



# Briefing Note for members of the Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences

## Launch of the Canada First Research Excellence Fund and the Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy.

December 9, 2014

### I ANNOUNCEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

- On December 4, the Prime Minister announced the official launch of the [Canada First Research Excellence Fund](#) (CFREF) along with the updated [Science, Technology, and Innovation Strategy \(ST&I\)](#). In our February 2014 submission to Industry Canada's S&T Consultation, the Federation highlighted four issues. Find it [here](#). The Federation's press release in reaction to the December 4<sup>th</sup> announcement is [here](#).
- The new ST&I strategy aims to promote world-leading excellence, focus on targeted priorities, foster partnerships, and enhance accountability. It adds an official pillar on "innovation" to the earlier "people" and "knowledge" architecture. Meanwhile, research proposals to the CFREF must align with the updated ST&I's [research priority areas](#). A fifth priority, advanced manufacturing, has been added to the 2007 list: environment and agriculture, health and life sciences, natural resources and energy, information and communications technologies. Each priority area includes [sub priorities](#) and the strategy is also flexible to alter, as need be, the list of priorities and focus areas.
- The CFREF is being pitched as the centrepiece of the new strategy. It will provide \$1.5 billion over 10 years. The first round of funding amounts to \$50 million in 2015/2016. The funds will be available to PSE institutions across Canada and will last up to seven years. To be eligible for funds, PSE institutions must demonstrate scientific merit, strategic relevance to Canada, including the long-term economic advantage of the work, and a top-notch implementation plan.
- Applications will be considered from multi-institutional initiatives and small, single institutions alike. An independent, international panel of scientific experts will review the applications on a competitive, peer-reviewed basis along with an arms-length board of academic, public and private sector leaders. Applications for the first competition are due in March 2015.
- **The Federation urges members to explore the opportunity of this fund and to keep us informed of their experiences as we monitor its implementation.**



## II ANALYSIS – KEY ISSUES

### ➤ Linking the Fund with the (ST&I) Policy

It is understandable that broad government policy should shape the parameters of publicly-funded research. But the requirement that proposals to the CFREF explicitly align with the government's five STEM-heavy priorities raise questions about the space and support for SSH research to contribute to the public good. In practice these contributions will be affected by how narrowly the priorities are interpreted by institutions and peer reviewers and the availability of co-funding for projects addressing societal challenges linked to the five priorities.

### ➤ CFREF & Research Funding

The Federation has welcomed the new funding, but there is significant room to grow. The announcement must be taken in the context of Canada's overall poor [performance](#) on R&D funding relative to other OECD countries, despite modest increases to the Granting Councils. The Federation's pre-budget [submission](#) for 2015 calls for additional investment in the Granting Councils of \$250 million over three years, beyond the specialized funds for the CFREF, as well as for additional support for the Canadian Foundation for Innovation.

### ➤ CFREF Eligibility

Degree-granting institutions must meet eligibility requirements of one of the three federal research granting agencies. Institutions can be listed as partners on multiple applications, but can only be identified as the lead institution for one proposal per competition. This clause will be limiting, especially for large, multi-disciplinary institutions, and may encourage universities to narrow their research agendas at the cost of interdisciplinarity and the marginalizing of research not listed explicitly in the priority areas. The encouragement for institutions to invest their own resources and those of partners to support proposed initiatives raises concerns that, in practice, institutions will have to arrange co-funding to qualify for CFREF awards. This sort of arrangement could be damaging to the social science and humanities community, unless in-kind contributions are recognized (as per current practice).

### ➤ CFREF Governance

The Fund is to be administered by SSHRC, on behalf of the granting councils. Applications will undergo a multi-level peer review process that includes evaluation by external experts, assessment by review panels, and strategic review by a selection board, before being sent for final approval to the steering committee, which is composed of the presidents of CIHR, NSERC, SSHRC and the Canada Foundation for Innovation (as an observer), as well as the deputy ministers of Industry Canada and Health Canada. The peer review process and the arms length nature of review panels will be critical to help safeguard against pressures from short term government or commercial interests.



### ➤ **ST&I: A New Pillar on Innovation – STEM remains dominant focus**

The new policy explicitly notes that it is broadening to include a new “pillar” on Innovation, transforming the previous language of “Entrepreneurialism” from the 2007 strategy. The newly revised strategy offers a more nuanced understanding of innovation and its complex links with R&D, which is welcome. The strategy also recognizes the need for regional institutions and partners. At the same time, the ST& I strategy is narrowly cast. In its details, it provides little or no language geared towards humanities and social science research, favouring preponderantly STEM skills and disciplines, business, intellectual property, and bringing research to market. The five priority areas are not obvious magnets for social science and humanities researchers, though in practice our community is implicated in many of these [areas and sub-areas](#). Questions also remain about how the new policy framework will affect the existing panoply of government research funding, including Tri-Council operations. We need to monitor if funding patterns recognize how social science and humanities researchers are central to the challenges identified in the strategy.

### ➤ **Digital infrastructure**

The ST&I strategy’s commitment to developing Canada’s digital infrastructure is critical for the connectivity of people and their processes of innovation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The strategy’s description of the “internet of things,” however, focuses on a revenue-generating business, tech, and communications environment without reference to people. In a related vein, the strategy’s new priority area, advanced manufacturing, is similarly short on people-centered analysis, despite the fact that the demand for new materials and new methods or designs will be shaped by people and communities.

### ➤ **Mobility**

The new strategy demonstrates a strong commitment to mobilizing knowledge and people. The Federation advised the government to invest in the next generation of labour force participants by increasing opportunities for experiential learning and international experience. The new ST&I strategy includes plans to expand global connections through investments in MITACS and other international student internships and scholarship programs. The Government is renewing its commitment to implement its International Education Strategy, which is a welcome development.