

Evaluation of the National Research Council of Canada's international strategy

November 2024

●●● NRC Evaluation

About the international strategy

The NRC's first international strategy, launched in fiscal year (FY) 2019-20 for a 5-year period. It was extended by 1 year, through FY 2024-25 to enable alignment of the next international strategy with the NRC's new strategic plan. The strategy aimed to focus the NRC's international activities by setting priorities and goals, aligning resources and tracking progress. The strategy was launched shortly before COVID-19, which impacted its implementation. Despite these challenges, the strategy led to substantial progress on its goals.

The implementation of the strategy resulted in:

- increased focus on selected ecosystem economies
- establishment of an NRC presence in 2 of 3 ecosystem economies
- creation of the International Innovation Office to support implementation of the strategy
- development of a governance structure
- allocation of funding to NRC partners in ecosystem economies
- prioritization of supporting Canadian small-and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) collaborating with businesses in ecosystem economies

Key findings

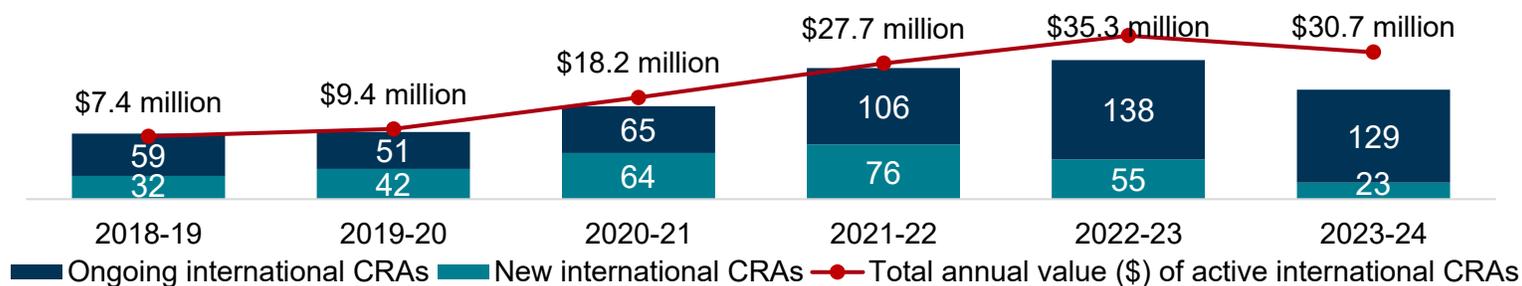
International relations

During the strategy, the NRC's relationships with the ecosystem economies were at different stages of development. Executive leadership played a crucial role in fostering international engagement, with an increase in high visibility events and memorandums of understanding. The NRC's participation in international networks like Eureka also raised its visibility and facilitated collaboration. Most external collaborators and NRC staff reported that the strategy's activities enhanced the NRC's international visibility.

Research excellence

The strategy advanced research excellence through increased international collaborative research agreements (CRAs) and co-publications with ecosystem economies.

Figure 1. Growth in the NRC's international CRAs



International collaborations facilitated access to global funding, facilities and expertise, thereby enhancing research capabilities and training highly qualified personnel.

Business innovation

The strategy contributed to business innovation by increasing international funding and project opportunities for Canadian SMEs through NRC IRAP International. The number of new international projects per year nearly doubled, facilitating technological advancements and international market access for Canadian SMEs. These projects led to significant returns on investment, attracted substantial external funding, and drove revenue and employment growth.

Governance

The NRC's International Governance Committee (IGC) provided a platform for discussion and an advisory function to the NRC President on international activities. Overall, the IGC was seen as effective in its oversight role and in promoting a shared agenda for the NRC. Challenges were noted regarding the frequency of meetings, decision-making authority, with opportunity noted for more cohesive messaging at the executive level.

Despite significant organizational changes during the strategy's implementation, roles and responsibilities related to international activities within the NRC were generally viewed as clear.

Implementation

The implementation of the NRC's international strategy led to more coordinated and aligned international activities, especially with ecosystem economies.

Global circumstances such as geopolitical tensions both helped and hindered the strategy's implementation. Communication challenges within the NRC were reported. The NRC's International Innovation Office demonstrated both the competency and capacity to support the strategy's goals and ecosystem economies.

Recommendations

The evaluation included 2 recommendations:

1. Refresh the NRC's international strategy documentation. The strategy should clearly outline the components and provide a clear plan. It should be communicated widely across the NRC for awareness, and to inform research centre and program planning, where relevant.
2. Review the IGC to identify improvements, such as implementing a formal reporting mechanism to the President informed by insights and recommendations from all the International Governance Committee members.

About the evaluation

A detailed planning phase was conducted before the evaluation began. The scope of the evaluation was determined in consultation with management, in order to inform the next iteration of the strategy. The evaluation applied a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data from several lines of evidence. A Gender-based Analysis Plus lens was applied where appropriate in the evaluation.

Visit the [evaluation page](#) on the NRC's website to access the complete evaluation report.