

PROGRAM CONTEXT







The Canada Foundation for Innovation (CFI) is a not-for-profit corporation, which strives to build Canada’s capacity to undertake world-class research and technology development. The CFI makes financial contributions (in general, up to 40% of the infrastructure cost) through several Funds to Canada’s universities, colleges, research hospitals and non-profit research organizations to increase their capability to carry out high quality research.

As of March 31, 2019, the CFI has funded more than 11,314 research infrastructure projects at over 160 eligible institutions across Canada, awarding over \$8.0 billion and attracting \$11.4 billion in matching funds from partners since CFI inception in 1997.

Innovation, Science and Economic Development (ISED) directly funds the CFI through Contribution Agreements. The CFI signed an agreement with the Government of Canada that will transition the CFI to permanent ongoing funding of up to \$462 million per year in 2023-24 and onward.

EVALUATION APPROACH

This evaluation examined the continued relevance, performance and efficiency of the CFI in accordance with the Treasury Board Secretariat *Policy on Results*. It focused on the period from April 1, 2014 to March 31, 2019, utilizing several lines of evidence:

 Document review	 Administrative data analysis
 Literature review	 Key informant interviews
 Surveys	 Case studies

WHAT THE EVALUATION FOUND

The CFI is the primary federal funder for large-scale research infrastructure at eligible institutions in Canada (on average, CFI contributed 36% of total project costs). CFI funding is typically complemented with a reciprocal amount from provinces and contributions from other partners (including in-kind contributions). The evaluation found that the CFI addresses the needs for new research infrastructure in Canada and upgrading and renewing existing supply. However, some gaps exist between the needs of stakeholders and supports provided through the College-Industry Innovation Fund, where colleges do not request or access all available funding, likely due to eligibility requirements. There is also an opportunity for the CFI to better respond to the needs of social sciences and humanities projects, particularly with regard to the eligibility of research infrastructure such as database development.

Performance-related evidence demonstrates that the CFI funding: 1) has increased the capacity of institutions to attract and retain world-class researchers from within and outside Canada, as well as conduct world-class research by improving the overall quality of the infrastructure, equipment, and research at funded institutions; 2) has positively impacted the quality of training environments and the acquisition of knowledge by highly qualified personnel (HQP – e.g., students, technicians, and research assistants); and 3) has contributed to advance knowledge through several research outputs (e.g., publications), commercialization outputs (e.g., spin-off companies) and technology development as well as social, economic and environmental benefits for Canadians, including job creation and health protocols.

Overall, researchers and institutions are satisfied with the CFI’s program design and delivery. However, the evaluation identified some opportunities for improvement (e.g., application and review processes). In addition, evidence indicates that the CFI has experienced some challenges in getting institutions to use their available Infrastructure Operating Fund allocations (which covers a portion of project operation and maintenance costs). Evidence shows there is also a need for communication and collaboration improvements with other funders (e.g., when making program changes), particularly with provinces. The CFI has begun efforts to promote equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) practices within its organization and programming, but overall application remains in the early stages.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- College-Industry Innovation Fund Access:** ISED’s Science and Research Sector should work with the CFI to identify and examine areas for improvement in the program design and administration of the College-Industry Innovation Fund, including opportunities to improve access (e.g., review eligibility criteria and approval processes) to better meet the needs of colleges and their private sector partners.
- Eligible Research Infrastructure:** ISED’s Science and Research Sector should collaborate with the CFI to review the scope/criteria for eligible research infrastructure costs, particularly activities associated with the development of databases which can be a significant component in many research fields, including social sciences and humanities.
- Program Design and Delivery:** ISED’s Science and Research Sector should work with the CFI to examine opportunities to improve program application and review processes.
- Support for Operation and Maintenance Costs:** ISED’s Science and Research Sector should work with the CFI to explore opportunities to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the Infrastructure Operating Fund, including the timely draw down of available funding.
- Collaboration:** ISED’s Science and Research Sector should work with the CFI to examine opportunities to improve collaboration and coordination with stakeholders.