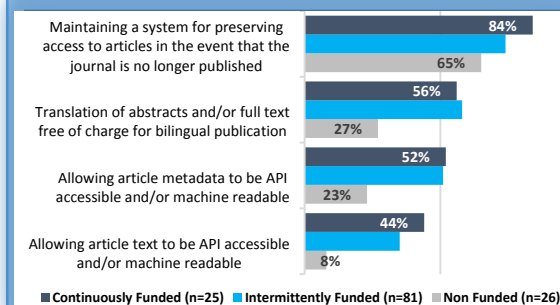
Conclusion

Relevance

- Canadian journals have served as a publication channel for a majority of Canadian SSH researchers (65%).
- Canadian journals were rated as important channels for publication by 84% of researchers surveyed: they report that these journals are not only important for the dissemination of their research, but also as content for input to their research, to connect them with peer researchers and target audiences, and for cultivation of Canadian research.
- Without ASJ, most funded journals would lose more than half of their revenue. Alternate revenue sources are limited, especially for Gold OA journals.

Performance

- ASJ funding has enabled a significant and meaningful increase in amount of SSH research published each year.
- The findings suggest that ASJ also has made small, indirect contributions in some other areas, such as journal capacity to assure manuscript quality, and practices related to accessibility and discoverability of the research published.



Potential

- Canadian journals are positioned to influence EDI at the system level, and some journals already play a role to mobilize research on equity-related topics (e.g., Indigenous research).
- ASJ is also an important component of SSHRC's effort to increase quality OA capacity in Canada. The funding is especially important to Gold OA journals whose alternative revenue sources are limited.

Cost-efficiency

- The data for ASJ indicate that ASJ is cost-efficient.

Recommendations

1. **Continue to offer ASJ funding.** Canadian journals remain important to the SSH research system in Canada. ASJ funding is increasingly relevant for journals transitioning to OA.
2. **Review ASJ's objectives to align more closely with the Insight Program and ASJ's key strengths.** An improved alignment with Insight Program and the role of Canadian journals as identified by researchers would improve ASJ's focus and may enable it to do more with its limited resources.
3. **Ensure operational alignment of ASJ to updated objectives.** More fully developed objectives should be carried forward into ASJ adjudication and performance monitoring practices.
4. **Update ASJ's logic model.** ASJ's current logic model should be updated to better capture ASJ's performance and the mechanisms by which it contributes to outcomes.
5. **At the corporate level, consider using ASJ as a vehicle to further advance key council priorities.** ASJ has the potential to be a point of leverage for SSHRC in the SSH research system to advance objectives related to assessment of research excellence, research use, EDI, open research and other areas.

