Submission for the Pre-Budget Consultations ahead of Federal Budget 2026:

Accelerating the Flourishing of Canada's Research Ecosystem: Talent Retention, Engagement, and Strategic Governance

By the Canadian Consortium for Research (CCR)

The CCR is the largest umbrella organization representing Canada's researchers across all disciplines with more than 500,000 researchers and 50,000 students represented among its constituent societies and organizations. Established in 1976 and celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2026, the CCR comprises over 20 member organizations, predominantly representing researchers based in universities, while also including members working in government laboratories and private sector research centres.

The CCR is dedicated to fostering a flourishing research community in Canada, promoting research funding across all disciplines, and supporting post-secondary education.

All Consortium activities are carried out by volunteers from its member organizations. For more information, visit https://ccr-ccr.ca/ or email info@ccr-ccr.ca

Recommendations:

1. Accelerate delivery of the outstanding $1.28 billion from Budget 2024 tri-council funding increase. Then increase tri-council funding by 10% annually for four years, doubling tri-council budgets from 2024 levels by 2030-31.

2. Any new capstone organization must distribute funding equally across the three tri-agency discipline groupings using a 3:1 ratio of funding between fundamental to applied research. Funding decisions must be peer-review driven, free from political influence.

3. Engage provincial counterparts and strengthen federal support for the post-secondary education sector to alleviate the fiscal crisis impacting Canada's research capacity.

4. Formalize coordination across government with a federal secretariat for post-secondary education and research to 1) ensure effective cross-department coordination on sector-wide programs 2) serve as a central access point for stakeholders 3) support the planned Federal Advisory Council on Science and Innovation.

Attracting, training, and retaining research talent

Canada's research community has a history of welcoming international colleagues with open arms. The CCR's members are ready to work with those attracted by the Impact+ program and, in the words of King Charles, "build Canada into the world's leading hub for science and innovation." Though welcoming, we are also concerned about the reality into which new colleagues are arriving. Our recommendations address long-standing issues and mitigate unintended consequences of the Impact+ program.

The government wisely indicated in Budget 2025 an intention to examine questions regarding "Canada's research ecosystem require[ing] further support to retain talent." It is time to act—to increase support for Canada's research community and retain research talent. Action needs to address more than one tranche of our talent pool:

- **International researchers attracted by the Impact+ program**, once their initial funding expires, if Canada's research ecosystem continues languishing, some may relocate to countries with higher funding opportunities. Loss of this talent would raise questions about return-on-investment of Budget 2025's $1.7 billion talent attraction funding.
- **Recent PhD graduates and postdoctoral scholars,** many of whom sincerely want academic jobs that pay for research, face a labour market with few prospects. When these highly qualified workers are unable to secure academic research positions, they either leave Canada or research work. More than a failure to retain research talent, this also represents a loss of significant public money invested in their education and research careers.
- **Contract academic staff (CAS)**—full-time adjunct professors renewing their contracts each semester—are a growing precariously employed pool of potential research talent hidden in plain sight. Their potential contribution to the research ecosystem is largely untapped: typically, they are ineligible to hold federal research funding. Their academic work—unlike that of their tenure-track peers from whom they are usually nearly indistinguishable—does not pay them to engage in research.
- **Graduate students and future students** need continued support and opportunities to engage in research across the entire PSE sector.

Accelerating growth & strengthening fundamentals

The CCR is concerned about on-going low and declining funding success rates at the tri-councils.

At the Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), Insight Grant success rates temporarily rose above 50% in 2021-22 due to fewer applications during Covid. For the 2024-25 competition, **SSHRC reported funding success rates of 34.1%.**

At the National Science and Engineering Research Council (NSERC), Discovery Grant (DG) success rates declined from over 80% in 2002 to 67% in 2019 and have since hovered around 58%. The most recent **funding success rates reported by NSERC are at 62%**.[1]

At the Canadian Institute for Health Research (CIHR), success rates for Project Grants have steadily fallen since 2000, with an exception from funding infusions during Covid. In 2000, CIHR received 1,260 applications and funded 421, for a 33% success rate. By 2018, they funded 740 of 5,117 applications (14%). For the autumn 2025 competition, **CIHR is reporting an alarming funding success rate of 13.6%**.

Low and declining success rates indicate a research funding ecosystem moving towards or approaching system failure. CIHR's low success rates particularly indicate systemic inefficiency: top researchers spending hundreds of hours annually in an almost futile exercise of applying for funding.

Approved but unfunded research proposals are ready-to-launch research plans and each represents a lost opportunity. Among unfunded proposals, every single year, most would—if only they could proceed—advance their fields and produce net positive downstream impacts. Every proposal is ripe with potential to expand knowledge, generate economic and IP benefits, improve the lives of Canadians and the world, and more.

Peer reviewers appreciate this. Anecdotally they report the hardest aspect of their role has become going home at the end of the day fully appreciating all of the potential excellent research that will not get funded and their part in making impossible choices. The weight of this knowledge is a kind of moral injury carried by peer reviewers.

Increasing funding success rates is critical. Funding more awards must not be achieved by shrinking grant sizes. Instead, spreading funding across more researchers ("peanut butter" approach) has been shown to yield better national outcomes than concentrating large grants among a small number of established researchers. By contrast, the Impact+ chairs program concentrates large grants among later-career researchers likely to cluster at well-resourced urban universities.

Tri-council data indicates senior investigators consistently have higher success rates than early career researchers (ECRs). It is strategic to increase ECR success rates: ECRs are more likely to drive innovative research, transform disciplines, and – critically – remain in Canada. As Impact+ researchers enter the same applicant pool, mitigation is needed against increased competition, to prevent further declines in success rates overall and disproportionate impacts on ECRs.

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[1] Note that DGs are not directly comparable to CIHR's Project or SSHRC's Insight Grants. Reasons include that 1) DGs are by design a 'grant-in-aid' intended to award only a fraction of the total budget required for a research project to proceed, sometimes as low as only 30-40% and 2) funding success rates are meant to be high.

Increasing the number and size of grants also has downstream benefits for graduate students and postdocs whose stipends are paid from grants.

Budget 2024's $1.795 billion investment in tri-council funding was widely celebrated. Planned ongoing increases were announced to be implemented as follows:

2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	Total
$75 m	$153 m	$286 m	$517 m	$764 m	$1,795 m

In addition to the $286 million increase expected for 2026-27, $1.28 billion remains outstanding. Meanwhile, the $1.7 billion investment in talent attraction (Budget 2025) will reshape the ecosystem and exacerbate existing pressures. Canadian researchers cannot wait until 2028-29 for full implementation of tri-council increases nor will they be enough.

Recommendation:

Accelerate delivery of the remaining $1.28 billion Budget 2024 tri-council funding. Then increase tri-councils funding by 10% annually for four years, effectively doubling budgets from 2024 levels by 2030-31.

The foundation of Canada's research ecosystem is investigator-led fundamental research. With government interest in mission-driven research, it is critical to maintain strong supports for the foundations upon which Canada's global research excellence is built. Mission-driven priorities, including advanced digital technologies (Quantum, AI, Cybersecurity, etc.), all began with fundamental research. In line with expert opinions, funding should follow a 3:1 ratio of fundamental science relative to applied research.[2]

Recommendation:

Any new capstone organization must distribute funding equally across the three tri-agency discipline groupings using a 3:1 ratio of funding between fundamental to applied research. Funding decisions must be peer-review driven, free from political influence.

[2] For example, quantum technologies advances are in large part thanks to Canadian fundamental research. The D-Wave lab has led quantum computing developments for years, based on decades old investments in fundamental quantum research made before possible applications were ever evident.

Research talent hidden in plain sight: addressing universities' fiscal crisis

Canada's research capacity has been reduced by the current fiscal crisis in the post-secondary education (PSE) sector.

Long-term declining public funding has pushed institutions towards alternative revenue streams, (notably international student tuition,) and cost reductions including limiting hiring of permanent tenure track research and teaching positions and expanding reliance on contract academic staff (CAS).

CAS are a pool of untapped Canadian research talent. Full-time CAS are often indistinguishable from their tenure-track peers in terms of their qualifications and research training; nonetheless, CAS are excluded from applying for tri-council funding due to their precarious employment status. Unlike tenure-track professors, CAS's employment does not pay them to research. Some CAS self-fund research but lack the job security needed to fully exercise academic freedom and fearlessly pursue knowledge regardless of how findings may be received by colleagues.

Although data are not publicly reported, anecdotal evidence indicates significant recent increases in institutions relying on CAS, with some estimates suggesting up to two-thirds of university teaching staff are CAS.[3] Growing reliance on CAS contrasts with stable numbers reported across the sector for assistant professors, the entry level rank for tenure track careers, with approximately 10,000 people holding assistant professor roles annually, with no growth in these numbers since 2004.

Each year in Canada, approximately 8,000 PhD students graduate and 10,000 scholars hold postdoc positions. Many of these highly trained researchers seek academic careers but are unable to secure assistant professor roles. As a result, some take up CAS work, others leave research altogether, and some leave Canada for opportunities abroad.

[3] Reasonable estimates of CAS numbers in Canadian universities circa 2022-23 are as high as 2/3 of academic staff on campuses. This was the conclusion of Statistics Canada's second pilot on expanding the University and College Staff System (UCASS) survey with findings reported verbally to stakeholders in 2024. The pilot used a "representative sample" of institutions from across the Canadian university sector but, Statistics Canada insisted, the findings could not be extrapolated to represent the sector. Elevated CAS numbers is in-line with previous research based on Freedom of Information Requests.

The federal government has a role to play addressing the current fiscal crisis faced by the PSE sector. Unlike primary and secondary education, PSE is not strictly the domain of the provinces. Just as the federal government makes substantial annual investments in early-childhood education, it also invests in PSE every year with:

- Over $4 billion in research funding;
- Over $15 billion through the Canada Social Transfer, which legislatively supports post-secondary education and related programs;
- Approximately $8 billion on student financial assistance;
- Additional funding through various federal programs and departments.

Maximizing return on these investments—to say nothing of broader national benefits of a well-funded research and education ecosystem—requires federal engagement with provinces.

Recommendation:

Engage provincial counterparts and strengthen federal support for the post-secondary education sector to alleviate the fiscal crisis impacting Canada's research capacity.

Government coordination to support a flourishing research ecosystem

Beyond financial engagement, federal policies also impact university-based research. Unintended consequences of policies can run counter to other policy objectives. This was evident with IRCC's cap on international student visas – particularly its impact on international graduate students who are key workers for research programs funded by the tri-agencies. The CCR echoes recent calls for better coordination across government departments.

Recommendation:

Formalize coordination across government with a federal secretariat for post-secondary education and research to 1) ensure effective cross-department coordination on sector-wide programs 2) serve as a central access point for stakeholders 3) support the planned Federal Advisory Council on Science and Innovation.