

PROMOTING EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH

AN INTERNATIONAL BLUE RIBBON PANEL ASSESSMENT OF
PEER REVIEW PRACTICES AT THE SOCIAL SCIENCES AND
HUMANITIES RESEARCH COUNCIL OF CANADA

**REPORT TO THE COUNCIL OF THE
SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES RESEARCH
COUNCIL OF CANADA**

December 2008

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The mandate of the International Blue Ribbon Panel [hereafter, “the panel”] was to “assess the quality and integrity of SSHRC’s peer review practices.”

To implement its mandate, the panel analyzed an extensive amount of documentation, conducted interviews with peer reviewers, program officers and management, and did a web survey of the humanities and social sciences faculty in Canadian universities. The panel also took into account the experiences of the American, Australian, British and German peer-review systems. These experiences have informed the panel’s recommendations throughout the report.

The panel has exchanged innumerable e-mails, and held three meetings—on July 7, October 15 and December 12, 2008.

From the start, in Part 1 of this report, the panel unanimously wishes to state that:

The peer-review process at the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) is, overall, up to the best practices and highest international standards. It is a system that works well and that is very healthy in its fundamentals.

The critical observations made in this report and all the recommendations aim to make sure that this system remains sustainable and efficient, and is improved in such ways that it maintains its high standing internationally, among the best granting agencies.

Part 2 investigates SSHRC’s practices in selecting peers—that is, external assessors, adjudication committee members and Chairs. This is a crucial issue, as the quality of peers and their performance constitute the keystone of the whole process.

Broadening the pool of potential peers, lightening and facilitating their work by moving as quickly as possible to online and digital technologies, and better and more publicly rewarding their contributions seem all necessary and practical ways to improve the rate of acceptance to serve in peer review (Recommendations 1 to 10; see complete list on page 82).

Part 3 focuses on the instructions and guidance provided to the peers prior to adjudication meetings.

SSHRC generally makes quite clear what is expected from the different groups of peers, and it is to be commended for some innovations it has implemented, such as the “score calibration teleconference” implemented in some of its programs.

Among its other findings, the panel has noted that what is expected from adjudication committee members and Chairs, in terms of the extent and amount of the reading of proposals, is not understood in the same way by everyone and calls for clearer instructions. On the other hand, in the management of conflicts of interest, laxity is certainly not an issue at SSHRC. In fact, the numerous and stringent rules which are consistently applied might be usefully reviewed. We may have here a case of defensive over-management, which adds considerably to the burden of constituting committees and finding acceptable reviewers. (Recommendations 11 to 19).

Part 4 examines aspects of the adjudication process itself, the ways committees deliberate and make final decisions, and prepare feedback to applicants. This is, of course, the crucial phase of the peer-review process. External assessments are a major contribution to that process, but external assessors pass judgement on the intrinsic quality of a singular proposal. It is the peer members of the adjudication committee who will have to weigh, in a competitive context, the relative merit, quality and significance of a research proposal compared to a wide range of other proposals. It is under these conditions that they have the final word.

In terms of fairness and equity this segment of the peer review process seems to be generally well managed and with a high degree of conscientiousness.

Going fully electronic will facilitate the process for committee members and facilitate the enforcement of a more uniform and orderly handling of the files. Files should be discussed according to their ranking, not in the alphabetical order, as is the case in some committees. Moreover, files generally do not need to be discussed in detail by the full committee when the assigned readers agree and there is no adjudication committee member in dissent. Discussion should concentrate on those files that fall in the mid-range, and on those about which reviewers disagree (Recommendations 20 to 23).

Regarding the sets of criteria to be applied in evaluating proposals, the panel is of the opinion that the use of rigid set percentages (60/40) ought to be seriously questioned. SSHRC aims to support unquestionably excellent proposals that are likely to produce innovative and high-quality research results. Track record per se should entitle no one to receive another research grant. The view of the panel is that the quality of the research proposal, its originality and potential significance (scholarly and otherwise) should always be given primary attention. Track record ought always to come second, permitting peer evaluators to decide whether the applicant has a shown ability to take charge and bring research to completion (Recommendation 24).

Discussions on budgets submitted in proposals occupy a substantial amount of time in adjudication committee meetings. Interpretation of instructions, initiatives taken and the decisions made about budgets are far from consistent across committees. In many agencies peer-review committees pronounce exclusively on the quality and the feasibility of research proposals. Indeed this is the domain in which they have undeniable competence; it is in this respect that they are peers. In these agencies, it is experts of the staff (in some cases, advised on cost specificities by experienced scholars in different disciplines or fields of research) who make final decisions on the grant amount, according to policy decisions taken by the organization's leadership. Such an approach should be considered by SSHRC. In no way should committee decisions impinging on policies, such as setting budgetary rules, be condoned (Recommendation 25).

Regarding the assessment of proposals with inter-disciplinary approach or content, it is not clear to the panel why Committee 15 (Inter-disciplinary and multi-disciplinary studies) would be needed. A large majority of the scholars surveyed in the humanities and social sciences declare their research to be inter-disciplinary and actually forward their proposals to other, so-called "disciplinary" committees. Indeed at the present time, given the way research is evolving in all domains, and even though a researcher may be identified with a particular discipline, enforcing disciplinary boundaries is not the order of the day. Quite the contrary, efforts should be made to choose as members, for all adjudication committees, peers who

have proved to have a broad understanding of the evolution of research in their field (Recommendation 26). As for inter-jurisdictional programs, issues to be solved clearly pertain less to peer reviewers' attributes or behaviour than to the need for better-defined policies agreed upon by the granting agencies (Recommendation 27).

Feedback to applicants is an essential part of the process and its perceived success and fairness. The way it is presently managed creates a huge burden for adjudication committees and for program officers. It might be possible to lighten the workload of peers and of staff while improving the feedback (Recommendation 28).

Finally, the panel seriously questions the practice of resorting to two parallel tracks in the pre-selection of applications for Doctoral Fellowships. It implies that the process is not the same for all. Moreover, for candidates who have first to go through the university track, the differences in organizational and operational cultures in different universities entails necessarily real heterogeneity in treatment and thence introduces another layer of opacity. Finally, as has been pointed out to us by some university officers interviewed, it is not always easy at the local level to safeguard the process against "departmental biases and institutional politics" (Recommendation 29).

Part 5 addresses three policy issues: the funding of younger researchers, the funding of applicants from smaller universities and the funding of high-risk innovative research.

At SSHRC, as is the case in all granting agencies, the success rates of newer scholars is significantly lower than that of seasoned researchers, as is to be expected. The will to keep a full research pipeline active and to adequately fund the new generation of researchers are fundamentally policy issues and it is for SSHRC's Council to set goals and rules in that regard. The burden of the relevant decisions should not be placed on adjudication committees. Their role is to evaluate the quality and feasibility of research proposals, not to set goals and make decisions in terms of success rates. The same distribution of responsibilities can be said in the case of proposals from researchers at smaller universities. In both cases, institutions also have responsibilities to exercise and roles to play—to better coach and support their researchers (Recommendations 30 and 31).

The funding of high-risk, path-breaking research is now a matter of primary concern for all major granting agencies throughout the world. What has been learned from international experience is that rewarding high-risk and strongly original proposals, especially at a time of intense competition and low rates of success, is not best done in regular programs. It might be better achieved with specific strategic initiatives (Recommendation 32).

Part 6 examines the diverse arrangements for regular monitoring and quality control at SSHRC.

This is certainly one of the areas where SSHRC has to be strongly commended. Indeed the organization has here shown real innovation—by establishing, for instance, the practice of adjudication committees' policy discussions or by creating its group of adjudication committee "observers." Suggestions from the panel aim to essentially optimize and generalize such initiatives (Recommendations 33 to 36).

Part 7 concerns program officers and their pivotal role in ensuring the quality of the peer-review process.

The panel was told: “Good program officers are worth their weight in gold.” and it fully concurs. The respect of the research community for SSHRC largely hinges on the quality of work of its programs officers. Indeed their contribution certainly ought to be publicly celebrated.

Program officers not only have to be excellent in the exercise of their administrative and procedural responsibilities, but they also ought to acquire and maintain a real depth of understanding of the evolving intellectual domain in which they participate. This is a demanding requirement and this is why the quality of these program officers ought to be, and remain, constantly one of the highest priorities for SSHRC.

The panel is of the view that research grant program officers belong to an emerging, new profession. It combines academic credentials with managerial abilities, and that places these professionals closer to the scholarly world than to the realm of government bureaucracy. To keep in line with international standards and practices, new candidates for these functions should, hold a PhD. But this is not enough. To enable them to perform their complex jobs, these officers also necessarily need to acquire considerable administrative managerial skills set, efficiency in procedural matters and multitasking, and an ability to organize and proceed in an orderly manner.

Today it has become incumbent upon granting agencies, such as SSHRC, to construct for these new professionals a career structure in which they can grow in stature and find personal satisfaction and reward through the years. (Recommendations 37 to 39).

In its concluding remarks, the panel reiterates its global finding that the peer-review process at SSHRC is, overall, up to the best practices and highest international standards. It is a system that works well and that is very healthy in its fundamentals.

It also points out that the thrust of all its recommendations has been a triple one that can be subsumed under three interlinked key messages:

1. Lighten the workload of peer reviewers, and encourage and recognize better their efforts and those of program officers.
2. Clearly distinguish issues pertaining to policy decision-making and SSHRC Council from those that ought to remain properly attributed to peer-review evaluators.
3. Make all processes as public and as transparent to the research community as possible, in order to improve the understanding of SSHRC’s operations and maintain trust and goodwill.

LIST OF PANEL RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION 1. Broaden and enrich the pool of expert external assessors.

- Periodically mobilize universities (vice-presidents of research and deans), learned societies and professional organizations to submit names for service as external assessors.
- Establish contacts, and share with foreign funding agencies, research tools for identifying assessors and explore willingness to share lists of willing and seasoned expert assessors.

RECOMMENDATION 2. Maintain and enhance the quality of external assessments.

- Invite adjudication committees to bring to the program officers' attention the external assessors to be excluded because of poor quality of reviews.
- Provide online model assessments to external assessors.

RECOMMENDATION 3. Lighten and facilitate the work of external assessors.

- Generalize the use of electronic tools for performing the assessments.
- Continue to use standardized forms for external assessment.

RECOMMENDATION 4. Retain and reward external assessors.

- Acknowledge annually by letter, and identify personally to universities, the contributions of their faculty in external assessments, and engage universities in better assuming active institutional responsibility and recognition of this function.
- Invite excellent external assessors, after two or three years of service, to formally become members of a "SSHRC International College of Expert Reviewers" and to continue to serve as reviewers.
- Improve the feedback to external assessors through automated electronic sharing of other assessors' anonymized reviews and forwarding of information on the fate of the proposal(s) they reviewed.

RECOMMENDATION 5. Make more transparent the selection and role of external assessors.

- Make public, on the SSHRC website, the criteria for selecting external assessors, their responsibilities and duties.
- Publish, on the SSHRC website, every year the list of external assessors who have served in the previous competitions.
- Publicize, on the SSHRC website, the membership of the "SSHRC International College of Expert Reviewers."

RECOMMENDATION 6. To increase rates of acceptance to serve on adjudication committees and to reduce turnover, cut the workload for members, reduce the number of days spent in committee work in Ottawa, and revise rules on conflict of interest.

For ways of implementation, see Recommendations 17, 20, 21, 22, 24 and 28 below.

RECOMMENDATION 7. Extend to five years, not necessarily consecutively, the normal tenure on adjudication committees.

RECOMMENDATION 8. Reward and retain committee members.

- Engage universities to accept service on SSHRC adjudication committees as a form of administrative duty and to release, accordingly, from administrative tasks their faculty members serving on these committees.
- Invite committee members, after a second year of excellent service, to formally become members of the new “SSHRC International College of Expert Reviewers” and to continue to act as adjudicators.

RECOMMENDATION 9. Make more public and transparent the selection and role of adjudication committee members.

- Make public, on the SSHRC website, the criteria for selecting committee members, their responsibilities and duties.
- Publicize, on the SSHRC website, the membership of the “SSHRC International College of Expert Reviewers.”

RECOMMENDATION 10. Make the criteria and process for selecting Chairs more explicit, transparent and public.

RECOMMENDATION 11. Put on the SSHRC website, for each program, examples of outstanding and successful fellowship and grant proposals.

RECOMMENDATION 12. Make public, on the SSHRC website, the instructions to external assessors and extend the use of standardized forms to all programs involving external assessors.

RECOMMENDATION 13. For easier consultation, complement the reference manuals for committee members with a two-pager schematically summarizing responsibilities, steps to be taken and rules to follow.

RECOMMENDATION 14. Develop, with seasoned Chairs, a handbook for Chairs based on best practices in chairing adjudication meetings.

RECOMMENDATION 15. Continue to use the annual meetings for Chairs to explain policies and regulations, but also emphasize what is expected specifically from Chairs and the best practices in conducting adjudication committee meetings.

RECOMMENDATION 16. Extend to all programs the practice of holding an instruction and score calibration teleconference with all members prior to the committee meeting.

RECOMMENDATION 17. Make more precise and clear in manuals, and other instructions, the obligations of adjudication committee members and Chairs regarding the reading and analysis of proposals.

- Members, when acting as designated readers of a set of proposals, will read these files thoroughly and rate them according to their detailed analytical findings.
- Members are also expected to closely read the summary of all the other proposals submitted to their committee.
- Chairs are expected to read the summary of all the proposals submitted to their committee. They are also expected to read the complete files positioned in the mid-range (so-called 4-A) by the scores given to them by the designated readers and that, therefore, call for thorough discussion by the full committee.

RECOMMENDATION 18. Make clear and public, on the SSHRC website and in documentation to committee members, guidelines applying to the disclosure and discussion of information not included in proposals.

RECOMMENDATION 19. Remain vigilant regarding conflicts of interest, but review relevant regulations to ensure an efficient peer-review process.

RECOMMENDATION 20. Introduce, as quickly as feasible, electronic filing of proposals, external assessments and committee readers' reports and scoring, as well as web and networked handling of files in committee meetings.

RECOMMENDATION 21. Introduce, as soon as possible, for committee readers standardized electronic forms, similar to those for external assessors, permitting detailed scoring according to criteria and open boxes for comments.

RECOMMENDATION 22. Provide uniform guidelines to committees on procedures for discussion and decision-making on proposals, including:

- ranking of all proposals according to preliminary scores provided by assigned readers; and
- for Standard Research Grants, discussion of only those proposals:
 - getting from readers a score that puts them in mid-range (that is, among the 50 per cent of proposals scoring below the 15 per cent top scores which ought to be funded, and over the 35 per cent bottom scores that should not be funded);
 - about which readers' scores exhibit significant disagreement; or
 - about which other committee members express disagreement regarding the scores provided by readers (so-called "flagged" files).

RECOMMENDATION 23. Increase the transparency and make public the preceding rules to be implemented by adjudication committees in the discussion and final decision on proposals.

RECOMMENDATION 24. Do away with the 60/40 percentage rules. Advise the adjudication committees that SSHRC aims to support unquestionably excellent proposals and therefore that the quality of the research proposal, its originality and potential significance should always be the primary focus of attention in decision making. Track record should, on its own, entitle no one to receive another research grant.

RECOMMENDATION 25. Review SSHRC policies on the role of adjudication committees in budgetary matters and implement new practices calling for expert staff decision in these matters, and apply a clear distinction between peer-review competencies and policy decisions.

RECOMMENDATION 26. Abolish Standard Research Grant (SRG) Committee 15, and make all committees, including all SRG committees, able and responsible to assess proposals extending beyond disciplinary boundaries.

RECOMMENDATION 27. In collaboration with other Canadian granting agencies, explore

policies conducive to encouraging research and to facilitating peer review of proposals at the interfaces of the respective responsibilities of the agencies. Implement, at first, through pilot program(s).

RECOMMENDATION 28. To reduce workload of adjudication committees and program officers, maintain and simplify reporting to all grant applicants.

- Forward to applicants the standardized forms filled by external assessors, as well as those filled by adjudication committee readers (see Recommendation 21 above).
- Communicate to applicants on a standardized form the summary position of the adjudication committee, when different from that of the readers and the decision is negative.
- In all cases, transmit these forms with a cover standardized letter:
 - a) explaining the general peer-review process;
 - b) emphasizing that it is the adjudication committee only that is fully responsible for final decision, not the external assessors, nor the committee readers alone; and
 - c) reminding the applicant that the committee decision on his/her proposal is the result of a competition.

RECOMMENDATION 29. Eliminate the university screening stage for the Doctoral Fellowships program.

RECOMMENDATION 30. State clear policy goals regarding younger researchers, eventually setting target success rate and defining mechanisms to fund new scholar applications following positive merit evaluation by the relevant adjudication committee.

RECOMMENDATION 31. Treat issues related to proposals from smaller university researchers as an area of policy responsibility, shared with institutions, and eventually adopt and implement complementary decision-making rules and mechanisms.

RECOMMENDATION 32. Notwithstanding SSHRC's investment in supporting high-risk research through the Research Development Initiative Program and other pilot programs such as Aboriginal Research and Research/Creation, explore new mechanisms dedicated exclusively to the support of high-risk, path-breaking and transformative research, open to all domains of the humanities and social sciences. Set specific peer-review rules and adjudication mechanisms accordingly.

RECOMMENDATION 33. Improve feedback and timely reaction to reports on adjudication committee "policy" discussion.

RECOMMENDATION 34. Examine the possibility of extending the presence of observers to other programs.

RECOMMENDATION 35. Invite diligent observers to formally become members of a "SSHRC International College of Expert Reviewers" and to continue to serve as observers.

RECOMMENDATION 36. Keep the appeal process as transparent as possible, make public,

each year in advance, the membership of the appeal committee and ensure fast decision on all appeals.

RECOMMENDATION 37. Recruit permanent program officers and minimize the number of temporary ones.

- Advertise job openings more broadly, beyond government circles, in scholarly publications and in graduate departments.
- Comply with evolving international standards and recruit professionals with Ph.D.
- Aim to recruit professionals with a proper combination of high-level formal university training, understanding of research activities, and organizational and managerial abilities and skills.
- Keep the salary structure for program officers competitive for attracting and retaining quality staff.

RECOMMENDATION 38. Define for program officers a career structure in which they can grow.

- Pursue the development of a training program for incoming program officers.
- Maintain and support the extension of scholarly and scientific competences of program officers.
- Encourage program officers that already work in the system to acquire and develop personal managerial and other new skill sets.
- Reward and celebrate publicly exceptional performance.

RECOMMENDATION 39. Make more public and transparent the role and responsibilities of program officers at SSHRC, and encourage and support their interactions with the research community.

PREFACE

Dear Dr. Gaffield and Mr. Kierans,

It is my great pleasure to communicate to you the report of the International Blue Ribbon Panel Assessment of Peer-Review Practices at the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). Panel members have been very impressed with SSHRC's peer-review system. While we are making several recommendations for improvement, we have come to the conclusion that the system is already performing its functions remarkably well. The administration of SSHRC should be congratulated for its professionalism and high standards, which are in line with international peer-review practices.

I take this opportunity to thank those who have played an essential role in the preparation of this report:

- the panel members whose remarkable range of expertise and experience has allowed us to look at the SSHRC's peer-review system through comparative lenses. Each member made many substantial contributions to our deliberation and shaped our conclusion in significant ways. Their efficacy and good humor greatly facilitated my role as panel Chair.
- Camille Limoges, Coordinator of the panel, who synthesized our thinking with great skill and led the important effort of data collection (including conducting the many interviews) that fed our work. His own expertise in the area of peer review deeply influenced the report and our conclusions.
- François Simard, and his colleagues on SSHRC's staff who assisted Camille Limoges in the data collection and treatment. Their work is a perfect illustration of SSHRC's remarkable professionalism.
- Marilyn Taylor, SSHRC's Vice-President, Grants and Fellowships, for the great support she has given us throughout, while exercising perfect discretion.

We hope that you will find this report useful and that it meets your expectations.

Yours truly,

Michèle Lamont, Chair of the Blue Ribbon Panel Probe on Peer Review at SSHRC
and
Robert I. Goldman, Professor of European Studies, and Sociology and
African and African-American Studies, Harvard University

INTRODUCTION

The Terms of the Mandate

The mandate of the Blue Ribbon Panel [hereafter, “the panel”] has been defined in the following manner by decision of the Council of SSHRC:

“As part of its strategic priorities in support of its Quality ambition, SSHRC is creating a blue ribbon panel of internationally recognized individuals highly respected for their knowledge of and expertise in peer review processes.¹

The panel will assess the quality and integrity of SSHRC’s peer review practices, including:

- the principles and approaches used to design appropriate peer-review processes, including selection of assessors and adjudication panels for the different types of grants and fellowship programs;
- the adequacy and application of peer-review criteria;
- the appropriateness and overall quality of the guidance provided to external adjudicators and adjudication panels;
- the handling of inter-disciplinary and inter-jurisdictional proposals;
- the role and utility of observers and other monitoring activities;
- the adequacy of policies and practices to protect the integrity of the peer-review process (e.g., conflict of interest policy, confidentiality policy, practices governing members who may be applicants, quality of the documentary trail on decisions); and
- advice on emerging international trends in peer review for further consideration.”

The Implementation of the Mandate

To implement its mandate, the panel has been provided with full documentation on SSHRC’s grants and fellowships programs (resources, applications and outcomes); instructions provided to applicants, external assessors, adjudication committee members and Chairs; peer-review process characteristics for each program; as well as tasks and responsibilities of program officers.

To complement that documentation, 53 interviews have been conducted with external assessors, Chairs and members of adjudication committees, observers, program officers, management and Council members, as well as with officers from associations and/or institutions. Open questions have been provided to interviewees in advance. Some interviews were conducted in-person in Ottawa, the others on telephone, each one lasting from 40 to 80 minutes (see Table 1 below).

¹ For the list of panel members, see Appendix 1 of this report.

Table 1: Distribution of Interviews

External Assessors	6
Adjudication Committee Members	14
Adjudication Committee Chairs	11
Observers	2
Program Officers	9
SSHRC Management and Council	8
Associations and institutions	3

A web survey of SSH faculty in Canadian universities has also been conducted by Science-Metrix for the Blue Ribbon Panel during a 10 week period, from August to October of this year. More than 6 000 questionnaires have been completed and analyzed. (See table 2 below).

Table 2: Sample Disposition Table of the Web Survey on SSHRC's Peer-Review Process

Number of e-mails obtained/collected* (a)	19 826
Number of bounced e-mails/unreached client (b)	2 169
Survey population: Number of potential survey respondents (c=a-b)	17 657
Completed (d)	6 224
Response rate (d/c)	35,2%
Margin of error*	1,31%

*Calculated for a response distribution of 50% (i.e., 50% yes / 50% no); confidence level at 99%

The panel has held three meetings. The first meetings were held in-person in Montreal, the third meeting was held by teleconference.

All meetings were held in camera, with the exception of the beginning of the first meeting on July 7, which started with a discussion of the mandate with the president of SSHRC and two of its vice-presidents. Discussions on the implementation of the mandate, and preliminary findings and queries, following first analyses of the documentation, were the focus of this first meeting.

The second meeting, on October 15, was centered on the discussion of a draft report of findings and on the tentative formulation of recommendations, using (beyond the written material provided by SSHRC) the analysis of the interviews and some preliminary results from the survey.

In its final meeting, on December 12, the panel discussed, amended and approved the final draft of the panel report.

Organization of this Report

The object of this report is to provide an assessment of peer-review rules, process and practices at SSHRC.

“Peer review is the practice by which the worth of research is evaluated by *those with demonstrated competence to make a judgment.*”²

² British Academy (2007), p. ix.; italics are ours. For a comparative analysis of the German, Swiss, and Danish peer review systems, see Stefan Hornbostel, Dagmar Simon (eds.), *Wie viel (In-)Transparenz ist notwendig? Peer Review Revisited*, iFQ-Working Paper No. 1, December 2006.

Peer-review aims to enhance the quality of research, by weeding out less interesting proposals and identifying those most promising and innovative. It happens, however, that even where the peer-review process is effective, numerous potentially rewarding research programs may remain unsupported because of scarcity of resources. That indeed is the case at SSHRC.

This report adopts a generic process approach rather than proceeding program by program—an approach that would have entailed numerous repetitions. However, the report pays attention to significant specificities that some programs may exhibit regarding peer-review. It combines, at each step, the panel's major findings and, eventually, its recommendations for improvement.

The evaluation and recommendations are based, in part, on a comparative approach that takes the American, Australian, British and German peer-review systems into account.

Part 1 states the position of the panel on the significance of its findings regarding the peer-review process at SSHRC; it also provides some general contextual information.

Part 2 investigates SSHRC's practices in selecting peers for the purpose of assessing proposals and adjudicating research grants and fellowships, as well as in selecting Chairs of adjudication committees.

Part 3 pays attention to the instructions and guidance provided to external assessors, adjudication committee members and Chairs of these committees prior to adjudication meetings.

Part 4 examines some aspects of the adjudication process itself, the ways committees deliberate and make final decisions, and finally provide feedback to applicants.

Part 5 addresses policy issues that may impact the peer-review process and ought to be considered by SSHRC's Council.

Part 6 examines the diverse arrangements for the regular monitoring of the peer-review process at SSHRC, including the adjudication committees' policy discussions and recommendations, the role of observers and the appeal process.

Part 7 concerns the multiple tasks of program officers and their pivotal role in ensuring the quality of the peer-review process.

In its concluding remarks, the panel states its final global appraisal of the peer-review process at SSHRC and briefly draws attention to key sets of recommendations.

PART 1. OVERALL PANEL STATEMENT AND KEY OBSERVATIONS

1.1 General Statement

In November 2007, SSHRC released *Framing our Direction*, setting out its strategies for 2008-10.

“The specific ambition of enhancing the quality of, and support for, research and research training in the social sciences and humanities emerges from SSHRC’s responsibility to foster and support international excellence in these fields in Canada. SSHRC is committed to ensuring a world class merit review process to select the best ideas and people for research support.”

SSHRC intends to promote “world-class excellence”—one of the principles articulated in the Government of Canada’s science and technology strategy, *Mobilizing Science and Technology to Canada’s Advantage*, released in May 2007.

The federal strategy itself states that “the selection of world class research initiatives requires a competitive process that is informed by international developments.” It also stresses the need to maintain “Healthy competition to ensure that funding supports the best ideas.”³

The strategy also points out that “There are currently differences among Canada’s three granting agencies in the extent to which they rely on international experts to select world class projects for funding, the competitiveness of their grant review processes, and the form and level of support provided. These differences call for careful consideration to identify best practices and ensure public funding supports international levels of research excellence.”⁴

These best practices essentially rest upon the peer-review process, as has been emphasized for instance in recent reports from the Royal Society of London⁵ and from the British Academy:

“Peer review has its critics, who allege that it is costly, time-consuming and biased against innovation. None of these criticisms is entirely without force, but the Working Group concluded that there were no better alternatives and that the criticisms were directed at deficiencies of practice rather than the principle of peer review. [...] In the case of grants peer review remains essential if good work is to be identified.”⁶

A peer may be an academic or not. It is not a matter of professional status but of pertinent knowledge and of balanced judgment.

Peer review aims to produce the best science and scholarship possible. It is about critique and it tries to get the most from people whose ethos it is to be critical. This is how such objectives as those stated in the Canadian science and technology strategy are best secured.

³ *Mobilizing Science and Technology to Canada’s Advantage* (2007), p. 11.

⁴ *Mobilizing Science and Technology to Canada’s Advantage* (2007), p. 67.

⁵ Royal Society (1995), p. 2-3.

⁶ British Academy (2007), p. ix.

In that regard, first and foremost, the panel unanimously wishes to state here that the peer-review process at SSHRC is, overall, up to the best practices and highest international standards.

Indeed, SSHRC ought to be commended for its performance in ensuring the fairness and integrity of its peer-review evaluation process.

It is a system that works well and that is most healthy in its fundamentals.

Of course, no such process is ever fully optimal and room always remains for improvements.

So, it ought to be clear for the reader from the start: all the observations and recommendations formulated by the panel in this report aim mainly at making sure that this system that already works well remains sustainable and efficient. They are predicated on what has been learned from the experience of other countries, and they suggest ways to improve this system and make it work even better.

In that regard, and as this report will make clear in its recommendations:

- 1) Where the most numerous changes are recommended by the panel, it is largely because SSHRC's commendable concern for excellence in peer review may, at times, lead to overtaxing expert human resources and imposing on the actors of peer-review, especially on adjudication committee members and program officers, workloads and burdens that might not be sustainable for long and strain the system to a point that may prove critical; and
- 2) Some other significant changes are also suggested that aim at better differentiating practices pertaining to the peer-review process itself. That is, the evaluation of the quality and significance of research, from processes and issues pertaining to policy decision-making (such as, for instance, setting target rates of success or defining special rules for the support of younger scholars or applicants from smaller institutions).

1.2 Summary Contextual Information

SSHRC supports over 5,400 full-time faculty and 3800 graduate students who are the best and most competitive in the country. By applying a rigorous peer review process, SSHRC funds approximately 20% of full-time faculty in its fields and 7% of full-time graduate students in Canada.

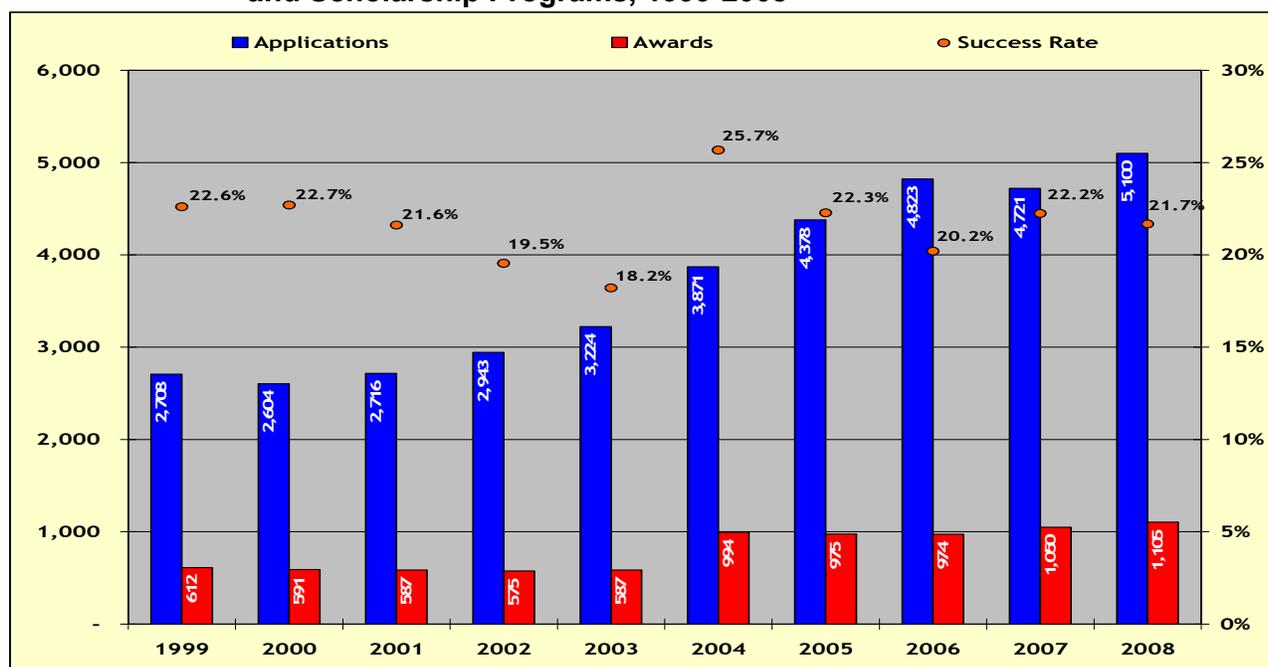
SSHRC's selection committees are made up of university-based researchers and, where appropriate, experts from outside the academic community. Committees adjudicate applications to SSHRC programs through rigorous independent expert review. Each year, between 350 and 400 Canadian and international scholars and experts volunteer to serve on these selection committees. Together, they assess over 9,000 research and fellowship proposals and make recommendations, based on academic excellence and other key criteria, about which projects to fund. About 5,000 other Canadian and international experts provide written assessments of proposals to help the selection committees in their decision-making.

In 2008-09, the total forecasted budget of SSHRC for grants and fellowships is close to \$250 million (excluding the two programs for Indirect Costs [\$314 million] and the Canada Research Chairs Program [\$59 million]).

For 2007-08, the estimated expenses were \$128 million for research grants and \$100.2 million for fellowships and Canada Graduate Scholarships. Other amounts are for dissemination \$13.4 million, Networks of Centers of Excellence(NCE) \$11.8 million and Canada Research Chairs \$59.2 million.

Government investment in SSHRC has permitted, in recent years, support to an increased number of outstanding doctoral students.

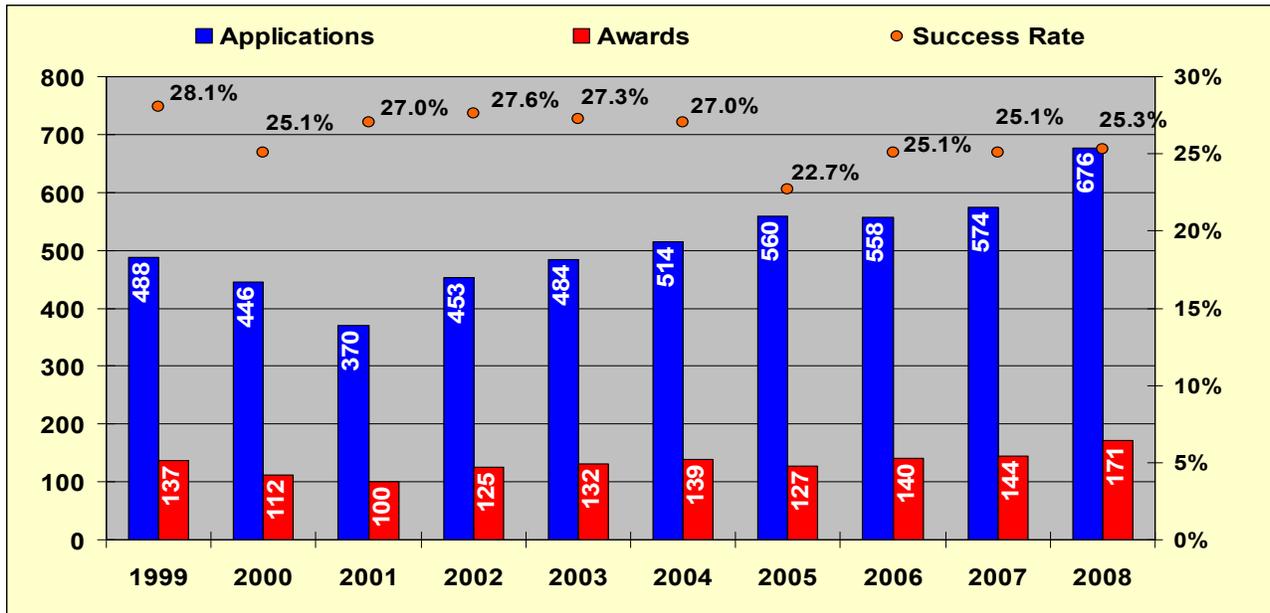
Graph 1: Number of Applications and Success Rate for Doctoral Fellowship and Scholarship Programs, 1999-2008



Source: SSHRC, *Year in Numbers: Expenditures and competition results: 1998-99 to 2007-08*, p. 45

This is not, however, the case at the postdoctoral level where success has, during the last decade, oscillated between 23 and 28 per cent and remained close to 25 per cent from 2006 to 2008.

Graph 2: Number of Applications and Success Rate for Postdoctoral Fellowships, 1999-2008



Source: SSHRC, *Year in Numbers: Expenditures and competition results: 1998-99 to 2007-08*, p. 46

The situation has not improved evenly in the case of research grants either as the following table makes clear.

Table 3: Expenditures by Research Type, 2000-08

Year	Investigator-Framed Research*	Strategic Research**
2000	\$47,541	\$21,969
2001	\$52,731	\$22,544
2002	\$62,787	\$15,335
2003	\$71,207	\$18,592
2004	\$79,156	\$19,953
2005	\$87,247	\$25,251
2006	\$93,287	\$26,332
2007	\$84,877	\$36,898
2008	\$85,252	\$37,310

Source: For 2000-07, numbers taken from *SSHRC, Year in Numbers: Expenditures and competition results: 1998-99 to 2007-08*, pages 11-12

For 2008: Numbers taken from: www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/est-pre/20082009/me-bd/pub/ME-312_e.asp

*Standard Research Grants and Major Collaborative Research Initiatives

**Strategic Research Grants, Strategic Joint Initiatives, Social Economy Suite, Community-University Research Alliances, International Opportunities Fund and Research Development Initiatives. Initiative on the New Economy and Knowledge Mobilization grants are not included.

This evolution of funding translates into rates of success, which have become very problematic (see Table 4 below), especially for SSHRC's main program—the Standard Research Grants (see graph below).

Table 4: Success Rate by Research Type, 2000-08

Year	Standard Research Grants	Strategic Grants*
2000	42%	45%
2001	41%	40%
2002	41%	55%
2003	41%	33%
2004	43%	34%
2005	40%	32%
2006	40%	32%
2007	33%	46%
2008	33%	Not yet available

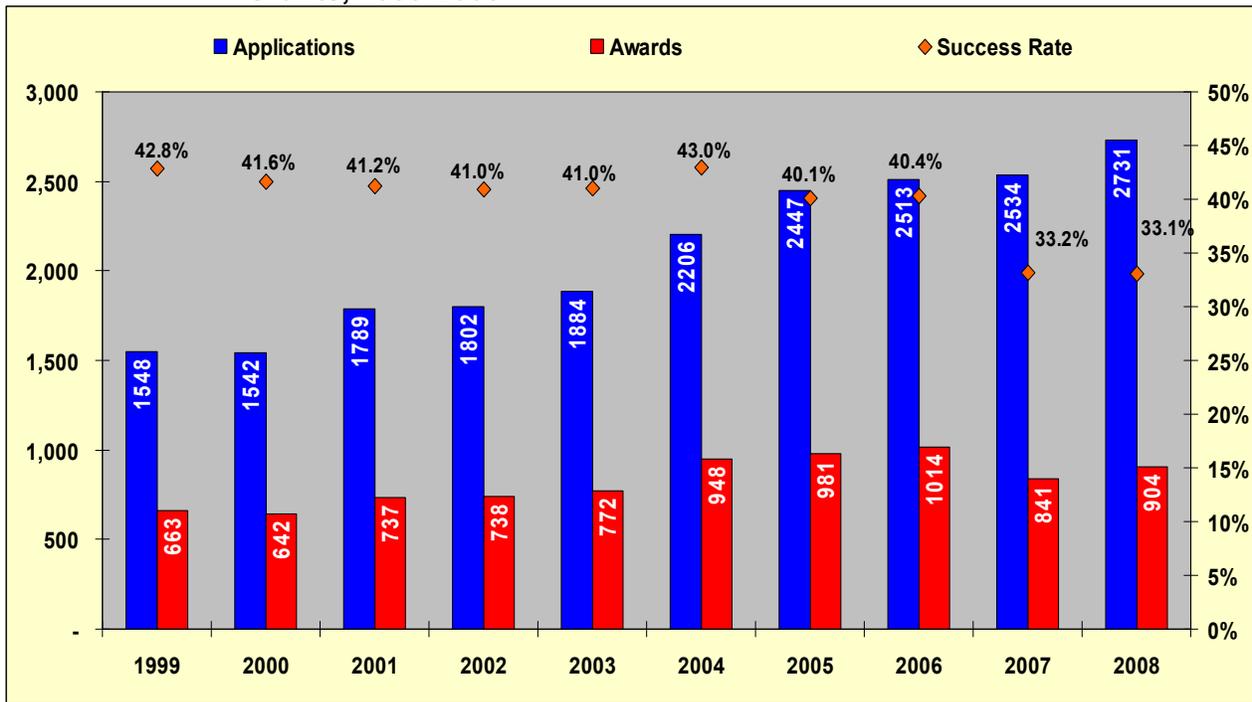
Source:

Standard Research Grants: *SSHRC, Year in Numbers: Expenditures and Competition Results: 1998-99 to 2007-08*, page 47.

Strategic Grants: Internal SSHRC data. Success rates calculated using the number of total requested grants divided by the number of total awarded grants

* Strategic Research Grants, Strategic Joint Initiatives, Social Economy Suite, Community-University Research Alliances, International Opportunities Fund, Research Development Initiatives, Knowledge impact in Society and Public Outreach Grants. Initiative on the New Economy and other Knowledge Mobilization grants are not included.

Graph 3: Number of Applications and Success Rate for Standard Research Grants, 1999-2008



Source: *SSHRC, Year in Numbers: Expenditures and competition results: 1998-99 to 2007-08*, p. 48

Of course, the evolution of investments in the programs and target success rates are respectively government and SSHRC policy issues and responsibilities; they remain beyond the reach of the peer-review process and therefore of this report as well.

However, it is clear that levels of funding and success rates do impact the management of programs, as well as the degree of confidence of applicants. They also create pressures on the peer-review process, at least in indirect ways. For instance, in the willingness of people to serve in the demanding and time-consuming functions of assessors and adjudicators, and in the degree to which they feel they owe something to the system.

The peer-review process is not insulated from the evolution of the national investments in research. This is why this summary presentation of this context has been provided here.

PART 2. SELECTING THE PEERS

SSHRC funds research and training through a broad range of programs that call for a diversity of peer-review processes and peer selection characteristics (see Appendix 2).

That selection is a crucial segment of the evaluation process; indeed, proper identification of peers is its cornerstone. Essentially performed by the team of program officers, that recruitment of peers amounts to a huge and very demanding task.

The variety of SSHRC programs requires every year the voluntary participation of more than 500 committee members and many thousands of external assessors (around 6,000 for the Standard Research Grants program alone). These assessors, whose expertise has, in each case, to match closely the proposal they review, play an essential role in forwarding evaluations of these proposals to the adjudication committees.

A survey conducted in the United Kingdom in 2006 showed that “93% of university researchers believe that the peer review system is worthwhile despite the amount of effort involved.”⁷ However, fewer than 50 per cent of the experts approached are able to accept SSHRC’s invitation to serve either as external assessors or as adjudication committee members. Each year close to 15,000 potential peers have to be first identified and then contacted.

It is indeed a daunting task and SSHRC has to be commended for its success in running, despite these odds, a peer-review process that is, by international standards, of eminently high quality.

In recent years, much has been written on “peer-review fatigue.” It is said that many peer-review systems around the world are “crumbling under their own weight.” Much attention has been paid to that issue by the panel. Many of our recommendations aim precisely at preventing that and at maintaining SSHRC’s system in good health by streamlining some processes, lightening some burdens and regulations, and making more attractive peer participation.

2.1 External Assessors

Peers are “those with demonstrated competence to make a judgment.”⁸ Though it is not fully realized by everyone, the external assessors, because they are selected one-by-one on the basis of the cogency of their precise expertise for evaluating the worth of a given research program, track record, project or proposal are peers par excellence. Choosing them is a task of the outmost consequence for the insuring of credible peer review. Conversely, external assessors ought to be highly conscious of the key role they are called upon to play and should act responsibly.

Typically, for Standard Research Grant (SRG) proposals, it is expected that the adjudication committee will have in hand at the time it meets at least two, and not more than three, external assessments. One of these assessments is normally provided by a foreign assessor. In the case of Major Collaborative Research Initiatives (MCRIs) or of thematic programs, there might be

⁷ Quoted in British Academy (2007), p. 20.

⁸ British Academy (2007), p. ix. Italics are ours.

as many as five or more external assessments to address all the significant dimensions of a proposal entailing inter-disciplinary contributions and, most of the time, interactions with non-academic partners. In such cases, the persons with “demonstrated competence to make a judgment” may not be all academics. Again, the notion of a peer refers to a domain of shared competence between an applicant and an assessor and to intellectual ability, not necessarily implying an identity of occupation or professional status.

2.1.1 Assessing External Assessors

The SSHRC web survey has shown that researchers understand well the key role of external assessors. They consider their choice extremely important, even more than that of adjudication committee members.⁹ Their degree of satisfaction with external assessors is also higher than with committee members.¹⁰

Interviews with adjudication committee members and with Chairs have shown, as was to be expected, a large spectrum of opinion on the quality and usefulness of the external assessments actually provided.¹¹ Most seem to agree that though “many reviews are far from perfect, committees learn to deal with that”¹² (SRG committee member).

In the words of a high-level manager at SSHRC, “the quality of external assessors is very much a factor of the program officers and their diligence.” The variation in quality of the external assessments provided to SSHRC committee, as is also the case in other granting organizations, is largely a function of the experience of the program officer involved and the training, tools, organizational supervision and support new officers benefit from, as well as the clarity of instructions provided to the external assessors.

The introduction of standard forms to be used by assessors has, according to the committee members and Chairs interviewed, greatly improved the relevance and utility of external assessments.

2.1.2 Selecting External Assessors

Declining participation is a problem that all agencies have to face. Excellent reviewers are in high demand; they will commit to a limited number of assessments every year and they have to be contacted early enough to do the job effectively and in a timely manner.

As of 2008, applicants for Standard Research Grants are asked, on a voluntary basis, to send a brief notification of intent by August 15 (two months before the October 15 deadline for full

⁹ Q. 25a and 25b.

¹⁰ Q. 32a and 32b.

¹¹ “External assessments are as useful as they could be” (committee Chair, SRG); “The usefulness of external assessors is mixed; some European assessors tend to be much too brief and give little to work with” (committee member); “Some are conscientious and other less so; some are not of terribly high value to the committee. But you will get that no matter what. The only way to control is to not use these people down the road” (committee member); « L’utilité des évaluations est très variable. Pour avoir servi sur des comités de revues, des comités de promotion, j’ai vu que le problème est universel. Ce n’est pas un problème particulier au CRSH. En plus, les universitaires habitués à ‘dealer’ avec ça. Il faut surtout des membres de comités qui ont beaucoup d’expérience. Ceux qui ont vu et vécu peuvent en tirer les leçons » (committee Chair).

¹² Committee member. It also happens, however, that some assessors might mislead committees. A case in point was recently brought to the attention of SSHRC’s administration. Two proposals were criticized by external assessors (and, because of that, penalized by adjudication committees it seems) for not citing specific works deemed essential and central by them, works that, however, turned out not to be published yet and one of them even one year later.

proposals). This is likely to help the program officer to make earlier contacts with potential external assessors, as well as with adjudication committee members, with proper expertise.

To perform optimally a program officer has to use, beyond existing specialized databases and tools such as Google Scholar, as broad as possible a network of contacts. And much is to be gained by having scholars and other experts help constitute banks of names of persons respected for their knowledge, fairness and sense of duty to the research community.

Interviews have also shown, however, that many committee members and Chairs do not expect to be contacted to help identify potential external assessors, nor do they always see that eventuality positively. They very often consider that this is the responsibility of the program officer and fear contamination of the process if they themselves intervene. To them it is not proper for a committee or some of its members to mingle with external assessors' selection: "The choice of assessors [...] is better left to the program officer; if he meets some difficulty, he may ask for suggestions from the Chair. But you want to avoid the program chair recommending only like minded colleagues." Indeed, the peer-review process is best warranted by maintaining a healthy distance between external assessors and the committee members that will use their reports. But contributing names to a general bank of experts certainly does not infringe upon that principle.¹³

Some attitudes reflect the fear that the process might be corrupted by conflicts of interest. This is an issue that we will have to come back to more than once.

SSHRC is to be commended for its will to keep the process pure and for implementing very stringent rules to prevent possible problems from conflicts of interest. In fact, SSHRC may be overdoing it and creating for its processes unnecessary strains and stresses. At times, it is a better procedure to factor in potential effects of conflicts of interests and to benefit from a top expert, than to shy from all conflicts and pass judgement on a proposal without the help of best expertise.

In the case of external assessors, as the following table shows, SSHRC's will to prevent all possible conflicts of interest in any given year excludes a large number of experts.

¹³ This is for instance the result of a survey conducted in Germany in 2005 when the German Research Foundation modified its peer-review system significantly. See Stefan Hornbostel and Meike Olbrecht, *Peer Review in der DFG: Die Fachkollegiaten*, iFQ-Workin Paper No. 2, November 2007, p. 27-28.

Table 5: Number of Potential Assessors Excluded Because of Conflict of Interest, Number of COIs Per File, Standard Research Grants, Competition 2008

Committee		Total Number of Applications (n)	Average Number of Re-Applications Related to Conflicts of Interest*	Average Number of Institutional Conflicts of Interest Per File (n)**	Average Number of Authorship Conflicts of Interest Per File (n)***	Total Average Number of Conflicts of Interest Per File (n)
1	Classics, Religious Studies	104	3	4	3	10
5	Linguistics	82	3	5	22	30
7	Economics	140	3	4	17	24
9	Geography	132	3	5	29	36
10	Psychology 1	125	3	5	37	45
15	Interdisciplinary	122	3	6	29	38
17	Education 2	120	3	6	32	41
19	Literature 2	132	3	3	12	18
20	Health Studies	122	3	8	45	56
21	Mangement 1	82	3	5	25	33

Note 1:

* According to current guidelines, an application cannot be assessed twice by the same expert. Therefore, two potential assessors are excluded for each reapplication (average n of reapplication X 2).

** An application cannot be assessed by any researcher affiliated with the same institution as any member of the team that submitted the application. We assumed an average of two institutional Conflicts of Interest for regular scholars, four for new scholars (two for the institution from which they graduated and two for their current affiliation), and two for each additional team member.

*** Average number of distinct co-authors for all team members in the last six years

Note 2:

For practical reasons, the following Conflicts of Interest (COI) were not included in the statistics:

COI related to potential assessors excluded at the request of the applicant;

COI related to movement between institutions, including visiting professorship;

COI related to affiliation to research networks or institutes;

COI related to co-investigators and collaborators who are new scholars; and

COI related to members of teams that submitted an application in the same competition.

In the case of SSHRC's main program, the SRG, less than 45% of external assessors are affiliated to a Canadian post-secondary institution. SSHRC peer review process is in that regard already strongly international in composition. Here again, SSHRC is to be commended for a practice that warrants the high standards it wants to maintain in peer review.

Table 6: Assessors' Nationality and Response Rate for Standard Research Grants, 2008 Competition

Country	Willing to Assess		Unable to Assess		Total Requested		Willingness to Assess
	N	%	N	%	N	%	%
Canada	2585	43	2928	39	5513	41	47
US	1999	34	3156	42	5155	38	39
UK	521	9	532	7	1053	8	50
Other	852	14	865	12	1717	13	50
Total	5957	100	7481	100	13438	100	44

2.1.3 Acceptance to Act as an External Assessor

Despite the fact that many of the external assessors interviewed have pointed out, as one put it:

“Reviewing is not that demanding; of course you have to read and think; but it is a rewarding process, you learn; for me it carries its own reward; I do not just do it out of duty; it is also enlightening when you have a bright proposal, great ideas. It presents no special difficulty; the process is clear and straightforward”

or again

« Cela fait partie de nos tâches, cela fait partie de nos responsabilités ; c’est quand même aussi informatif sur les recherches en train de se faire, on voit comment la recherche se développe dans notre domaine »

it remains, as Table 5 has just shown, that the acceptance to serve as an external assessor remains quite low, even among Canadians.

Some remedies have been suggested. For instance, universities ought to do more to recognize the contributions of their faculty when they act as assessors, and, on a different level, an online system would facilitate the job and increase the odds of making these assessments as useful as possible.¹⁴

Finally, we have to note a criticism formulated by many assessors: contrary to their experience with other international granting agencies, is it frustrating for them to get such little feedback from SSHRC when their job is done.¹⁵

2.1.4 Recommendations Relevant to External Assessors

RECOMMENDATION 1. Broaden and enrich the pool of expert external assessors.

- Periodically mobilize universities (vice-presidents of research and deans), learned societies and professional organizations to submit names for service as external assessors.
- Establish contacts and share with foreign funding agencies research tools for identifying assessors and explore willingness to share lists of willing and seasoned expert assessors.

RECOMMENDATION 2. Maintain and enhance the quality of external assessments.

- Invite adjudication committees to bring to the program officers’ attention the external assessors to be excluded because of poor quality of reviews.

¹⁴ The British Academy report we have quoted earlier has pointed out : “Electronic communication now means that peer review can more easily be an international process, potentially widening the range and *number* of reviewers” (p. 5).

¹⁵ « On nous remercie mais on ne sait pas ce qui se passe ensuite ; on l’apprend par la bande. On peut évidemment aller sur le site, mais ce serait beaucoup de travail ; il faudrait au moins nous dire quand les résultats apparaissent sur le site web » ; “There is no feedback once job is done; I do not know if the proposal I reviewed was funded; I would like to know; I also would welcome an opportunity to learn on how assessment is being used, also what other assessors said.” This is done in other agencies. See, for instance, the Report of the British Council (p. 23) on the practice at the ESRC: “(once final award decisions have been reached) of sending reviewers a copy of all other reviewers’ comments on that proposal (in anonymised form) together with a letter informing them of the final funding outcome. This initiative has a number of objectives: improving feedback to reviewers; and helping reviewers to develop their peer-reviewing skills.”

- Provide online model assessments to external assessors.

RECOMMENDATION 3. Lighten and facilitate the work of external assessors.

- Generalize the use of electronic tools for performing assessments.
- Continue to use standardized forms for external assessment.

RECOMMENDATION 4. Retain and reward external assessors.

- Acknowledge annually by letter, and identify personally to universities, the contributions of their faculty in external assessments and engage universities in better assuming active institutional responsibility and recognition of this function.
- Invite excellent external assessors, after two or three years of service, to become formally members of a “SSHRC International College of Expert Reviewers” and to continue to serve as reviewers.
- Improve the feedback to external assessors, through automated electronic sharing of other assessors’ anonymized reviews and forwarding of information on the fate of the proposal(s) reviewed.

RECOMMENDATION 5. Make more transparent the selection and role of external assessors.

- Make public, on the SSHRC website, the criteria for selecting external assessors, their responsibilities and duties.
- Publish, on the SSHRC website, every year the list of external assessors who have served in the previous competitions.
- Publicize, on the SSHRC website, the membership of the “SSHRC International College of Expert Reviewers.”

2.2 Adjudication Committee Members

Adjudication committees assume the responsibility for final recommendations to SSHRC on the quality of the proposals submitted for funding. The selection of the members of these committees is then of the highest importance.

At SSHRC, that selection process is a complex affair, run by the program officer under the supervision of management. It involves the balancing of a diversity of criteria (type and size of institutions, regional representation, gender, language competences, disciplines/specialties coverage, etc.). Those numerous constraints and also the very rigorous rules in force to avoid even the appearance of conflict of interest, make the constitution of such committees a very demanding task. Each year, some of the very best scholars, even among those very willing to serve on an adjudication committee, have to be left out although they may be asked to review proposals as external assessors.

2.2.1 Assessing Committee Members

Nevertheless, interviews (as well as the web survey) have shown that the work of SSHRC adjudication committees is highly appreciated in the research community: only 16 per cent of respondents questioned the selection of the committee members that adjudicated their application(s),¹⁶ and given the low rates of success, this is a telling result.

This is in agreement with the views of a former upper-management officer at SSHRC who said in interview that “Very few members are frivolous or did not do their homework. Some

¹⁶ Q. 32b : Very dissatisfied: 5.5%; Dissatisfied: 10.9%.

were out of their depth at times; but all were involved.” As well, a university administrator who has been on thematic committees emphasized that he was very impressed “by the expertise deployed and by the presence and involvement of very senior people.” This seems also confirmed by observers: “the performance of committee members is high. They are overall keen to be there and do a good job [...] they want to be fair and give as many grants as possible because the quality is high.”

The panel fully concurs with these appreciations.

In 2008, 22 experts coming from other countries served as members on SRG adjudication committees (there will be at least 24 in 2009) and some 15 others did on MCRI or thematic committees (about eight per cent of all adjudicators).

This rise in number of international members in 2008 was, in a sense, a pilot experiment.

Though it is not seen as a necessary move by all our interviewed interlocutors, it is however seen as a positive. In the words of someone who has been a SRG Chair and has served on the Council of SSHRC, “The truth is that I have enough confidence in the Canadian community to rank proposals. But I do see it as an important international validation for SSHRC’s political profile. But we already got that through from external assessors.”

Interviews conducted for the panel, as well as a survey of last year’s international members conducted by a SSHRC program officer, have shown that the experience is globally very positive; calling, however for more extensive or systematic preliminary explanation, instructions and support.¹⁷

2.2.2 Selecting Committee Members

The new practice of sending an advanced notice of intent to apply for a research grant to SSHRC’s office should now give more time to balance the composition of committees and choose their new members according to the variety of proposals submitted.

In the words of one manager, “It is tough job to constitute good committees. Due diligence is required. Where the program officer is experienced, better committee slates are generated, including members with breadth and maturity. [...] Selection needs continued attention. Some program officer use contacts in the community to good use. I am not sure that this is a normal, that is, generalized, process. There may be need for refinement at SSHRC here.”

As was the case for selecting external assessors, Chairs and members of committees are of two minds regarding their role in suggesting names for committee membership. Most Chairs

¹⁷ “The presence of the international member was interesting. He was great, but he had to change his scores a lot. He was much too generous, he had to lower all his scores. But he was sensitive to cultural differences, learned quickly and contributed a lot in discussing the substance and method of proposals” (member, SRG); “At times, it seems very difficult for them [international members] to understand our criteria and to stick to them. It is manageable, but it requires more attention and time. It is clear that good researchers coming from the UK or Australia have something different to contribute and we have to welcome that.” (Chair, MCRI); “I talked to a few of them at coffee breaks. They were really impressed by the SSHRC process. But some of them had not really done their homework and should not be invited next year (Chair, SRG).

interviewed prefer not to be involved.¹⁸ They would not object, however, to suggesting names for future committees.

Selection criteria

As mentioned earlier, the set of criteria for selecting committee members is diverse and complex. In the words of a very experienced program officer who sent us a note after being interviewed:

“There are a number of possible determinants one looks for in a potential committee member:

- a solid record of refereed publications;
- previous participation on a SSHRC or other type of academic adjudication committee;
- editorial experience with a refereed journal;
- a history of successful grant applications and grant management;
- a history of assessing SSHRC applications as an assessor;
- experience in organizing workshops and conferences;
- level of bilingualism;
- the expertise(s) of the prospective committee member(s) have to be such that they fit into the mosaic of expertise represented on any given committee;
- in the case of many strategic programs like RDI (Research Development Initiatives) and IOF (International Opportunities Fund), the prospective committee must have the necessary multi-disciplinary perspective to evaluate the wide variety of disciplinary and multi-disciplinary proposals submitted to these types of program; this characteristic is all the more important because there are no external assessors in the majority of strategic programs (this is due in part to the simple fact that the division does not have the adequate manpower to devote to the time consuming process of finding expert assessors: for instance, it is not surprising to find strategic grant officers managing four adjudication committees with a file load of 250 files. Moreover, there is the fact that it would be an extremely time-consuming effort to find assessors with the needed multi-disciplinary perspective in some programs when it is already extremely difficult to come by the required committee members for those very same programs. Lastly, a program like RDI has five specific criteria for evaluating the initial building blocks of research which allow a multi-disciplinary team of experienced researchers to judge an RDI project on those terms; in contrast Standard Research Grants deal with advanced mature disciplinary projects which require the expertise of a disciplinary committee and the advice of external assessors).

¹⁸ “I was contacted to suggest names for committee members to the program officer. I think that is a useful practice, because it is when you are active in the field that you know people, the good people” (interview, committee member, SRG); “Chairs should not recommend members. That would lead to nepotism” (Postdoctoral Fellowships committee); « Je n’ai pas été consulté sur le choix des membres et des assesseurs, et je préfère ne pas l’être. Un grand danger c’est l’*advocacy*. Cela deviendrait trop incestueux. » (Chair, MCRI); « C’est le rôle du CRSH pas celui des membres ou des présidents de comités; attention aux jeux de préférence et copinages ! » (Chair SRG) ; « Je n’ai jamais été consultée sur la composition de mon comité et c’est mieux ainsi. La présidente doit rester neutre ; il est important que les membres sachent qu’elle n’est pas impliquée dans le choix des membres. » (Chair SRG).

In creating a committee, the program officer must ensure that it is well balanced in terms of region, language, gender, international representation and multi-disciplinarity. In some cases the committee may also have to be multi-sectoral in nature given the objectives of the program in question. This adds to the determinants listed above and it makes committee creation a very complex task and very fine balancing act that requires a great deal of preparation and very fine tuned judgment on the part of the program officer.”

Some of the criteria mentioned here clearly concern the thematic programs, rather than the SRG program for instance, but the approach remains largely the same.

Disciplinary coverage

On the whole, members and Chairs generally agree that the coverage of required disciplines or specialties is well managed in their own committee.

Some of them point-out, however, that because of the strict SSHRC rules on conflicts of interest (see below) it happens that when a member has to go out of the room, the expertise level for evaluating a given file might become much lower. And this happens often, given that one is excluded from the deliberations each time a proposal from one’s university comes under review. Redundancy makes for more robust decisions, but the size of a committee ought also to remain manageable.¹⁹

Where a very large number of proposals is reviewed, such as in a Postdoctoral Fellowships committee, expert coverage is a real challenge.

Some SRG committees are more strictly disciplinary; others include related fields and adjudicate proposals from a few different disciplines (see List in Appendix 7); still others are more inter-disciplinary with proposals falling in-between disciplines or bringing together two or more disciplines, as is the case for the SRG Inter-disciplinary and multi-disciplinary studies committee, and thematic committees which are, so to speak, inter-disciplinary by nature.

The need for variety and coverage might also vary according to the dynamics of a discipline. One interviewee pointed out that “in linguistics there has been rapid change in the past five years, especially regarding methods. A gap might be created between younger and older researchers. There is a generational difference. About a third of the proposals come from younger researchers, the others from more senior ones. However the committee needs the expertise of people who understand what it is to manage a research project. This is rarely the case with newcomers.”

Younger scholars as Members

In fact, regarding younger researchers, some feel that their presence on committees is essential, “though for most of them there are dimensions of proposals that offer special difficulty: for some, evaluation of CVs/resumes is a challenge, for others it is budget, in other cases, they just are still too narrow in their expertise” (SRG committee member). In the same vein, a former high-level manager at SSHRC estimates that “in the case of assistant

¹⁹ It also happens than in some fields where there are very few researchers applying every year. Slavic languages having been mentioned for an example. It is difficult to have experts on the committee. This makes the breadth of learning of members and especially external assessments then all the more important. In the words of a SRG committee member: « l’ouverture à d’autres disciplines, la souplesse interdisciplinaire, la capacité d’écoute sont des qualités essentielles pour jouer correctement son rôle en comité ».

professors, it is probably too early in their research career because of the breadth of proposals that committees have to examine.” However, an observer insisted that it is “important to have balance of seasoned and new researchers; be careful not to devalue what younger ones bring to committee.”

The issue seems less contentious with Doctoral and Postdoctoral Fellowships committees, but also requires caution :

“Doctoral-level choice of members worked extremely well. There you can have a mix of seasoned and younger members and it is for doctoral because young faculty usually they are far enough from their doctoral time. But you really need a good number of seasoned, particularly at the postdoctoral fellowship level because newish scholars have too high expectations, they often are too hard on files of post doc. Sometimes younger members get too engaged»” (Postdoctoral Fellowships committee Chair).

“Younger researchers absolutely have to be on committees. Some, not all committees. Newer scholars tend to be eager. [...] Older scholars often have insights on what can be done. But it is not that obvious that younger scholars are necessarily more open to transformational and risky research. Some older are adventurous. Others quite conservative, tradition is best, but some really are entrepreneurial. It varies and is not a matter of age. Younger scholars tend to question more, not necessarily challenge more” (program officer, Fellowships program).

Some program committees generally require special types of members. Chairs seem to be satisfied :

« Le comité est composé de chercheurs et d’administrateurs universitaires, par exemple des doyens et vice-doyens : c’est la bonne composition ; dans notre cas, il n’y a pas d’autres types de membres externes souhaitables » (committee Chair, Major Collaborative Research Initiatives)

“Depending on the proposals submitted we may have different needs, for instance someone who is aboriginal or familiar with aboriginal research; this can apply to other areas. We have to be careful to be equitable in these circumstances. If someone is very interested or active in an area, he can be very influential on the committee, systematically too positive or too negative, and this may be really damaging. Picking the right people is of the essence” (committee Chair, Community-University Research Alliances).

Language competencies

Some degree of bilingualism is seen as crucial by most persons interviewed, enough at least to read and follow the discussions during committee work. Each member is expected to use the language she/he is most comfortable with. In that regard, it is generally thought that SSHRC does better than other comparable agencies, even in Canada.

It remains, however, a constraining requirement. It excludes for instance some top researchers who, though they can act as external assessors for proposals they can read, cannot serve on adjudication committees.

At times some exceptions are made, which require that the Chair or the program officer act as summarizers in translation during meetings. It is a rare and certainly not ideal situation.

This being said, interviews show that observers, Chairs and committee members, generally see this as a real issue but also as an aspect of committee work that is reasonably well managed.²⁰ Moreover, given the very similar success rates of proposals coming from researchers choosing to communicate with SSHRC either in French or in English, the panel is of the opinion that indeed it does not appear that this is a critical issue.

Foreign members

As mentioned earlier, starting in 2007, foreign scholars have been more systematically invited to become members of adjudication committees and the initiative has been deemed positive.

Those of our interlocutors who have served on committees of the Canada Foundation for Innovation (CFI), which relies largely upon international peer-review assessors and committee members for its evaluations, have been impressed by the quality of the work done in these circumstances, as well as by the legitimacy and credibility it confers on funding decisions.

In the words of a high-level officer of a Canadian scholarly association, “The CFI process shows benefit of internationalization. In a way, it relieves Canadian scholars and it validates the process; it also raises the bar on level of validation.”²¹

Indeed, many appreciate the presence of foreign members on adjudication committees as a way to extend the visibility of SSHRC, as well as of Canadian scholarship, by networking more intensively with excellent researchers from foreign countries.

Stability/Turnover

Committee members who have served a first year in a useful and efficient way are invited again to serve for a second and third year. Three years is the usual term. “This is the optimal number of years on committee: you want to have some continuity, at least one half of members coming back” (committee member, SRG).

As Table 7 below shows, there is, however, a very high turnover.

²⁰ “Language is not really a problem. People are very careful not to serve if their other language is not good enough. One should use the language he is more comfortable with” (Chair, Postdoctoral Fellowships Committee); “It is challenging for me to follow conversation; I am grateful that I had not too many French files to evaluate this year” (member, SRG); “One assumes that it gets easier to put together committees relative to language. One hopes that the comfort level is moving up. I remember having colleagues I regarded as ideal for adjudication committee, but were not bilingual. But so long as you can hang on the rope, it is OK. It is enough to understand, you do not have to talk in that language” (Chair, SRG).

²¹ Another high-level manager indicated to us: “At CFI, I have seen people from Harvard, Princeton, MIT, etc. doing their job; it sends a powerful message. Up to 50% of international members seems to me acceptable.” Others (including some in SSHRC management) think, however, that “International members may be a double-edged sword; too many, you lose national culture, expertise on geographical relevance, etc..”

Table 7. Returning Canadian and Foreign Committee Members, Standard Research Grants, 2008-09

Committee	Total Number of Members in 2008		Returning Number of Members in 2009	
	Canadian	Foreign	Canadian	Foreign
410-01	6	0	1	0
410-02	11	1	5	0
410-03	9	0	4	0
410-05	6	1	2	1
410-07	12	1	5	0
410-08	9	1	7	0
410-09	8	1	3	1
410-10	8	1	2	1
410-12	11	1	2	0
410-15	9	1	3	0
410-16	8	1	1	1
410-17	8	1	3	0
410-18	7	1	0	0
410-19	8	1	3	0
410-20	12	1	5	1
410-21	7	1	2	0
410-22	5	1	2	1
410-23	8	1	1	0
410-24	10	1	4	1
410-25	6	1	2	0
410-26	9	1	2	0
410-27	7	1	3	1
410-28	9	1	6	1
410-29	7	0	2	0
Total (n)	200	21	70	9
Total (%)	100	100	35	43

This excessive turnover does not come from people not having played their role correctly. It rather depends on scholars being on-leave or on sabbatical, or becoming in conflict of interest because they have a proposal evaluated that year. Again, SSHRC has very stringent conflict of interest rules, so that one is not allowed to stay on a committee the year one is applying for a grant, whereas at most other agencies it is deemed sufficient for a member to leave the room when his/her file is being processed by the committee.

High turnover means a higher number of less experienced members, and it may account for excessive “peer review fatigue.” The burden generally diminishes with years of experience, and stability in committees also warrants better consistency.

2.2.3 Acceptance to Serve as Committee Member

Much has been written on, and said about, in Canada and abroad about “peer-review fatigue.” This is indeed the case at SSHRC.

Data for 2009 indicate that to recruit the new members required to complete the membership of 23 of the 24 SRG committees (see Appendix 8), and fill 111 vacant memberships, 441 persons had to be contacted. With the exception of the linguistics committee where the three scholars contacted accepted, percentage of refusals is never below 33 per cent and climbs as high as 92 per cent. Indeed, the median refusal rate is 73 per cent. This implies a

tremendous burden of unrewarded work for program officers, and pleads for practices that would seriously reduce the turnover rate in committees and increase their stability. There is no doubt that this implies a serious strain on peer-review system and that this is an issue that ought to be addressed in priority.

According to a former upper-level manager at SSHRC: “The culture of stewardship and generosity may be stronger at some other agencies. There may be two factors: low success rates that make people less indebted to SSHRC for their career and insufficient or inadequate communication with the rank and file. At some other agencies I know, members of committees would visit every community in Canada in a given field over three years. It is immensely effective in building knowledge and sense of community. No doubt at times there is need to do damage control, but this the lesser of two evils. It is hugely effective.”

We noticed already that a high proportion of those approached are unable or unwilling to act as an external assessor. As we will see below, the workload is much heavier for those who serve on adjudication committees. They may have to read closely and assess more than 30 detailed proposals and read as much as they can of the other 70 or more files that will be discussed at the committee meeting. In the case of SRG, this meeting may last from three to five days and requires travelling to, and staying in, Ottawa. Some of the committee members interviewed estimated that each year they serve, they have to dedicate, at a minimum, two and a half weeks to these tasks. This is indeed extremely demanding.

Moreover, as mentioned earlier in the case of external assessors, this is very rarely recognized institutionally and only a few large universities accept to diminish the teaching load in recognition of services rendered to the research community and the public good. It is almost never recognized institutionally for promotion or tenure.

This aspect of the situation is not specific to Canada. In its recent report, the British Academy for instance, emphasized that: “Each university in receipt of public funds should accept an obligation to encourage its researchers to engage in these activities, recognizing that peer review is an essential part of the fabric of academic life.” Indeed, each university should encourage its faculty to participate in peer review and lighten the administrative tasks of those who accept to serve on adjudication committees.

Adjudicators are not financially compensated for their services at SSHRC, unless they are self-employed or come from the private sector, and their participation would entail personal financial costs.

In the case of foreign scholars invited to be members of adjudication committees, because 12 of the 22 who have served last year also accepted more recently to answer a questionnaire, we have some understanding of their predicament:²² “International members found their experience to be extremely enriching and interesting. They were impressed with the quality of the peer review at SSHRC and praised the adjudication process. At the same time, they noted that the workload was extremely heavy. If some were pleased with the adjudication experience and did not expect an honorarium, most international members expressed discouragement due to the lack of funds to remunerate them.”

²² Synthesis of responses of *International Members Participation in the 2008 Standard Research Grants Adjudication*, [SSHRC internal document], June 12, 2008, two pages.

The panel is of the opinion that, in the present situation of financial stress particularly, it does not seem appropriate to take funds away from grants. Moreover, the experience in other countries does not indicate, in any case, that monetary compensation of adjudicators would significantly improve the situation.²³ Finally, the panel also strongly thinks that lightening the workload of committee members, providing better feedback to them and using significant symbolic rewards remain more promising as effective and appropriate paths. International intellectual collaboration is currently being strongly developed in the European Union, and researchers are encouraged to extend their international networking. It might be worth it for SSHRC to explore with European Union authorities' ways to facilitate cooperation in that regard.

Reduction of their workload (see below sections 3.2.4, 4.1, 4.4 and 4.6) and better institutional and more public recognition for the services rendered might encourage committee members to serve up to five years. The process would greatly benefit; it would lead to increased stability and consistency in committee work, and would also reduce the need for recruiting large numbers of new committee members each year. These five years of service might be interrupted a given year, when a member is also an applicant and cannot, therefore, serve on the relevant adjudication committee.

2.2.4 Recommendations Relevant to the Selection of Committee Members

RECOMMENDATION 6. To increase rates of acceptance to serve on adjudication committees and to reduce turnover, cut the workload for members, reduce the number of days spent in committee work in Ottawa, and revise the rules on conflict of interest.

For ways of implementation, see Recommendations 17, 20, 21, 22, 24 and 28 below.

RECOMMENDATION 7. Extend to five years, not necessarily consecutively, the normal tenure on adjudication committees.

RECOMMENDATION 8. Reward and retain committee members.

- Engage universities to accept service on SSHRC adjudication committees as a form of administrative duty and to release, accordingly, from administrative tasks their faculty members serving on these committee.
- Invite committee members, after a second year of excellent service, to formally become members of the new “SSHRC International College of Expert Reviewers” and to continue to act as adjudicators.

RECOMMENDATION 9. Make more public and transparent the selection and role of adjudication committee members.²⁴

- Make public, on the SSHRC website, the criteria for selecting committee members, their responsibilities and duties.

²³ See, for instance, the German survey; in Hornbstel and Obrecht (2007), p. 16-20.

²⁴ An opinion expressed in an interview is worth quoting here regarding the basis for this recommendations: “I would suggest that we will have to become increasingly transparent on the process of constructing these committees. Adjudication committees, we read in our literature, ‘are appointed by SSHRC.’ Yes, but what is the process effectively? It is that we rely a lot the program officers who have generally proven to be very competent. But our community, I am not sure that it has a good understanding of the role of program officers. [...] Training manuals for program officers are not on the web. Would it be useful to have something like that on the web?”

- Publicize, on the SSHRC website, the membership of the “SSHRC International College of Expert Reviewers.”

2.3 Committee Chairs

Though interviews have shown, among people who have held this function, a broad spectrum of interpretations of the responsibilities involved (and we will come back to that later), it is common knowledge that Chairs have a key role to play in ensuring the quality and integrity of deliberations and decision-making during adjudication committee meetings. This is indeed the case in all granting agencies.

2.3.1 Assessing the Chairs

It does not seem that Chairs’ functions and performance have ever been the object of any specific assessment analysis and report at SSHRC.

Dysfunctional Chairs seem to have been the exception. According to the program officers interviewed (in their judgment), only two or three of the some 24 Chairs in recent years were weak in their chairing function. On the contrary, most Chairs seem to range from very good to excellent (performance often improving with experience) and, according to the Chairs interviewed, all of them have enjoyed the responsibility despite the significant workload that comes with it.

2.3.2 Selecting Committee Chairs

The process for selecting committee Chairs is not entirely explicit. As more than one Chair responded in interviews: “How was I selected for Chair? I have no idea at all; I got e-mail from the program officer; I asked a few questions and I said yes; I assumed that it was because of previous external assessments I wrote and because I have received grants.”

The criteria for selecting Chairs seem to be, nevertheless, widely understood the same way, according to our interviews. They are a mix of abilities, experience and personality.

The characteristics that make a good Chair have been summarized in this way by an experienced observer: “The Chair has to be able to summarize, to make people move through, keep them focused, make them respect all rules and regulations, apply criteria fully, insure equity and consistency.”

They generally are senior scholars who have already served on the same adjudication committee (but not always) and they have to be really functional in both languages (this seems almost always to be the case).

The Chair is chosen by the program officer responsible for a given committee who has seen its members in action during previous years and knows the reputation of different scholars. Supervision from management seemed to be exercised in proportion to the previous experience and record of the program officer.

2.3.3 Accepting to Serve as Chair

Although those who have served as Chairs positively appreciate their experience, it has proven quite difficult to recruit for that role.

According to the information provided by an experienced program officer (a team leader) the rate of refusal is around 65 per cent. This makes the problem acute at times, because the pool from which to select is much smaller than in the case of committee members.

2.3.4 Recommendation Relevant to the Selection of Chairs

RECOMMENDATION 10. Make the criteria and process for selecting Chairs more explicit, transparent and public.

PART 3. INSTRUCTIONS AND GUIDANCE

The different phases of the adjudication process in the case of SSHRC's main grant program—the Standard Research Grants (SRG)—are illustrated in Appendix 3 at the end of this report.

Some variations occur in the processes adopted for some thematic programs (where, for instance, room may be made in some cases for a supplementary step to assess social relevance or significance of proposals before adjudication decision-making). It is also the case for fellowships programs, where letters of appraisal from professors are substituted for evaluations from external assessors.

However, the general logic of peer review remains the same for all SSHRC programs. Where differences matter, they will be specified in the following parts of this report that adopt a generic approach primarily based upon analyses and findings regarding the SRG program.

3.1 Instructions to, and Support of, Applicants

Clarity of documentation on programs and specific guidance for applicants have been the object of increasing attention and activity at SSHRC.²⁵

Program officers travel every year throughout Canada, meeting “SSHRC university administrators”—officers locally responsible for research services—and also groups of researchers and potential applicants. In some cases when a new program is launched, it has happened that lead researchers involved in the definition of the program, as was the case some years ago for aboriginal studies, will be invited to make presentations in some universities.

Interviews indicated that reviewers and Chairs generally agree on the relevance, quality and clarity of instructions and guidelines to applicants.

It seems, however, to have happened at times, when new programs were quickly launched, that the documentation sent to institutions and potential applicants lacked in precision.²⁶ Moreover, in some institutions, where support to new researchers is still underdeveloped, potential applicants may need a better understanding of what makes a proposal successful. It was suggested more than once that model proposals should be available on the SSHRC website for each program. Indeed this is a practice espoused by some granting agencies.

Designing a realistic and adequate budget seems a real challenge for some researchers, especially for newcomers and again in universities where little institutional support is provided.²⁷

²⁵ See Science-Metrix (2005).

²⁶ From an interview with the Chair of a strategic program committee: “Information was sent out defining the program to applicants, but then we got some very weird stuff. [...] Sometimes we feel that it is just misunderstanding, and it is lots of work for the program officer to get back to applicants and explain. Much time, energy and enthusiasm are lost, that maybe better preparation and management would have saved time and effort for everyone.” A MCRI Chair also emphasized that the definition of this program in SSHRC documents, “seems to encourage gigantism and inflation. It does not help applicants...”

²⁷ A thematic committee Chair suggested in her interview that guidelines should be made very specific about budgeting. She also mentioned having recently participated in the United States in a six-week institute, funded by the National Science Foundation, where one of the much-appreciated courses was on budget preparation. It seemed to her that travelling workshops on budget might prove to be a very productive initiative to consider.

Many interviewees emphasized that universities themselves have responsibilities toward their researchers, particularly their younger ones without any practical experience in “grantsmanship.” The panel fully concurs.

Grant-writing skills, particularly regarding feasible research objectives, theoretical clarity, cogency in methodology, precision and realism in budgeting need to be learned. What SSHRC can do in that regard is limited, as many respondents emphasized, and rightly so. Some universities really support their researchers. With members of their faculty who have served as assessors and adjudicators at SSHRC, some even set “mirror committees” to help researchers improve their proposals. Such exercises help applicants to understand what it means, in really practically terms, to go through external assessment and committee evaluation. SSHRC can not assume that responsibility throughout the country but it might usefully provide tools to support institutions in developing good practices in that regard.

3.1.1 Recommendation Relevant to the Instructions to, and Support of, Applicants

RECOMMENDATION 11. Put on the SSHRC website, for each program, examples of outstanding and successful fellowship and grant proposals.

3.2 Instructions to Peers

3.2.1 Instructions to External Assessors

We have underlined earlier the crucial and necessary role of external assessors. To perform their job well, these peers need very clear indications on SSHRC’s needs and expectations. That does not seem to always be the case. This is why instructions and guidelines to external assessors, as well as the level of satisfaction of adjudication committees using their assessment reports, need to be continuously monitored and eventually improved.

A standardized form with instructions is provided to external assessors, but only in the case of the SRG program. For all the other programs that require external assessments (a few do not), instructions are only provided by the program officer.

It has been observed (information provided by a program officer and team leader) that before such SRG forms were introduced three years ago, many evaluations showed traces of incorporating recycled comments from evaluations made in other circumstances. Assessments were of very different lengths and their quality extremely unequal, creating very serious problems for committees.

The introduction of such forms appears to have been very well received from researchers as well as institutions (“a truly rare instance for SSHRC initiatives of this type” commented a university officer) and it is generally considered that the quality and usefulness of assessments have consequently much increased. External assessors interviewed confirm this appreciation.

3.2.2 Recommendation Relevant to the Instructions to External Assessors

RECOMMENDATION 12. Make public, on the SSHRC website, the instructions to external assessors and extend the use of standardized forms to all programs involving external assessors.

3.2.3 Instructions to Adjudication Committee Members Prior to Meetings

One is not born a peer reviewer. Some granting agencies seem to forget that basic and elementary truth. Indeed, the British Academy stated recently, “We were struck by the extent to which there is little attention to training in peer review.”²⁸

The panel is pleased to report that this is not the case for SSHRC. Effective guidance and support is indeed provided to members of adjudication committees and steps are taken previous to committee meetings to ensure the quality and equity of evaluations and decision-making.

Guidance to Committee Members and Chairs

A manual provides, to adjudication committee members and Chairs, information on SSHRC, principles for adjudication (including rules regarding confidentiality, conflict of interest, ethics and integrity in research, non-discrimination policy, and appeals and complaints), the role and functioning of adjudication committees, specificities of the relevant program, eligibility of applications, the process of evaluation and adjudication itself (including criteria and scorings), and the reviewing of budget proposals. In interviews, committee members and Chairs have all agreed on the usefulness of these sets of instructions, though many found them a bit heavy reading.²⁹

For Chairs, information meetings are held in December and January and they are invited to attend one of these to learn more on what is expected from them. It is also the occasion to meet face-to-face with the program officer they will work with. Chairs interviewed react very positively to these initiatives. However, these meetings focus essentially on policy issues, the administrative process, rules and regulations, and many Chairs have suggested that more attention be paid to the conduct of adjudication committee meetings and to best practices in chairing. Indeed, some experienced Chairs even mentioned that they would be pleased to cooperate with SSHRC officers in developing such elements for training.³⁰

Preliminary Teleconference

In the case of some programs, preliminary teleconferences are held to answer questions and eventually better explain rules and criteria to members of adjudication committees. This is highly appreciated.³¹

For some programs, the core of the teleconference is an exercise in the calibration of scores regarding each of the criteria applying to the proposals adjudicators have to read and evaluate. A limited number of proposals (usually three) are selected by the Chair and the program officer of the committee and evaluated by all members of the committee before the

²⁸ British Academy (2007), p. 24.

²⁹ For instance: « Les documents, les instructions du CRSH sont très complets, peut-être trop, mais toute l’information est là » (committee Chair, SRG) ; « Le manuel d’instructions pour jouer le rôle de président est beaucoup trop volumineux : on ne lit pas tout cela ; en tout cas, il faudrait trouver moyen de résumer l’essentiel sur une page : responsabilités et conseils sur la gestion de la chose » (other committee chair, SRG).

³⁰ The National Institute of Health has posted on its website a “best practices” document for its Scientific Review Officers and Chairs. It provides in less than four pages the essentials on the selection of chairpersons, their responsibilities before and during meetings, the meetings logistics and procedures to be practiced by the Chairs, and finally their post-meeting responsibilities.

³¹ “We have one conference call first to explain what you have to do. The range for grading files is given by the program officer and explained to committee members who have to comply. The organization at SSHRC, compared to elsewhere, is really exceptional” (Chair, postdoctoral committee).

teleconference where the scores are then compared and discussed. This calibration exercise, going beyond just sharing information on scoring, provides a form of guidance that is much appreciated by all the participants we have interviewed.³² It seems to be done systematically only for SRG, Major Collaborative Research Initiatives (MCRI) and Scholarly Journals adjudication committees.

Specific training for international members.

The feedback received from last year's international members in SRG adjudication committees provides some insight on their needs in terms of guidance³³: "International members found the teleconference very helpful. They made a few suggestions: to improve our guidelines to the evaluation of team applications, to explain more clearly in the Committee Members' Manual who is considered as internal assessor."

"It was observed that it would be useful for all the international members to have an orientation session with information on the different agencies/institutions that grant funding to researchers in Canada. Information regarding the Canadian academic context and research environment would also be useful. Also, the importance of the student training/supervision component in Canada should be emphasized in the orientation document."

3.2.4 Reading Requirements

The workload for committee members is very substantial. For new members of adjudication committees, the task may sometimes seem quite daunting. Interviews have shown that at least two issues arise here: first, the workload; and then the exact nature of the reading requirements:

"The task seems overwhelming the first time when boxes arrive; I did not the first time realize I had not to read all the files; I had not realized you do not have to do that unless you are Chairs; beyond the files you have to read thoroughly and assess, it is enough to scan and read the summaries" (committee member, SRG);

"Each reader had over 30 files to evaluate. The number of French files makes a difference, it takes me more time to read; the job takes me all my non-teaching time; one year, our committee met in Ottawa for a full week; in another committee another year we did it in three days» (committee member, SRG);

"My first year, we had 220 applications in my committee. Despite terrific Chair and program officer, it was a difficult committee to start with. It was in fact a negative experience; I thought the process was being compromised. The next year I accepted to Chair but under the condition that the committee was split in two" (committee Chair, SRG).

³² "The conference call is very useful and important; one of the members could not make it; when we met later, it turned out that he was the member whose scores were most out of line" (Chair, SRG); « La conférence téléphonique préalable a pour la calibration une fonction extrêmement importante ; elle fournit un cadre de référence, C'est une sorte de cours de formation : avec l'agent de programme, le président choisit 3 dossiers un fort, un moyen et un faible. Tous les membres lisent les trois dossiers et donnent leurs scores. En conférence on discute les écarts. Une erreur cependant dans la façon de précéder : l'exercice a lieu au mois de janvier ; les gens reçoivent des piles de dossiers et commencent à les travailler, mais la séance de calibration vient ensuite, c'est trop tard ; il faudrait commencer calibration beaucoup plus tôt avec quelques dossiers qui seraient les seuls envoyés d'abord; ensuite ils recevraient les grosses piles de documents » (Chair, SRG).

³³"Synthesis of responses of International Members Participation in the 2008 Standard Research Grants Adjudication" (SSHRC internal document) June 12, 2008, two pages.

In fact, some committee members or Chairs told us in interviews that one should not be assigned more than 20 to 25 files as a primary reader and that one should not be expected to look seriously at more than 60 to 70 files assigned to other readers. This seems reasonable.

In thematic or strategic programs, the situation is often very close to that experienced in SRG committees. A program like the Community-University Research Alliances (CURA) is deemed more selective, but some years we had over 100 applications. The workload is not that different” (committee Chair, CURA).

As we emphasized, the workload is most probably a significant factor in the high rate of refusals to serve and with “peer-review fatigue.”

The number of SRG adjudication committees has been increased in recent years, up to 24 for this year. Grant committee structure is something one might want to investigate more thoroughly, keeping in mind however that committees that are too small and too specialized are at odds with the clear trend exhibited by researchers themselves toward inter-disciplinary research programs, and might risk encouraging inertia rather than transformative and more risky endeavours.

The issue of workload is related to that of the depth of knowledge and understanding of each proposal required from all members of a given adjudication committee. Interviews revealed in that regard that behaviour varies a great deal and that what is expected from each committee member is not uniformly and unambiguously understood.

Indeed, the manuals for adjudicators do not specifically ask committee members to read all the applications submitted to their evaluation committee.³⁴ We have been told by a program officer that “generally officers ask that members read at least the summaries of the files for which they are not Readers A or B. For very large committees we cannot expect more than that. It is different for smaller committees. This question is generally raised at the meeting bringing together Chairs and also at the time of the calibration teleconference.” Be that as it may, even for committees of similar size, the practice is not uniform.³⁵

A member of the upper management at SSHRC told us in interview that “the Chairs ought to read very closely at least all the files in the ‘grey zone’;” that is, those that are borderline in terms of likelihood of being funded, given the scores they have received from the assigned readers before the meeting. This is certainly not universally understood. A Chair stressed in an interview that his job is to manage the meeting, the exchanges between members and move towards consensual closing of discussion: “that’s my business: I have to see that business is

³⁴ See for instance *Manual for Adjudication Committee Members* – November 2007- pp. 18-19.

³⁵ “I would like to have more time to read proposals; sometimes committee members would like to review them all but it is not possible, we have to somewhat rely on other members. But that’s why we have a committee, and readers A and B who do in-depth reading and assessment and report to committee. And then it is my job as chair to make sure that we have a real open discussion if need be. People may be of different views, not of the same views as those of readers A or B, and you start asking to committee and you come to consensus. It is a very good process” (thematic program Chair); « Le système avec les lecteurs A et B qui font rapport au comité, suivis d’une éventuelle discussion de tout le comité fonctionne bien ; les autres membres lisent peut-être les sommaires ; 25 à 30 dossiers c’est déjà assez lourd et compliqué. Mais lors de la discussion, les lecteurs doivent être challengés par le président quand il y a ambiguïté ; c’est important de poser des questions pour lancer la discussion ; la discussion se fait, pas vraiment générale avec la participation de tous les membres la plupart du temps, mais c’est OK » (committee Chair, SRG).

done and done fairly; but I know nothing of any of the proposals; I read none” (committee Chair, SRG).

The panel believes that the reading obligations of adjudication committee members is so basic and fundamental in the conduct of peer review that they ought to be clearly spelled out and then monitored to verify actual implementation.

3.2.5 Rules Regarding Sharing of Information

The manuals provided to committees are clear regarding confidentiality and we have not uncovered any problem regarding the respect of confidentiality in our examination of the peer-review process at SSHRC.

There might be, however, another aspect in the management of information, on which the manuals are silent, that would, however, require specific attention. Indeed, a few interviews revealed ambiguity in the minds of some involved in the peer-review process regarding rules applying to what information is to be considered legitimate when discussing a file.³⁶

When asked in an interview about that issue a member of the upper-level management team of SSHRC strongly stressed that “Only the information provided by applicants in their proposals ought to be considered by assessors and adjudicators, excluding all other kind of information on the person and his/her proposal that these actors in the peer-review process may have knowledge about from elsewhere. If some exceptional situation makes an assessor or adjudicator feeling morally obligated to share any further knowledge, he should not speak freely about it, but first report it to the chair or the program officer who, eventually, might want to consult management on how to handle the situation so created.” This, it seems to us, is the proper attitude and corresponding guidelines should be introduced in the manuals.

3.2.6 Recommendations Relevant to the Instructions to Committees Prior to Meetings

RECOMMENDATION 13. For easier consultation, complement the reference manuals for committee members with a two-pager schematically summarizing responsibilities, steps to be taken and rules to follow.

RECOMMENDATION 14. Develop, with seasoned Chairs, a handbook for Chairs based on best practices in chairing adjudication meetings.

RECOMMENDATION 15. Continue to use the annual meetings for Chairs to explain policies and regulations, but emphasize also what is expected specifically from Chairs and the best practices in conducting adjudication committee meetings.

³⁶ “Information not in the proposal, about person, performance etc.: should not be allowed; it happens, but minimally; the application should stand by itself” (committee member, SRG); “I never saw a case where inappropriate information was brought to the committee. If people are well chosen on committee, they will stick to the factual. [...] But the safe thing is to focus on the information in the proposals. Chairs need to reassert that rule” (committee chair, SRG); “Regarding information, we should stick to the file. I heard this I heard that, this is not verifiable. A few times things were introduced, acknowledged by Chair who pointed out that it was not in the file and could not be taken into account. He was right” (committee member, SRG).

RECOMMENDATION 16. Extend to all programs the practice of holding an instruction and score calibration teleconference with all members prior to committee meeting.

RECOMMENDATION 17. Make more precise and clear in manuals, and other instructions, the obligations of adjudication committee members and Chairs regarding the reading and analysis of proposals.

- Members, when acting as designated readers of a set of proposals, will read these files thoroughly and rate them according to their detailed analytical findings.
- Members are also expected to closely read the summary of all the other proposals submitted to their committee.
- Chairs are expected to read the summary of all the proposals submitted to their committee. They are also expected to read the complete files positioned in the mid-range (so-called 4-A) by the scores given to them by the designated readers and that, therefore, call for thorough discussion by the full committee.

RECOMMENDATION 18. Make clear and public, on the SSHRC website and in documentation to committee members, guidelines applying to the disclosure and discussion of information not included in proposals.

3.3 Managing Conflicts of Interest

The panel wants here, from the start, to state that laxity in managing conflicts of interest is definitely not a problem at SSHRC.

Rules regarding conflict of interest are paid much attention at SSHRC. These are spelled out in the manuals and all assessors and adjudicators, even observers, have to sign a formal document in that regard.³⁷

This seems to be strictly managed and we know of no case of appeal where an adjudicator's decision would have been reversed for reason of conflict of interest. In fact, if there is an issue, probably defensively produced, to prevent or counter criticisms, it is that the process is over-managed.

No doubt, the management of conflicts of interests is of the utmost importance to ensure justice and equity in peer-review evaluation and decision-making and to preserve the credibility of the process and the institution. One ought not to condone any laxity here, but on the other hand, it should not be overdone; calling into question the efficiency of the system and the contribution of the some of best-qualified peers. This would be self-defeating.

³⁷ “Conflicts of interests, it worked like clockwork» (interview, committee Chair, SRG); “In my view, conflicts of interests that is never an issue. Guidelines are clear; people act properly. [...]. It is not a critical issue” (committee Chair, SRG and also later a board member); “Conflicts of interests are pretty well taken care of. In post doc meeting you leave for files in your department. And you do no ranking for your university. It is the same for the doctoral committee. In the mail you are asked to declare conflicts. I did with a student that had failed with me and left for another university. SSHRC is quite scrupulous about it” (Chair, Postdoctoral Fellowships committee); “The program officer knows very well the academic scene, who has worked with whom, etc. members of committee sometimes were not as knowledgeable about that. In Canada there is a close community; where to draw the line? Exclude when same department ok; but in a large university people may not know each others. I think it is overdone. Manual details well what is a conflict of interest. Chairs ought to be given latitude to interpret, when not to apply too mechanically” (committee Chair, CURA).

The panel is of the opinion that conflicts of interest are, at SSHRC, very well managed. The Council may in fact be overdoing it. This view is predicated on a variety of facts, such as practices exemplified in the explanatory notes at the bottom of Table 5 in Part 2 of this report, exhibiting the multiplicity of reasons why an expert is automatically excluded from serving as external assessor, or the rule excluding a committee member from discussion and even from the room when a proposal from his/her university is being reviewed (whereas this is the case only when one's own proposal is being discussed in most agencies³⁸), or the practice requiring even from observers that they leave the room when a committee discusses a proposal presented by a researcher from their university.³⁹

All considered, the panel is of the opinion that too strict an enforcement of defensive bureaucratic rules to preserve the integrity and purity of the process at SSHRC may be on the verge of weakening the system it intends to preserve.

One needs to keep in mind, and this is a principle known to be effective and widely respected internationally, that appeal to the personal honor of scholars is more apt to secure responsible behavior than bureaucratic rationality and blind application of automatic rules. It is well known among agency officers throughout the world that the gravest breaches of trust are not that easily preventable and come not from official institutional positioning of experts but from more difficult to detect forms of conflict,⁴⁰ or lack of judgment,⁴¹ fortunately rare.

In a context of so-called “peer-review fatigue,” when greater complexity of proposals call for the best expert reviews possible, and when refusal rates have become alarmingly high, any agency ought to make sure that the intellectually most appropriate assessors and adjudicators are not excluded for formalistic reasons. While taking the utmost care to insure objectivity and integrity, one ought to keep in mind that some aims are best assured not by bureaucratic rules, but rather by appealing to honesty and a sense of honor and, foremost, common sense.

3.3.1 Recommendation Relevant to Rules on Conflicts of Interest

RECOMMENDATION 19. Remain vigilant regarding conflicts of interest, but review relevant regulations to ensure efficient peer-review process.

³⁸ At SSHRC, one sending a proposal to SSHRC a given year cannot serve in any way as peer for that program that same year.

³⁹ An observer does not in any way participate to any discussion and remains silent at all time when visiting a committee. Moreover an observer, as well as any external assessor or member of adjudication committee, has to sign an engagement to confidentiality form.

⁴⁰ « Sur les conflits d'intérêt, il faut continuer à faire très attention, il y a des gens qui ne comprennent pas suffisamment l'étendue de ce qui n'est pas permis. [...] Dans un cas un membre s'est découvert en conflit d'intérêt beaucoup trop tard. L'agent de programme doit contacter chaque membre individuellement pour les forcer à vérifier. Pas seulement un e-mail de groupe. Je vois ça comme un des rôles cruciaux de l'agent de programme ; le président doit travailler en équipe avec lui » (Chair, MCRI program).

⁴¹ “An experience has stayed with me because I was a much younger then, when an older scholar was vitriolic on a younger researcher and in conflict it seemed to me. [...] SSHRC is very precise on declaration of conflict, and has also in recent year invited researchers to identify assessors that might be problematic” (committee member, SRG and later strategic program committee member).

PART 4. PEER DELIBERATION AND DECISION-MAKING

Again, and it is no doubt worth repeating, it is the general conclusion of the panel that the quality, equity and credibility of the peer-review process at SSHRC are unquestionably up to the highest international standards. However, at SSHRC, as in any other granting agency, this process remains a human, thus improvable, process.

The activities examined in this fourth part of this report essentially address issues where improvements are achievable and desirable, such as:

- ensuring a more manageable and less time-consuming workload for committee members and program officers;
- better distinguishing responsibilities that belong properly to the peer-review process from those that pertain rather to policy decision-making;
- adopting a new organizational mechanism; or
- adapting criteria to allow better evaluation.

The phase of the peer-review process investigated in the following sections, when the adjudication committee meets, is the crucial one, where final evaluation and decisions are made on what is excellent and worth funding on the basis of the examination of proposals.

External assessments are a major contribution to that process, as we have already emphasized, but external assessors pass judgement on the intrinsic quality of a singular proposal. It is the peer members of the adjudication committee who will have to weight, in a competitive context, the relative merit, quality and significance of a research proposal compared to a wide range of other proposals. It is under these conditions that they have the final word.

Moreover, committee discussions are of special relevance here, especially in fields where there are conflicting paradigms. This is indeed confirmed by what has been learned about the behaviour of adjudicators in the humanities and social sciences.⁴²

In programs that have adopted the practice of holding a teleconference before scoring proposals, a new committee member gets substantial information about his/her own personal responsibilities and different aspects of the process. But the specifics of the meeting, the nature of the proceedings and the behaviour expected from each member may remain somewhat imprecise. The National Science Foundation in the United States is presently testing a mock meeting video available on their website. It is an initiative that might be usefully replicated by SSHRC, both as assistance to new committee members and to contribute as well to a more transparent process.

When the adjudication committee meets, the Chair is in charge, with the program officer in a support role. All witnesses agree that the role of the Chair is key to the committee's success and that it can be a very frustrating experience indeed when the Chair does not competently assume his/her responsibilities.

These roles are probably best described in the words of those who have acted successfully in these functions.

⁴² Lamont (2009).

As for the Chairs:

“As Chair, I am there to insure that business gets done and done well, fairly. Keeping time is essential, but it is even more important to make sure that any necessary discussion takes place, as fully as needed, and that everybody who has to contribute does. It is my job to summarize discussion and to state consensus. The program officer is at the chair’s elbow to say what needs to be done if I forget something; he also makes sure that good notes are taken on every application. It works well.” (committee Chair, SRG);

“The Chair has to keep people on course, show respect, but bring back people on issues” (thematic committee Chair).

Ensuring that all committee members contribute is seen by all Chairs as a key responsibility, with special attention to what the new members have to contribute:

“I start committee by explaining why we are there. [...] Young academics come there sometimes in part because that it is an honor and expect to be mentored a bit, to learn. It is important to have veterans and a good chair make them more relaxed. I take time to talk with them during breaks and help to clarify things. It is a very good process in the end” (thematic committee Chair).⁴³

In a note already mentioned earlier, as a complement to his interview, a seasoned program officer has described for us the specific role of the program officer when the adjudication committee meets:

“At the committee adjudication meeting, the Chair is in charge of the committee and its deliberations. The Program Officer meanwhile in his role as Committee Secretary, has several important tasks to perform. In this capacity he proposes possible solutions when committee deliberations become difficult, based on his experience with many previous committees. He also ‘polices’ the deliberations to ensure that the adjudication is done strictly according to the criteria and solely on the basis of what is presented in the application before the committee; he allows nothing extraneous to be introduced. Moreover, he ensures that committee members leave the room when they have a conflict with an application under discussion. In addition, he acts as a resource person for the committee, providing them with information on Council policy, rules and regulations. Suffice it to say, that Program Officer must carry out the tasks just mentioned with tact, diplomacy and good humour.

At the committee adjudication meeting, the officer ensures that the committee provides solid feedback on applications. He requires this feedback in order to articulate a solid committee minute that will provide an applicant with a satisfactory summary of the committee’s evaluation of his application. Therefore, he will not hesitate to ask the committee for more input when he judges that there is need for fuller feedback to the applicant regarding the evaluation of the criteria.”

⁴³ For a similar statement: « Les membres nouveaux au début prennent difficilement la parole, c’est la force du président du comité que de faire parler tous ceux qui ont quelque chose à contribuer. [...] Le rôle du président est d’assurer une grande rigueur, une discussion disciplinée, de cadrer la discussion et de garder le temps. Il doit favoriser l’ouverture, s’assurer que l’on revient sérieusement aux dossiers difficiles, borderline. Le président doit faire en sorte que le comité comprenne bien les enjeux de chaque demande ; il doit aussi éviter les manifestations de dogmatisme théorique » (committee member, SRG).

4.1 Processing Files Collectively

4.1.1 Handling Files

Currently, except for some pilot experiments, committee members handle boxes of huge binders that they receive at home or at their office, and then eventually carry or send back to Ottawa for their own use during the adjudication meeting week.

Whereas, in other countries and also in Canada, some agencies have entirely moved to electronic applications (some of them a decade ago) and use exclusively digital documents, this is not yet the case at SSHRC.

Interviews show that in committees where CDs have been used rather than proposals on paper, opinions differ on the advantages of using this tool.⁴⁴ Though almost all academics in the social sciences and humanities use computers for word processing, e-mailing and some navigation on the web, many do not go much beyond that in their personal use of the new electronic tools, and a great many do not use currently fast scrolling techniques, split screens, search shortcuts, etc. They will have to be assisted and supported by SSHRC.

Experience elsewhere shows that where electronic handling of proposals, assessment forms and scores is introduced, using the web and networking capabilities in meetings, people rapidly get used to and appreciate the new methods. This is a move SSHRC ought to make.

4.1.2 Ranking and Discussion of Proposals

Before the committee meets, readers send their preliminary scores, evaluating according to the various criteria. “This allows for the creation of a spreadsheet wherein the applications are in a preliminary rank order which provides the basis for the committee deliberations.”⁴⁵

The Tyranny of Binders

From there, committees do not all proceed in the same way. Some discuss the proposals following the alphabetical order of principal investigators’ names, whatever the scores obtained. Other committees start with discussing the proposals that score among the lowest (alphabetically or according to rank of scores, it again varies among committees), and still others start with the best scores. All committees pay special attention to the proposals that get mid-range preliminary scores, as these are borderline files that may or may not get funded, depending on the final scores the committee will collectively decide to assign to each one of these proposals. It seems to happen that, at least in one committee, proposals from new researchers may be discussed first in each of the groups (low scores, high scores, mid-range scores).⁴⁶

⁴⁴ “We worked with CDs; everybody thought that worked extremely well; the spreadsheet was continually projected and corrected immediately; all orientations needed were there. It worked excellently” (committee, Chair, SRG); « Les dossiers électroniques ce sera la façon écologique de procéder ; d’autant plus que le système marche très bien » (committee Chair, SRG) ; « Notre comité était en projet pilote sur CD ; rester fixé à l’ordinateur des heures c’est difficile, dur pour les yeux, dur pour la pose du corps. [...] La plupart des gens sont habitués. J’étais négative au début; ensuite, on nous a expliqué les moyens de travailler avec plusieurs fenêtres, etc. [...] Si on maintient les CD, ça va demander une formation particulière ; il y a des trucs à communiquer, des méthodes à donner ; etc. Au moins le CRSH devrait suggérer une méthode pour travailler efficacement. L’avantage de l’électronique c’est que ça permet de mettre ses commentaires en ligne pour l’agente de programme et pour tout le monde » (committee member, SRG).

⁴⁵ Note from a program officer.

⁴⁶ Interview with a SRG committee member.

In one SRG committee, the decision was taken by the Chair with the program officer to move from the lowest to the top scores. They did not follow any alphabetical order: “We want to compare apple to apple. If you adopt the alphabetical order, it becomes more difficult to remain consistent.”⁴⁷

In a committee on Postdoctoral Fellowships, according to a Chair interviewed, “In the meeting we looked first on the alphabetical list at files where there were three or four points of difference in assessments (three different readers scores for each file). You just talk it through. You work through the anomalous files first.”

Some interlocutors have strong views in favour of the way chosen by their committee, others not. The practice in some committees may somewhat vary from year to year.

Privilege given to the alphabetical approach (against proceeding according to ranking by scores) is a practice of convenience reproducing the order in which proposals are distributed in the numerous binders from the start. Going through each binder in order economizes time and physical effort. It seems unjustifiable, however, given what is known about the epistemology of comparative evaluation, classification and ranking. Moving to networked electronic files will provide a solution to that quagmire.

This is an issue calling for explicit guidelines and more consistent behavior across committees.

Proceeding to Discussion and Final Scoring

Discussion on a file always begins with the reports of the readers assigned to that file. There are two in the case of the SRG program for instance, three in the case of fellowships, and there may be more readers under exceptional circumstances in the case of thematic programs (see table, Appendix 2).

When readers entirely agree, the discussion is usually very short, unless the file is “flagged” by a committee member who may have noticed something not seen by the readers or who is not satisfied by the reports and has some disagreement with them. Then, or when the readers’ assessments diverge, discussion ensues and the committee may reach a decision on final scores different from the initial one(s) proposed by the assigned readers.

“Two readers report to committee; how much involvement from other members depends on the file. Generally the first reader gives much detail; the second one acts as complementary. If both are happy, there is generally very little discussion unless someone on the committee has an issue. But when there is debate between the readers the committee gets much more involved. Assessment is an art form, not a science; an analytical art form” (from the interview of a seasoned SRG committee member).

The conduct of the discussions as such seems to be a generally very well managed part of the process.

It is, so to speak, in setting the agenda for discussion and in deciding on the proper order for considering collectively the different proposals according to the preliminary scores they have received from their assigned readers that new guidelines ought to be defined.

⁴⁷ SRG committee Chair

On the whole, and the panel has kept this in mind in all its recommendations, the utmost should be done, without compromising in any way the quality of decision-making, to streamline the process, cut the workload and shorten the time the committee members must spend in Ottawa.

4.1.3 Recommendations Relevant to Processing Files

RECOMMENDATION 20. Introduce, as quickly as feasible, electronic filing of proposals, of external assessments and of committee readers' reports and scoring, as well as web and networked handling of files in committee meetings.

RECOMMENDATION 21. Introduce, as soon as possible, for committee readers standardized electronic forms, similar to those for external assessors, permitting detailed scoring according to criteria and open boxes for comments.

RECOMMENDATION 22. Provide uniform guidelines to committees on procedures for discussion and decision-making on proposals, including:

- ranking of all proposals according to preliminary scores provided by assigned readers; and
- for Standard Research Grants, discussion of only those proposals:
 - getting from readers a score that puts them in mid-range (that is, among the 50 per cent of proposals scoring below the 15 per cent top scores which ought to be funded, and over the 35 per cent bottom scores that should not be funded);
 - about which readers' scores exhibit significant disagreement; or
 - about which other committee members express disagreement regarding the scores provided by readers (so-called "flagged" files).

RECOMMENDATION 23. Increase the transparency and make public the preceding rules to be implemented by adjudication committees in the discussion and final decision on proposals.

4.2 Program of Research Versus Track Record

All SSHRC guidelines and manuals relative to grants program are clear on the general framework for evaluation. There are two different components to any proposal: 1) the record of research achievement; and 2) the program of research.

The record of research achievement is defined as "tangible contributions made by applicant(s) to the advancement, development, and dissemination of knowledge in social sciences and humanities." The focus is on the most recent six-year period of activity. For regular scholars, an account of the five most significant contributions as identified by applicant from any period of her/his career is expected.

Programs of research are also quite clearly defined. "Programs of research are shaped by broad objectives for the advancement of knowledge and may comprise one or more projects undertaken over a three-year period or longer. SSHRC does not, therefore, expect researchers to submit, in the limited space allowed, detailed descriptions of their research methods, as

these may change during the course of the research.”⁴⁸ Indeed, in the course of the pursuit of the objectives of a research program, “specific approaches and methods are advanced, adopted and modified as the research proceeds and its findings are made and reported.”

Some of our informants have, however, indicated in their interviews that some committees nevertheless expect the presentation of rather detailed methodology. This is an issue that may be in need of further clarification, as well as of more specific guidance in instructions to peer reviewers.

Scores of 1 to 6 are attributed by evaluators to each of the two components; a minimum score of 3 on each component is required to qualify for a grant.

At the present time, for regular scholars, 60 per cent ought to be attributed to the track record and 40 per cent to the description of program of research. For new scholars, the ratios are 60/40 or 40/60 (percentage) respectively, “depending on which will produce the most favourable overall score.”

The panel agrees that both aspects ought to be considered in peer reviews: the program of research and the track record. However, the use of rigid set percentages (60/40) ought to be seriously questioned. SSHRC aims at supporting unquestionably excellent proposals, likely to produce innovative and high-quality research results.

Track record per se should entitle no one to receive another research grant. It should only permit adjudication committees to decide whether past results and experience demonstrate that the researcher is clearly able to conduct to success a research program evaluated as excellent. This is also why excellent but very complex proposals ought not to be funded if applicants lack demonstrated experience and ability to master and manage such complexity.

The view of the panel is that the quality of the research proposal, its originality and potential significance (scholarly and otherwise) should always be given primary attention. Track record ought always to come second, permitting peer evaluators to decide whether the applicant has a shown ability to take charge and bring research to completion.

Placing quality of proposals first encourages path-breaking and innovative research and favours a more open intellectual “market.” Giving track record a secondary role, restricted to that of a feasibility check, can work against intellectual inertia and encourages younger scholars to enter competition with realistic proposals.

4.2.1 Recommendation Relative to Evaluation Criteria

RECOMMENDATION 24. Do away with the 60/40 percentage rules. Advise the adjudication committees that SSHRC aims to support unquestionably excellent proposals and therefore that the quality of the research proposal, its originality and potential significance should always be the primary focus of attention in decision making. Track record should, on its own, entitle no one to receive another research grant.

4.3 Proposals from Teams and Proposals from Solo Researchers

In the course of the interviews we conducted, a good number of interlocutors expressed concerns relative to the assessment of team proposals versus solo researcher applications.

⁴⁸ *Manual for Adjudication Committee Members, Standard Research Grants*, November 2007, p. 21.

Some said they found it difficult to assess quality in the case of teams, and some thought that solo researchers, especially in some fields of the humanities, were getting a bad deal.

Regarding the assessment of team proposals, SSHRC guidelines, however, seem quite clear. A team receives a single score for record of research achievement. “This score reflects the committee’s assessment of the research achievements of each of the team members in relation to the importance of their respective roles in the research (as described in the application). The status of the principal investigator determines the relative weight assigned to the overall scores for record of research achievement and program of research.”⁴⁹

It seems, however, that the questioning here does not result exclusively, may be not even mainly, from technical complexities. The questions raised here seem to have much to do with fears of being inequitable to individual researchers, and also inequitable towards some domains of research.

Available data show that over four years, from 2005 to 2008, the rates of success happen to have been globally exactly the same, 37 per cent, for solo applicants and for team applications (see table, Appendix 9).

The data also show that over though it might have been true some years ago, humanities are not the preserve of the solo scholar. Indeed, among the five SRG committees that exhibit rates of success higher than 40 per cent for team research, one finds philosophy, linguistics and one of the two literature committees.

This is congruent with what we know about the evolution of publications in the humanities and social sciences in recent years.⁵⁰

4.4 Decisions on Budgets

Matters of budget are given much attention in SSHRC’s manuals for adjudication committees,⁵¹ and interviews also show that without any doubt. Discussions on budgets submitted in proposals occupy a substantial amount of time in committee meetings. It has also been brought to our attention, and we illustrate this below, that different committees adopt at times very different attitudes regarding budgetary matters.

According to the manuals, “during the adjudication meetings, the committees determine which proposals merit funding support and recommend a budget for each. After the meeting, SSHRC staff calculate the final allocation of funds (envelope) for each committee on the basis of the total funds available in the program and the total funding recommended [...]. SSHRC staff apply the envelope available to a committee to the rank-ordered list which that committee has provided. Beginning at the top of the list and moving down, applicants receive the full amount the committee has recommended until funds run out. [...] Individual committee envelopes may be adjusted slightly so that applicants falling on the funding cut-off line receive the full recommended budget.”

To assess budgets is often not considered an easy task:

⁴⁹ See *Manual for Adjudication Committee members, SRG*, November 2007, p. 21 and p. 24.

⁵⁰ See Larivière, Lebel and Lemelin (2004), p. 15, Table 6.

⁵¹ See, for instance, Section VIII, p. 27-30 in *Manual for Adjudication Committee Members, Standard Research Grants*, November 2006.

“Assessing budgets is one of the major challenges across the board. In SRG some people will pad budget. In this case [the thematic committee] it seemed to me that we see very honest budgets. But budgets should be looked at very seriously. Guidelines should be made very specific, so that comparing budgets can be made easier” (thematic committee Chair).

“[CURA projects] can be very complex; they are consortia more than projects. Management is crucial here [...] and the same holds for finances and budgets. It should be to experts at SSHRC to sort out budget complexity. Committees should be asked only to identify what looks problematic. For instance, what’s legitimate for travel given the nature of the project” (committee Chair, CURA).

Elsewhere, where it seemed to have been found easier to do, decisions were made by the committee on a variety of issues:

“No, we met no difficulties in trimming budget. Previous members were very helpful. We benchmarked number of graduate students, computer and software costs, reasonable travel and conference expenses, and we established rules. We then read each budget and we chopped. We took into account the situation at smaller universities. For students we allowed not more than one PhD and one master’s, unless a very good case was made. [...] Those rules we consistently applied, but, sure, we might have missed one or two at the margins” (committee Chair, SRG).

Be that as it may, many of our interlocutors emphasized that evaluating and trimming budgets are not what academic evaluators do best, and that it is not the job of peer reviewers to try to micromanage in advance grant budgets :

“What’s expected from us in fact is to cut, and we do it. We do it as best we can, but I always felt that this is not our job. Many of us have limited knowledge of the cost of this or that. Some say they do, maybe they do, I don’t know. Pruning budget is not the same as understanding past scholarly achievements and research program plans. We try to do it very seriously, with rigour, we care a lot, but I am really not comfortable with that” (committee member, SRG);

« Il n’y a pas de doute que le comité est le mieux placé pour juger de la valeur intellectuelle d’une demande, mais il devrait passer beaucoup moins de temps sur le détail des budgets. On passe un temps énorme à faire des calculs de boutiquiers. Il y a des petits comptables dans certains comités. C’est le chercheur qui est le mieux placé pour réorganiser éventuellement son budget quand il aura reçu sa subvention. Le CRSH n’est d’ailleurs qu’un contributeur parmi d’autres ; il y a aussi des fonds qui peuvent aussi venir de l’université, qui peuvent venir d’une chaire, qui peuvent venir d’une fondation, de contrats, etc. Une fois l’argent donné, comme chercheur, tu fais au mieux de tes connaissances et selon tes besoins, c’est d’ailleurs ce qui est prévu dans les règles du CRSH » (committee member, SRG).

A committee does its best to be consistent, at least in a given year; however, it is clear that interpretation of instructions, initiatives taken and the decisions made about budgets are far from consistent across committees. Many of our interlocutors were very conscious of that:

“A committee does the rankings without any clear understanding of where the line will be drawn for funding. It works extremely well in terms of managing committees. But we should have a clear public statement on how the process works. I know that it is

not managed the same way in all committees. Economics for instance have at times acted very strategically. Other committees not at all” (committee Chair, SRG).

Indeed, a very experienced member of the SRG economics committee stated:

“Budget discussion is not terribly useful. It is better to have more general cut provided it leaves enough money to do the research. Apply same % of cuts to all projects. To be honest, it may seem that the best way would be to examine the budget in all proposals in detail. But we cannot do that. It is an illusion. It is better with global cuts. The committees did both at different times. More often we had discussions on taking this and that thing out; more rarely % cuts. Among economist there is more consensus to % cuts. We economists are mean anyway.”⁵²

In the present circumstances, stated a seasoned observer, “now with so many more applicants, and as the budget does not go up, the goal is to achieve certain success rate. [...] Some committees look at what cuts can be made and still maintain the integrity of the research; some cut by a percentage; it is a rare case, but it happens; [...] budget now are more directly cut by committees than was the case a few years back; maybe is it OK; eventually there will be need for a move back to more analyses and cuts done by staff.”

On the whole, it is very clear that in budgetary matters some sort of order needs to be restored in the conduct of the committee’s work. The panel wants to state firmly that policy decisions and peer-review evaluation pertain to two very different domains of responsibility.

In many agencies peer-review committees pronounce exclusively on the quality and the feasibility of research proposals. Indeed this is the domain in which they have undeniable competence; it is in this respect that they are peers.

In these agencies, it is experts of the staff (in some cases advised on cost specificities by experienced scholars in different disciplines or fields of research) who make final decisions on the grant amount, according to policy decisions taken by the organization’s leadership.

Such an approach should be considered by SSHRC. Members of adjudication committees might usefully draw attention to special budgetary needs or anomalies in a proposal, and this is fine, but in no way should decisions impinging on policies, such as setting budgetary rules, be condoned. As well, final decision on grant size would be better left to experts in budgetary matters.

This would also lighten the workload of adjudication committees, shorten duration of the stay in Ottawa for meetings, and permit members to focus more intensively on their proper task.

It is certainly perfectly apt for a peer-review committee to make recommendations conducive to policy changes, but policy decisions ought to remain fully in the hands of SSHRC’s Council which may, of course, before ruling, conduct any consultation it sees fit. This obtains certainly for budgets and budgetary matters. This should be made very clear.

⁵² Regarding parametric cuts, a SRG committee Chair commented: « En faisant ça, les économistes ont porté leur taux de succès à 60%, malgré la règle de 40% donnée par la direction, peut-être parce que c’est très utile de pouvoir dire qu’on détient une subvention CRSH ».

It also seems that some clarification ought to be provided regarding more operational aspects of adjudication committee work and the exact nature of the responsibilities that their members are expected to assume as peer reviewers, including on budgetary elements in proposals.

4.4.1 Recommendation Relevant to Grant Size and Budget Management

RECOMMENDATION 25. Review SSHRC policies on the role of adjudication committees in budgetary matters and implement new practices calling for expert staff decision in these matters, and apply a clear distinction between peer-review competencies and policy decisions.

4.5 Inter-disciplinary and Inter-jurisdictional Issues

It is a striking result in our web survey that a very high number of respondents consider their research activity as largely inter-disciplinary. It is in fact a small minority who see themselves as confined to a single discipline. This is congruent with the increasingly collaborative dimension of research internationally, in all fields including the humanities and social sciences.

A university administrator remarked in interview: “The ground is changing under our feet in universities and unless you are at Harvard or some other wealthy research institution, and create university research centers and institutes and let the departments atrophy because it would be too touchy to transform them, it is becoming difficult. So it is in some way strange to see a SRG committee called interdisciplinary when you see all that is going on.”

The Standard Research Grants Program

In the case of SRG, some adjudication committees appear more strictly disciplinary (economics, philosophy); others bring together somewhat related disciplines (political science and public administration), and still others are more eclectic and lump together quite different domains of expertise (dance and history of art and musicology, or communication and women’s studies). Committee 15 is specifically identified as “Inter-disciplinary and multi-disciplinary studies.” It may in fact be chosen by some applicants for negative reasons, so that they will not be examined by another committee they think is not fit to assess their proposal.

It is not clear to the panel why Committee 15 would be needed when the large majority of scholars surveyed in the humanities, as well as in the social sciences, declare their research to be inter-disciplinary and actually forward their proposals to other, so-called “disciplinary” committees.

Indeed, at the present time, given the evolving way research is pursued in all domains, though a researcher may be identified with a main discipline, enforcing disciplinary boundaries is not the order of the day. It would be a mistake to entertain the notion that committees ideally should exhibit purely disciplinary composition. Quite the contrary, efforts should be made to choose as peers for these committees researchers who have proven a broad understanding of the evolution of research in their field.

Thematic and Strategic Programs

Parallel to the SRG program, SSHRC is running a broad spectrum of other strategic or thematic programs and joint initiatives that are all strongly inter-disciplinary in character. They call for some variety in their management, but they all rightly remain predicated on peer-review decisions.

For some strategic programs, a letter of intent is required and assessed first, then a full proposal. The evaluation then generally includes a meeting of the committee with the applicants. There is a significant management component to these large projects that bring together many researchers and different organisations. The team's capacities in that regard must be evaluated as well, not just the quality of the science.

Someone who has served as a high-level manager at SSHRC thought that "Strategic programs, some aspects go from very good to problematic. Government members when on committees are not always as strong and effective as academics. Nevertheless in these programs it is necessary to involve users. Academics may imagine what users need, users know. In that regard I would rather bet on them. So we definitely need the users there. But some have a poor understanding of research and of what is required to go from A to Z. Some of the best are on CURA committees. The choice of members is key, and the choice of chair. Strategics are more challenging than SRG, you have to make sure you have the breadth. It may be that non academics ought not to comment on quality of science but on relevance and involvement only."

A CURA committee Chair also stressed that this type of program is "very different from SRG" and that, in the case of programs such as CURA, consideration should be given to the need to do more work for better defining criteria. "Some of criteria bring a lot under one category. For instance management of CURA projects, that can be very complex; they are consortia more than projects. Management is crucial here, however it is just a subcategory under a larger one. [...] In consortia, financial contributions from some participants are very important in showing that community organizations have bought the project. The best projects have this very well covered. We take it as indicative of how well prepared they are. Even at first stage. Again, this is very different from SRG."

Inter-jurisdictional Programs

The functioning of committees that evaluate proposals from researchers also working with other granting agencies, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC) or Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), and bring together adjudicators from different jurisdictions, particularly in the health area, have generated much comment, at times expressing a significant degree of discomfort or uneasiness.

In the words of an adjudicator, for instance, "Health is a challenge. CIHR culture is different." Indeed it is more in the health area that concerns have been expressed. A SRG committee member told us: "Sometimes it is challenging on the health committee. Clinical disciplines and pure sociology or economics, have very different ways to look at things. For sure, it was fun too and OK; if there is open exchange, it's lot of fun. But you realize it has potential to get nasty with a wrong group of people. A couple of panel members had experience with CIHR. There are really two different cultures, but here SSHRC culture had to prevail."

A CURA committee Chair felt clearly uneasy with the increasing number of "health applications." He saw that as "a ricochet of problems at CIHR" and complained that "anything can be defined or redefined as a social issue."

"When people fit between councils, a manager told us, they often are poorly treated even if they are eminent researchers. It is an issue for both sides. It takes a lot of staff work to do that

and to understand why committees have trouble in assessing these proposals. It is one of my *bêtes noires*.”

Part of the difficulties may come from lack of experience in working in such inter-jurisdictional contexts. But on the whole it may be more a matter of still too poorly defined program goals and procedures and/or of persisting grey zones between agencies.

A member of the SSHRC’s Council said in interview that: “Regarding projects between councils, some progress have been made in the last year. There is need for a proper structure between NSERC and SSHRC. Management needs to be very explicit about the procedures in place. Applications in health should they come to SSHRC or go to CIHR, we will need to grapple with that.”

The panel concurs. Issues here seem rooted much less in the philosophical or technical aspects of peer reviewing than in the need to better define and find a mutually agreed policy needed to manage the interfaces of granting agencies.

4.5.1 Recommendations Relevant to Assessing Inter-disciplinary and Inter-jurisdictional issues

RECOMMENDATION 26. Abolish Standard Research Grant (SRG) Committee 15, and make all committees, including all SRG committees, able and responsible to assess proposals extending beyond strict disciplinary boundaries.

RECOMMENDATION 27. In collaboration with other Canadian granting agencies, explore policies conducive to encouraging research and to facilitating peer review of proposals at the interfaces of the respective responsibilities of agencies. Implement this at first through pilot program(s).

4.6 Reporting Back to the Applicants

Feedback to applicants is generally seen as an important element of transparency.⁵³

All research grant applicants at SSHRC receive an anonymised copy of all external assessments used by adjudication committees. They also receive a report on the adjudication committee’s findings and decision relative to their proposal.

Researchers who have failed very often reapply, and some of them meet success and even enter the ranks of the regularly funded. This is shown in the two following tables⁵⁴.

⁵³ British Academy (2007), p. 22.

⁵⁴ The slight difference in the total number of applications for 2002 and 2003 is related to the treatment of ineligible files.

Table 8: Results of the Bottom 35 Per Cent Who Re-Applied the Next Year, Standard Research Grants, Cohorts: 2002-07

Cohort	Number of Applicants in the Bottom 35% (A)	Number of Bottom 35% (A) Who Re-Applied the Next Year (B)	Number of Re-Applicants (B) in the Top 40% the Next Year	
			n	%
2002	639	294	72	24%
2003	671	352	86	24%
2004	780	407	84	21%
2005	866	430	110	26%
2006	891	444	81	18%
2007	896	386	81	21%

Note: No committee comment in 2006 for bottom 35 per cent.

This table indeed shows, for the period 2002 to 2007, for each annual cohort of researchers who ranked in the bottom 35 per cent, the percentage of those who re-applied the next year and then ranked in the top 40 per cent.

Looking at applicants to the Standard Research Grants program whose proposals ranked among the bottom 35 per cent of applications, and were not funded in the 2002 (631 failed proposals) and 2003 (659 failed proposals) competitions, one finds that 29.7 per cent of them have since received one Standard Research Grant and 3.3 per cent have been funded twice (see Table 9).

Table 9: Number of Standard Research Grants Received During the Next Five Years for Principal Investigators Who Ranked in The Bottom 35 Per Cent in 2002 and 2003

Cohort	All bottom 35%	0 SRG	1 SRG	2 SRGs
2002	631	438	179	14
	100%	69%	28%	2%
2003	659	441	196	22
	100%	67%	30%	3%

These two tables show that failure in a competition does not, by any means, imply that the applicant is definitely excluded from group of “regular” researchers. Many re-apply and a significant proportion is successful and become funded researchers.

Some interlocutors in our interviews, principally university officers, emphasized that in these cases feedback from the SSHRC committee (by forwarding useful comments) has often been of great help to applicants.

As the process is presently conducted at SSHRC, providing feedback to applicants has become very demanding and represents a significant share of the committee workload. Members of committees may have to comment specifically on more than 100 proposals during their meetings. It is one of the Chair’s responsibilities to ensure that the program officer has all the information he/she needs to report clearly and faithfully on the committee’s deliberations on each file. Later, the program officer takes many weeks to complete the writing of these reports.

In the end, a better balance ought to be struck between transparency and usefulness through feedback to applicants and reasonableness of peer-review workload.

University officers and faculty also have to keep in mind that coaching of applicants is not a responsibility of granting agencies. It must remain an institutional responsibility. SSHRC should encourage universities to hold, for their younger researchers, information and training sessions on the writing of sound proposals.

4.6.1 Recommendation Relevant to Feedback to Applicants

RECOMMENDATION 28. To reduce the workload of adjudication committees and program officers, maintain and simplify reports to all grant applicants.

- Forward to applicants the standardized forms filled by external assessors, as well as those filled by adjudication committee readers (see Recommendation 21 above).
- Communicate to applicants on a standardized form the summary position of the adjudication committee, when different from that of the readers and the decision is negative.
- In all cases, transmit these forms with a cover standardized letter: a) explaining the general peer-review process; b) emphasizing that it is the adjudication committee only that is fully responsible for final recommendation, not the external assessors, nor the committee readers alone; and c) reminding the applicant that the committee decision on his/her proposal is the result of a competition.

4.7 Fellowships Programs

The evaluation process of student applications for fellowships differs significantly from the grant proposal process (see Appendices 2, 5 and 6).

In its analysis of documents, conduct of interviews and examination of survey results, the panel has not been led to perceive, regarding these programs, problems related to the peer-review process under the direct responsibility of SSHRC. Processing these thousands of applications seems conducted in an equitable and efficient manner. That is not to say, however, that monitoring of these processes could be relaxed.

It is clear that success rates of candidates are very low for Postdoctoral Fellowships, but this is a SSHRC policy issue (and also, of course, a matter of government funding), not of peer-review process and evaluation.

In the case of Doctoral Fellowships, while students who are not registered in a Canadian university submit their applications directly to SSHRC, those who study in Canada have their applications screened first inside their own university. It is the responsibility of each university to make a first evaluation and rank these applications and to forward to SSHRC, according to a quota pre-determined for each university, only the applications that have survived this first triage.

This, it seems to the panel, offers matter for concern. The existence of two parallel tracks in pre-selection of applications implies that the process is not the same for all. Moreover, for candidates who have first to go through the university track, the differences in organizational and operational cultures in different universities involve necessarily a modicum of heterogeneity in treatment and thence introduces another layer of opacity. Finally, as has been pointed out to us by university officers interviewed, it is not always easy at the local level to

safeguard the process against “departmental biases and institutional politics.” Indeed in some universities, we were told, students are advised to take a year off before applying to bypass the internal screening system,

To repatriate the full review process for doctoral applications might eventually triple the number of files coming to SSHRC for evaluation (see table below).

Table 10: Doctoral Fellowship Applications Submitted to Institutions and Reviewed by a SSHRC Adjudication Committee, 2005-08

Year	Total Number Applications Received by the Universities	Applications Reviewed by SSHRC Adjudication Committees	
		#	%
2008	4248	1553	37%
2007	3943	1494	38%
2006	4028	1537	38%
2005	3872	1549	40%

Of course, the panel, which has emphasized repeatedly in this report the need to diminish the workload of peer reviewers and of program officers involved in research grants programs, cannot ignore here that for the SSHRC division responsible for managing fellowships program, this new approach would entail significant added work. Options for implementing new forms of pre-selection screening at SSHRC should be explored to help manage and reduce the added workload.

Provided more fellowships adjudication committees are established, this repatriation would not entail an increased burden for each reviewer. It might require the hiring of additional fellowships program coordinators.

Finally, one also has to keep in mind that Doctoral Fellowship adjudication committees use teleconferencing for their meetings so that additional logistics would remain simpler than for committees gathering in Ottawa for days.

4.7.1 Recommendation Relevant to the Doctoral Fellowship Program

RECOMMENDATION 29. Eliminate the university screening stage for the Doctoral Fellowships program.

PART 5. POLICY ISSUES

In this part of the report we address three issues about which clarification of responsibilities and action are required.

The first two sections bear respectively on the success rates of younger researchers and on applicants from smaller universities. The interviews we conducted make clear these they are sensitive issues in some segments of the research community.

It seems generally understood that adjudication committees will take into account in their deliberations and decisions, in each case, the situation of these researchers. Interviews have shown that this is far from being uniformly the case.

Moreover, as we have already repeatedly emphasized, peer review aims at making decisions by first assessing the quality of a research proposal and the prospective significance of its results and second, if judged of merit and fundable, its feasibility under the conduct of a given applicant.

Issues such as the success rates of younger researchers and of applicants from smaller universities need consistent decision-making and are better approached and dealt with as policy issues.

The same obtains for the object of the third section below, that of making sure that high-risk research proposals find the support they need.

5.1 Proposals from New Researchers

According to SSHRC rules, applicants requesting consideration as new scholars must demonstrate that they have not applied successfully, as principal investigator or project director, for any Standard Research Grant (SRG), Major Collaborative Research Initiative (MCRI) or strategic grants from SSHRC.

In addition, they must meet at least one of the following criteria:

1. Have completed their highest degree no more than five years before the competition deadline (SSHRC considers only the date of completion of the first doctorate);or
2. Have held a tenured or tenure-track university appointment for less than five years; or
3. Have held a university appointment, but never a tenure-track position (in the case of institutions which offer tenure-track positions);or
4. Have had their careers significantly interrupted or delayed for family reasons.

We have been exposed, during our field work for this report, to very different views on the situation of new researchers.

On the one hand, we were told for instance:

“Response to research proposals from younger scholars is a very serious problem, one of the more serious we have, I hear it here [at my university] and at [our scholarly association]. [...] A huge number of young scholars are discouraged, demoralized. We should put on a kind of alert. The system is not set to serve them. The success rates are bad enough at the SRG and it is demoralizing for young scholars. It is difficult to

cheerlead people to apply; we are answered that it is a futile task. It is a very serious problem. One way, I am not sure best way, would be to dedicate to younger scholars an amount of money or create special committees. [...] We need to create a more level playing field. If their proposals are mixed with those of seasoned researchers, the tendency will continue to be to reward people according to their CV. Community might be better served with a discrete program. There is a sense of urgency.”

But other interlocutors were adamant that this was definitely not an issue, at least in their domain of activity as peer reviewers :

“The evaluation of younger scholars is not an issue. SSHRC provides for flexible evaluation. [...] results show that they are well treated” (committee member, SRG);

« Le sort fait aux jeunes chercheurs au CRSH n’a rien de problématique. Les taux sont corrects, équivalents à ce qu’ils sont pour les autres chercheurs. Quand on examine en comité un projet de jeune chercheur on tient compte de sa situation. On n’est pas super exigeants pour les CV. Par ailleurs, j’aurais tendance à leur donner moins, pas plus que 100 K\$ pour 3 ans et plutôt de subventionner un plus grand nombre » (SRG and strategic committee member) ;

“Young researchers? Most certainly there is good room for young researchers. The committee takes their situation into account and we get from them some very good proposals. We fund many, we are very supportive. Some seasoned researchers on the contrary we reject because their proposal includes no real participatory research” (thematic committee Chair);

« Les nouveaux chercheurs sont équitablement traités. Nos discussions en comité garantissent ça : les taux de succès sont 50-50 entre nouveaux chercheurs et chercheurs établis ; le critère 60-40 fonctionne très bien » (committee member, SRG).

Do the data justify that serenity? The following table pictures a diverse situation. Committees do not all behave in the same manner. Last year, in three committees, success rates were slightly higher for newcomers than for regulars (Committees 12, 17 and 27). In 10 other committees, success rates were more than 20 per cent lower for younger scholars.

Table 11: Standard Research Grant Rates of Success by Committee, New and Regular Scholars, 2008-09

Committee	New Scholars	Regular Scholars
1	21%	37%
2	36%	40%
3	22%	41%
5	11%	47%
7	15%	47%
8	31%	39%
9	25%	39%
10	16%	39%
12	32%	31%
15	30%	42%
16	28%	37%
17	30%	29%
18	20%	38%
19	20%	42%
20	26%	37%
21	20%	40%
22	16%	48%
23	19%	45%
24	23%	47%
25	18%	37%
26	21%	44%
27	29%	27%
28	20%	28%
29	28%	52%
TOTAL	23%	40%

From a purely evaluative viewpoint, it may not be abnormal for younger researchers to have lower success rates. In the words of a seasoned researcher and manager, “What we observe is that regular scholars represent a small minority in the cohort of social sciences and humanities professors in Canadian universities. A triage has been made through the years. If you always get a grant, you are very good, you are a star. In the new cohorts, everyone has been very well trained, usually much better than in the oldest ones, but then you compete against those regular star scholars I mentioned, as well as against your young colleagues who have been so well trained; so it seems really normal that success be lower among younger scholars than among regulars.” Indeed, considered exclusively from the viewpoint of a functional peer review system, this is the case. To increase the number of funded young researchers, and this is a policy decision, would certainly require specific rules or measures.

Again, a SRG committee Chair, who asserts that his committee “always was very careful to be fair to younger scholars,” admits that “it is more difficult for a new scholar to get a grant” and adds “it is just a real reflection that new scholars are still learning; their success depends also of the institution they come from and of the quality of support it provides to them; I think that in our committee we handled that right.”

But such considerations leave open a crucial question, which is a fundamental policy question: does that normal process create a healthy pipeline for the future of research in the humanities and social sciences in Canada?

This is not a peer-review issue. It is for SSHRC to take a stand on this issue and to decide whether eventually to set new rules. These might, for instance, after adjudication committees have completed their work, give some advantage to proposals from younger scholars, so that they would receive grants and not be placed among those proposals that at the present time are considered “4-A” (fundable but not funded).

All this being said, it remains that, as one observer stressed in an interview, “Clearly some universities also have their share in responsibility for these failures: they push young scholars prematurely to send proposals to SSHRC, give them no support in the preparation phase, do not care if they are overambitious and then blame everybody for their own irresponsible attitudes.” Maybe should some universities too be reminded of their own responsibilities.

5.1.2 Recommendation Relevant to Younger Scholars

RECOMMENDATION 30. State clear policy goals regarding younger researchers, eventually setting target success rates and defining mechanisms to fund new scholar applications following positive merit evaluation by the relevant adjudication committee.

5.2 Proposals from Applicants at Smaller Universities

According to some of the program officers and Chairs interviewed, it is the practice in their committees to “flag” files coming from researchers in small universities, so that adjudicators can take into account some specificities of the applicant’s environment.

Chairs and committee members for thematic or strategic programs, we noticed in our interviews, are generally convinced that small university researchers are very fairly treated

“Small and periphery universities are as well funded as large. We do not differentiate at all if the capacity for research is there and if the proposals are good. Some small universities and colleges in fact have the upper hand with the grass-roots if for instance they teach aboriginal languages” (thematic committee Chair);

“Sometimes smaller universities are given more than a chance at SSHRC; committees have been more generous for smaller universities (and have been asked to be). Also over the years I found that some of the community colleges are being funded, quite a few are coming, quite aggressive, showing up well, getting well organized. Sometimes they have several proposals. [...] Don’t forget that some people are well known and put together very mediocre proposals, we do not fund them just because they are famous” (committee Chair, CURA);

“I almost sensed a reversed prejudice, that many people fought for small institutions against larger institutions where it was thought, though unfair, that people always could find money elsewhere. [...] Very imaginative and feasible projects are coming from there” (thematic committee Chair);

« Souvent, presque dans tous les cas, on a dans notre programme des demandes de groupes d’universités. Donc souvent on trouve des gens de plus petites universités. On ne se pose donc pas le même genre de question que pour les SRO. Il n’est évidemment

pas nécessaire pour avoir une décision favorable d'avoir une petite université dans la demande. On se demande est-ce la bonne équipe, est ce qu'elle est assez complète, avec l'expertise nécessaire pour le genre de question que l'on se propose d'adresser ? La taille d'université comme telle n'a pas d'importance, mais on en trouve dans plusieurs projets » (committee Chair, MCRI).

However, the picture seems different with SRG adjudication committees. Many of our interviewees thought one ought to recognize that the evaluation of proposals emanating from smaller institutions is indeed an issue, and some also indicated that maybe principles were not that clear or not uniformly applied. But they were not of one mind regarding the attitude or policy to adopt.

« Les université en périphérie, oui, ça pose problème. Souvent les membres de comité viennent de grands centres et ne comprennent pas la situation des chercheurs dans les petites universités. Je suis dans une grande université mais je connais des personnes dans de petites universités. Il devrait y avoir des critères différents ou une application différente des critères pour les chercheurs dans les petites universités. Même si le CRSH le dit, il y a chaque année, il y a toujours des membres qui ne le font pas. Il n'y a pas de critère spécifique qui attire l'attention là-dessus. On devrait toujours s'assurer que quelqu'un vient d'une petite université. Dans mon comité, ce n'est pas toujours le cas » (committee chair, SRG);⁵⁵

“Small and peripheral universities, that's a real difficulty. Committee does its best; but we are assessing projects. We felt we could not give extra points to applicants from smaller universities” (committee Chair, SRG);

« Pour les petites universités comme la mienne il n'existe pas au comité de souci particulier. Un bon chercheur dans une petite université va réussir, sûr, mais il n'a pas le même soutien. Il devrait y avoir un bonus, des points acquis au départ. [...] Que quelqu'un vienne d'une petite université, ce n'est pas signalé à l'attention du comité, il faut compter sur la vigilance des lecteurs. Le président et l'agent de programme ne sont pas préoccupés de cela » (committee Chair, SRG);

“I suspect that people from small universities should get some points in advance for that; [...] We have not solved the problem of dealing with small universities proposals” (committee member, SRG);

“Smaller universities is an issue, but it will not get resolved. The issue is that at a small university you have to work twice as much and this is difficult for research. There is less mobility in Canada than in the US : where you start out is where you end out. It is not SSHRC's job to address that. The only way to fix it is to have more grants. Or smaller grants. Then smaller universities would get more grants” (committee member, SRG).

⁵⁵ However, someone who has served at a high administrative level at SHHRC stated that on adjudication committees “smaller and regional universities have a fair hearing, one exception being when a member of a small university on committee lacks confidence and overdoes it. The same too happens at times with some young scholars on committees.”

In the opinion of an interviewee who has served on different committees and on SSHRC's Council, and who has also been a SRG Chair and a university administrator, "the issue of small universities is very much driven by how much a given vice-president is an activist on having people to apply for SSHRC grants. Then it may be tough because the success rate is low, because applications are not of high quality, because applicants have not learned grantsmanship enough. [...] There is no doubt that young researchers at some universities have much more support than at other universities. But I would be loathe to see us move very far in the direction of the size of universities."

As a higher management interlocutor at SSHRC pointed out to us, "If you are a professor at a small university much plays against you when you want funding for your research: pressure to teach a lot, committees and administrative load, few or no doctoral students and postdoctoral students, etc. We have had a lot of discussions with these universities. Provinces can help by getting involved in financially supporting university research. In Quebec, British Columbia and Alberta, it makes a real difference. It goes much beyond us."

It is the view of the panel that the same philosophy applies in the case of applicants from smaller institutions as for younger scholars. Smaller and regional universities success rate are first and foremost policy issues, if at all, and this is not for the panel to decide.

Creating a quota system or compensating in some way for a perceived institutional disadvantage has to remain a policy decision; it is not for peer reviewers to pronounce on that, or to make ad hoc decisions.

Again, the healthy position is to expect from peer reviewers a sound evaluation of the quality of the proposal and of its feasibility.

5.2.1 Recommendation Relevant to Proposals from Smaller Universities

RECOMMENDATION 31. Treat issues related to proposals from smaller university researchers as an area of policy responsibility, shared with institutions, and eventually adopt and implement complementary decision-making rules and mechanisms.

5.3 Funding High-Risk, Path-Breaking Research

Canadian researchers already produce a significant share of the world literature in the humanities and social sciences.

Bibliometric tools, essentially based upon articles published in scholarly journals, are known to be much less reliable for the fields covered by SSHRC than for health or natural sciences and engineering. Many factors explain this inadequacy, such as the centrality of books in the humanities and the social sciences, the strong national orientation and relevance of research in these domains, as well as the generation of a more polyglot literature.⁵⁶

Keeping this in mind, especially the linguistic bias, it remains however significant that Canada ranks third in the world in the share of papers published in high-ranking journals, producing about six per cent of the literature (against slightly above four per cent in all the other scientific fields, health, natural sciences and engineering), and so comes immediately

⁵⁶ Hicks (1999). See also Archambault *et al.* (2005), p. 149-158; Lamont and Mallard (2003), p. 15; European Science Foundation (2006), p. 23.

after the United States and the United Kingdom.⁵⁷ Canadian researchers are also well integrated and appreciated in international networks, and some 25 per cent of their articles are co-authored with scholars from other countries.

For many years now, success rates of proposals submitted to SSHRC have been quite low, showing that the process has become extremely competitive. The result is that SSHRC can support only about 20% of Canadian scholars at any one time. The quality of the peer-review process at SSHRC, combined with this degree of competitiveness, ought to make anyone confident that no mediocre proposals are being funded. Quite the contrary, the strong presence of Canadian authors in the highest-ranking international journals brings additional credibility to that view.

This, however, does not necessarily mean that funding support for path-breaking, high-risk innovative research is already optimal. Indeed, intensive competition and low rates of success are not especially conducive to risk-taking. This has been observed elsewhere. In the United States, for instance, it is felt that “competitive pressures have pushed researchers to submit more conservative applications, and we must find ways to encourage greater risk-taking and innovation and to ensure that our study sections are receptive to innovative applications.”⁵⁸

Similar observations are made in Canada. No doubt, originality is listed among the criteria for assessing programs of research, but it is not given a very prominent place in the guidelines provided to adjudicators.⁵⁹ Moreover, opinions are divided on how successful SSHRC is in promoting and supporting riskier and potentially transformative research. In fact, some even question whether it would be proper for SSHRC to take that direction, at least in the framework of SRG:

“Rewarding high-risk, strongly original proposals, I think we are not good at all. [...] To encourage these projects in responsible way would be essentially through special grants not SRG. SRG is not a good place to handle that, the committees have not been set for that. This would be more the job of strategic or special funding» (committee Chair, SRG).⁶⁰

According to a seasoned manager “Support to transformative science proposals meet obstacles in some fields [...] where there is high focus on a rather limited number of journals. This feeds orthodoxy and the emphasis that we put on track-record may encourage that. Committees look for that kind of journals in the CVs. [...] Ultimately it comes back to the quality of membership on committees. We cannot expect audacity from too tame members. [...] It is also a matter for training and guidelines for chair.”

⁵⁷ The bias in favour of English is obvious here. There is no doubt that the much larger researcher populations of Germany or France, for instance, generate much more scholarly literature in the social sciences and humanities than Canada. The indicators, nevertheless, warrant that Canada is producing high-quality scholarship, given the selection of journals in the international bibliometric databases.

⁵⁸ Scarpa (2006).

⁵⁹ See for instance *Manual for Adjudication Committee Members, Standard Research Grants*, November 2006, p. 22.

⁶⁰ In the same vein, a SRG Chair commented: « Le CRSH n’est pas assez accueillant à l’innovation. Les normes d’évaluation favorisent la poursuite de la ‘science normale’. Elles ne récompensent pas les comportements à risques. Ça peut évidemment dépendre de la composition des comités, de leurs membres. Ça peut varier d’année en année. Mais je préférerais que le critère soit explicite. Si un projet est vraiment risqué, il devrait être évalué différemment. Il est vrai que nous dépensons de l’argent public, ça explique les prudenances. [...] Il n’y a pas d’instructions claires du CRSH là-dessus. Il devrait y en avoir ».

These issues are at the present time a matter of primary concern for all major agencies throughout the world.⁶¹ This seems also to be a matter for strategic thinking at SSHRC.

5.3.1 Recommendation Relevant to the Support of Riskier Transformative Research

RECOMMENDATION 32. Notwithstanding SSHRC's investment in supporting high-risk research through the Research Development Initiative Program and other pilot programs such as Aboriginal Research and Research/Creation, explore new mechanisms dedicated exclusively to the support of high-risk, path-breaking and transformative research, open to all domains of the humanities and social sciences. Set specific peer-review rules and adjudication mechanisms accordingly.

⁶¹ See, for instance, in the United States the "R21" program at the National Institute of Health, or "Town Hall" meetings initiated by the National Science Foundation to explore transformative research avenues, and in the UK the appeal to set aside funds to more support "speculative" proposals (British Academy (2007), p. xiii). Also, the German Research Foundation created a special funding instrument, the Reinhart Kolleseck Grants, to enable outstanding researchers with a proven scientific track record to pursue exceptionally innovative of high-risk projects (http://www.dfg.de/en/research_funding/individual_grants_programme/reinhart_kolleseck_projects/index.html).

PART 6. MONITORING AND QUALITY CONTROL

SSHRC has maintained a high quality tradition of continuous and reflexive attention to the monitoring of its programs and activities. Numerous reports and a rich trail of statistical documents demonstrate that.

Our panel wants here to commend further SSHRC for its attention to closely monitoring its peer-review process and for its innovative institution of annual critical reports from adjudication committees, as well as for the use of observers of peer-review committee work and behaviour.

Indeed, the regular monitoring processes put in place by SSHRC are among the most extensive and innovative known to us.

6.1 Adjudication Committees “Policy” Discussions

SSHRC administration annually provides a set of questions that adjudication committee members are asked to discuss and report on. It is frequent that committees choose to address other issues.

From the interviews we conducted, it is clear that the committee members and Chairs consider it an important part of their responsibility not only to perform peer review and adjudicate, but also to take time to formally address issues as they come up in their practice and to recommend ways to improve the process and its results. This exercise is conducted by each adjudication committee on the last day of its meeting.⁶²

This monitoring activity of the peer reviewers themselves regarding the process, in which they are key actors, is of much interest for quality control and to improve performance and efficiency.

To sustain the vitality of such an activity, and to reap its benefits, substantial and timely feedback to committee members seems of the essence. However, they receive, it seems, little direct feedback, or receive it quite late. This is a great initiative that may not yet be run in the most optimal manner.

6.1.1 Recommendation Relevant to Committee “Policy” Discussions

RECOMMENDATION 33. Improve feedback and timely reaction to reports on adjudication committee “policy” discussion.

⁶² For instance, “We have had a very good policy discussion this year. We kept 2½ hours for that the last morning. Everybody contributed to it» (SRG committee chair); «The policy discussion is very important. At the last adjudication committee we finished early in the morning of the last day, we wanted to have a serious policy discussion. I wanted every member to make comments and comment on each others’ views. It’s a very good process. These discussions are a very important part of the process. Every year changes are made because of that. It is also useful for introductory instructions in the committee the next year. It makes things better understood, more conscious” (thematic committee Chair); “The policy reports are only partly implemented. That’s OK, there might be a lot of considerations we did not know about. Last year, for instance, we said we did not understand why the composition of committees is secret. This year we see that SSHRC is putting the list on the web. That’s good” (committee member, SRG).

6.2 The Observers

At SSHRC, the institution of observers at Standard Research Grant (SRG) adjudication committees is another truly original and most interesting initiative. It is indeed an innovative instrument for monitoring peer review as it is actually practiced during adjudication committee meetings, and for ensuring and improving the quality of that process.

Observers are selected among experienced scholars who have previously been, for some years, members of adjudication committees. Most of them have also served before as members on committees for other agencies, such as the National Science Foundation or Fonds de recherche sur la société et la culture (FQRSC), for instance.

This unpaid, voluntary activity is quite demanding, requiring presence in Ottawa for most of an entire week, and sitting in silent observation of committees during long hours every day. The observers we have talked to are very enthusiastic about the function they play. They are indeed convinced that it has very often led to improvements in the operations of the committees and the peer-review process.

The work of observers seems well organized. One of the pioneers in that role has written a guide for observers to help newcomers in the function. Observers meet members of SSHRC management at dinner before they start the work and discuss with them questions and issues in need of attention. Observers usually have breakfast and lunch together every day to discuss their common business and share their observations as they circulate from committee to committee. They meet again together to formulate their final joint report.

Observers are asked to attend the Chairs meetings in December and January, so that they can be introduced and their role explained to the Chairs before the committees meet. Observers are briefly introduced by the Chair as they come into a committee room, but they remain silent and do not participate to the discussions they witness as they visit the different committees. They may freely engage with committee members at coffee breaks. All agree that this creates no disruption and no discomfort as their role is understood by everyone.

In the words of one of the observers, “The job is to watch and flag. You want SSHRC to be fair [...] If something is wrong in a given committee and seems to require urgent remedy, I do not hesitate to alert management so that they can make move to have the committee work properly. [...] It is better than to just put it in the report.”

It is felt that, because of these intensive interactions among observers, even a newcomer is soon working efficiently. The ideal is to ensure overlapping terms. We are told by one observer that “there does not need to be a Council member among the group of observers but at least a member of the Board standing committee on research support.” That same person remarked that “it would be useful to have observers from elsewhere, out of SSHRC circles, at least some years,” and that indeed seems something to consider.

In this case, feedback is standard: “there is always some feedback from whomever is in charge; our observer’s report is usually tabled at the standing research support committee; quite often some program officers took it up and did things with it. Most of the time our findings and recommendations are convergent with feelings of other people, especially program officers.”

In high-level management at SSHRC, the work of observers has been for many years considered really relevant and helpful: “Observers on balance were extraordinarily good and diligent. Their recommendations as those from director of research grants or senior program officers have produced very wise insights on paper and orally.”

Some wonder if their role could not be extended and if appointed further ahead in advance, they could not act more as advisors to program officers.

6.2.1 Recommendations Relevant to Observers

RECOMMENDATION 34. Examine the possibility of extending the presence of observers to other programs.

RECOMMENDATION 35. Invite diligent observers to formally become members of a “SSHRC International College of Expert Reviewers” and to continue to serve as observers.

6.3 The Appeal Process

The appeal mechanism, in case something goes wrong in the peer-review process, serves as an ultimate safety net, so to speak. In that regard, it may also be considered a monitoring device, as well as a quality control mechanism.

Given the some 15,000 proposals for research grants of all types and for scholarships and fellowships that SSHRC receives every year, and given the low rates of success, numerous applicants will be disappointed. It is then remarkable that so few appeals are made (around 25 annually); only one or two are successful after examination by the appeal committee (see Appendix 12).

According to the document on *Appeals of Decisions Based on Peer Review* posted on the SSHRC website, decisions may be appealed on two grounds only:

1. Where there has been a procedural error in the adjudication process; or
2. Where the decision is based on factual error.

A procedural error is defined as including “any departure from the Council’s policy regarding undeclared conflict of interest, or a failure to provide prescribed information to the adjudication committee.”

A factual error exists “where there is compelling evidence that the committee based its decision not to recommend an award on a conclusion that is contrary to information clearly stated in the application.”

These definition and other explanations of their significance make clear that the basis on which to appeal a decision is quite narrow at SSHRC. It is not however exceptionally so. The Panel agrees with one of its interlocutors who stated that “to accept appeal on substance rather than on errors of procedure and of facts only would be to get into a deep ‘black hole,’ and that there should not be second guessing of peers.”

People who have recently served on the appeals committee (which is chaired by a SSHRC vice-president, and composed of former SSHRC adjudication committee Chairs or members) see it as a “straightforward experience.”

The panel sees no reason to recommend any fundamental change to that element of process.

6.3.1 Recommendation Relevant to the Appeal Process

RECOMMENDATION 36. Keep the appeal process as transparent as possible: make public, each year in advance, the membership of the appeal committee and ensure fast decision on all appeals.

PART 7. PROGRAM OFFICERS AND THEIR PIVOTAL ROLE

In the words of a former high-level officer at SSHRC, “Good program officers are worth their weight in gold.”

The panel fully concurs. The respect of the research community for SSHRC largely hinges on the quality of work of its programs officers. Indeed their contribution ought to be publicly celebrated.

The Pivotal Role of the Program Officer

In a note forwarded to us after his interview, a seasoned program officer wrote:

“The Program Officer is responsible for the very vital task of operationalizing the committee peer review structure. [...] The Program Officer plays an extremely vital role in the peer evaluation process. Among the many challenges of the program position, there is the most important challenge which is that of creating and managing peer review committees of Canada’s leading researchers. It goes without saying, therefore, that the job in and of itself is professionally rewarding. [...] It is very regretful that – with the exception of the committee members – the role of the Program Officer in the peer review process is undervalued and little understood, recognized or valorized by most.”

The role of program officers may not be recognized generally enough in the Canadian academic community. All the interlocutors interviewed, who have served as peer reviewers, were, however, fully conscious of the pivotal role of these officers and of how the quality of the peer-review process at SSHRC is predicated upon the competence and diligence of each of them.

Because of the different but critical roles program officers have to play before, during and after the adjudication committee meetings, committee Chairs and members become keenly aware of their essential contributions and of their level of performance. When inadequate, it is quickly felt and the burden on a committee increases. Fortunately, our encounters with peer reviewers show that their high expectations towards program officers are almost always extremely well met.

In the rare instances where problems did arise, it was essentially because of a still inexperienced newcomer, or with some transients that made only one appearance in the job.⁶³

⁶³ “I always was very impressed with service level at SSHRC and with the professional work of the program officers; they are cheerful and quick. One program officer was new, maybe probationary then, but now still there; the other seems to have been permanent” (committee member who has served at least four times, SRG); “There are regular and seasonal program officers. Some seasonals return every year; some are excellent, but in general it is highly problematical to have transients, especially when they have no experience in the specific field of the committee they are given. It is a burden on the permanents who have to train these people; it’s a kind of investment where there is no payoff if people do not come back. [...] there is a huge learning curve” (observer); « L’autre année, on avait une saisonnière ; sa prestation était correcte ; mais c’était clair qu’elle n’avait pas connaissance de tout, ne savait pas manipuler la filière Excel comme l’année précédente ; elle a dû avoir de l’aide parce que ça n’allait pas, mais elle comprenait bien son rôle et était respectueuse du travail des membres ; elle était bien préparée à cet égard par le CRSH » (committee Chair, SRG); « Il arrive qu’on change d’agent de programme chaque année. Ça aussi c’est un sérieux problème. La première année l’agente était nouvelle, très sincère mais pas formée et pas de supervision. Aussi cette même année-là la présidente était sans aucune expérience, c’était une chercheure chevronnée, mais elle arrivait de l’extérieur du Canada et ne connaissait pas la culture du CRSH. Cette première année a été ‘bordélique’. La 2e année, l’agent avait au contraire beaucoup

When such difficulties emerge, they generally come from problems created by non-availability of human resources, or recruitment and turnover management, not because of the level of performance of the regular program officers.

The workload of all program officers is heavy. In thematic and strategic programs, where officers are all tenured professionals, some with very many years of experience, each has to manage different programs, three or even more, according to different calendars, with some of them running in parallel. There again the level of satisfaction of peer reviewers working with these program officers is high.⁶⁴

In running both SRG and Doctoral and Postdoctoral Fellowship programs, the function of program officers is supported by a program coordinator. Their responsibilities are more exclusively of a procedural nature than is the case for program officers.⁶⁵ Accordingly, the coordinator has a different career pattern, levels of formal education, and work experience.

Program officers have not only to be excellent in the exercise of their administrative and procedural responsibilities, they also ought to acquire and maintain a real depth of understanding of the evolving intellectual domain in which they intervene. This is a demanding requirement; this is why the quality of these program officers ought to be, and to remain, constantly a priority of the first rank at SSHRC.

The Program Officer: An Emerging Profession

SSHRC is now recruiting candidates for many new positions as program officers for all programs. The expected level of education is a university degree (a graduate degree is an asset) with some experience in research, for instance as a research assistant, or in research administration.

The panel is of the view that candidates should hold a PhD to keep in line with international standards and practices. Program officers need to have a level of education and a training in research that give them not only credibility in a world of scholars, but also equip them with the basic knowledge and intellectual tools to understand the research activity and to actively follow intellectual transformations occurring at the frontier of research in their domain. This academic qualification alone does not suffice. Candidates must also necessarily, in order to be able to perform their complex job, possess managerial skills, that is, efficiency in procedural matters and in multitasking, ability to organize and proceed in orderly manner, etc.

d'expérience et la différence a été incroyable. La 3^e année, on a eu encore une nouvelle, mais elle avait vraiment été formée par l'agent de programme de l'année précédente ; elle a été très efficace même si elle était nouvelle. Elle connaissait bien les ressources qu'elle pouvait utiliser » (other committee Chair, SRG).

⁶⁴ “I have worked with two program officers. Both have been very good. One was more wanting to learn, was questioning a lot, and participated in things and he was very welcomed there. The other one was well prepared; he was very respectful of the committee; both were very serious about that. They were very busy, ran many programs. They did very good jobs both of them. (Thematic committee chair); «The role of the program officer is absolutely crucial; he has to be most familiar with program, rules and regulations, he plays an important role in identifying and managing conflicts of interest and in follow-up. [...] Program officers are generally extremely competent when they have been active for some years. It is an extremely important role to pick the right people for committee and make clear to them regulations and expectations” (committee Chair, CURA).

⁶⁵ From the interview of the program coordinator: “The components of the job? I do not only do committee membership, selecting members, but also review applications for eligibility and content; day to day there is a lot of talking to students about applications, awards, payments, day to day transactions; lots of transactions with student daily at all level, from masters to postdocs.”

The program officer is part of a new, emerging profession that combines academic credentials with managerial abilities, and that places him/her closer to the scholarly world than to the realm of government bureaucracy.

Today, it has become incumbent upon granting agencies, such as SSHRC, to construct for these new professionals a career structure in which they can grow in stature and find personal satisfaction and reward through the years.

In managing the careers of its program officers, SSHRC ought to ensure some mobility between various types of programs and functions (in policy division, in engaging and communicating with the scholarly communities), and also keep open access to positions as team leaders and in management. Of course, some losses are to be expected, as highly qualified and renowned program officers will accept responsibilities in university research administrations, or in other granting or research agencies. Management and quality of life at work should keep turnover and loss of expertise at a reasonable level.

A few of our interlocutors have expressed in interviews the fear that recruiting at the PhD-level might threaten the peer-review process itself, the program officers so qualified being then naturally tempted to usurp the functions of committee members. The panel disagrees. Indeed, what has been experienced in other granting agencies internationally, and even what can be already observed at SSHRC, shows that this apprehension is not justified.

It is true that during the adjudication process, program officers have to adopt an attitude of active and effective support, but also maintain some reserve and respect for the expertise of the peer reviewers, and abstain from interfering with the responsibilities of these adjudicators and of Chairs. This seems to be well understood, and practiced. Some of the program officers, recognized for the excellent quality of their contributions at SSHRC, do hold doctoral degrees and nothing we heard from committee Chairs or members leads us to believe that initiatives would have been taken by any of them that would impinge upon peer reviewers' responsibilities.

Finally, the panel believes that all efforts should be made to stabilize the group of program officers and to hire as many permanents as needed and feasible. We know that work is especially intensive at some periods of the year for processing proposals and running peer-review committees, peaking in the fall and winter. It seems that program officers could be deployed differently during other parts of the year. According to periodic changes in work flow, they could be involved yearly, for a few months, with policy or with strategic grants. They could also be much more present and active in the research community and institutions, outside SSHRC head office.

The Public Functions of Program Officers

Interacting with the research community is already a part of the program officers' jobs at SSHRC. Not only do they interact with applicants individually, but they also attend annual meetings and colloquia to keep abreast of intellectual innovations and debates, meet researchers in-person and extend their networking, as well as participate in presentations and workshops related to SSHRC programs. This is a matter of keeping in touch with the field intellectually, of ensuring a better presence and visibility of the agency in the research community, and of improving SSHRC communications.

Indeed, in well-run granting agencies, program officers are visible to the research community, to make it better understood how they actually operate. Transparency increases trust. In the words of one the most seasoned of our interlocutors:

“I am far from sure that the community has a good understanding of the role of program officers beyond coordinating the move of information; they have a considerable amount of responsibility and influence on process. [...] Training manuals for program officers are not on the web. I think it would be very useful to have something like that on the web. [...] There is nothing to fear by that. It would help raise the status of program officers within SSHRC and educate the community on how SSHRC operates.”

The panel strongly believes that the strength of the peer review at SSHRC, its credibility in the scholarly community and its international ranking among the best of granting agencies, will depend in no small part upon its forward vision and upon the adequacy of its management of this emerging new class of intellectual professionals, the program officers.

7.1.1 Recommendations Relevant to Program Officers

RECOMMENDATION 37. Recruit permanent program officers and minimize the number of temporary ones.

- Advertise job openings more broadly, beyond government circles, in scholarly publications and in graduate departments.
- Comply with evolving international standards and recruit professionals with Ph.D.
- Aim to recruit professionals with a proper combination of high-level formal university training, understanding of research activities, and organizational and managerial abilities and skills.
- Keep the salary structure for program officers competitive for attracting and retaining quality staff.

RECOMMENDATION 38. Define for program officers a career structure in which they can grow.

- Pursue the development of a training program for incoming program officers.
- Maintain and support the extension of scholarly and scientific competences of program officers.
- Encourage program officers that already work in the system to acquire and develop personal managerial and other new skill sets.
- Reward and celebrate publicly exceptional performance.

RECOMMENDATION 39. Make more public and transparent the role and responsibilities of program officers at SSHRC, and encourage and support their interactions with the research community.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The questions structuring the mandate of our panel were all aimed at assessing “the quality and integrity of SSHRC’s peer-review practices.”

We made our conclusion clear in Section 1, Part 1 of this report:

The panel unanimously wishes to state here that the peer-review process at SSHRC is, overall, up to the best practices and highest international standards. It is a system that works well and that is most healthy in its fundamentals.

Indeed, SSHRC ought to be commended for its performance at insuring the fairness and integrity of its peer-review evaluation process.

The findings upon which we based the preceding conclusive statement ought now to be clear to all readers.

It ought also to be even clearer by now that all the critical observations we have made along the way, and all the recommendations we formulated, essentially aim at making sure that this system that already works well remains sustainable and efficient, and is improved in such ways that it maintains its rank internationally, among the best granting agencies.

Indeed the thrust of all our recommendations has been three-pronged and it can be subsumed under three interlinked key messages:

1. Lighten the workload of peer reviewers, and encourage and recognize better their efforts, and those of program officers.
2. Clearly distinguish issues pertaining to policy decision-making and to the SSHRC Council from those that ought to remain properly attributed to peer-review evaluators.
3. Make all processes as public and as transparent to the research community as possible, in order to better the understanding of SSHRC’s operations and to maintain trust and goodwill.

SURVEY

The results of the web survey proved complementary to our sense of the research landscape.

They essentially confirmed that the provisional conclusions we had drawn from our analysis of the abundant documentation made available to us by SSHRC management, as well as from the interviews we conducted, largely converged with the perceptions of the Canadian university research community in the humanities and social sciences.

The survey results did not contradict in any substantial way our findings. They did provide a high degree of confirmation of our confidence in SSHRC peer-review system's value and credibility.

These survey results also provided (Q. 37), in many cases, very useful and substantive support for a large number of our recommendations.

The survey did bring an unexpected result in the rather high degree of homogeneity of distribution of opinions across disciplines and across domains of research. Contrary to the commonly held view, differences are more striking between some specific disciplines or domains of research within the humanities and within the social sciences, but no great divide appears to exist between the humanities (on the one hand) and the social sciences (on the other).

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APPENDIX 1. BLUE RIBBON PANEL MEMBERS

Michèle LAMONT (Chair)

Robert I. Goldman Professor of European Studies
Professor of Sociology and African and African American Studies, Harvard University

Dr. Lamont moved to Harvard in 2003 after having taught at Princeton for 15 years. A former Guggenheim fellow, she is currently serving as Chair of the Council for European Studies, the learned society of American social scientists and historians working on Europe. She is a fellow of the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research and is co-director of its research program on Successful Societies.

Dr. Lamont has published in the fields of inequality, culture, race, immigration, knowledge, theory, qualitative methods, and comparative sociology. Her most recent book is *How Professors Think: Inside the Curious World of Academic Judgment* (Harvard University Press 2009).

Donald AITKIN

Emeritus Professor, University of Canberra, AUSTRALIA

Don Aitkin AO is a former Vice-Chancellor and President of the University of Canberra, 1991-2002) who spent the first six months of his 'retirement' serving as the CEO of a R&D company. He is the Chairman of the Boards of the National Capital Authority, the ACT Cultural Facilities Corporation, the NRMA/ACT Road Safety Trust, and Pro Musica Inc. He has had a long-standing with the Canada Foundation for Innovation, as well as with a number of Australian and Canadian organisations interested in education, research, urban development, and governance, matters about which he has strong views and, in some respects, unorthodox ones. He is a Fellow of the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia, the Australian College of Education and the Australian Planning Institute. He was the founding Chairman of the Australian Research Council (1988-1990), where he trebled the budget and established the ARC as an organisation of world class; he served for six years as a member of the Australian Science and Technology Council (1996-2002). He holds honorary doctorates from the University of Canberra and the University of New England.

A historian and political scientist, he was a professor at Macquarie University (1971-1979) and the ANU (1980-1988), and the author of a number of books on Australian history, politics and higher education, as well as a novel. His most recent book, *What Was It All For? The Reshaping of Australia*, was published in October 2005, and he writes a weekly column on education for the *Australian Financial Review*. In past times he was a widely read newspaper columnist in the *National Times* and the *Canberra Times*, a contributing editor of *Newsweek*, and a television and radio commentator. In what passes for his spare time he writes books and plays the piano.

Michael GIBBONS

Honorary Professor, Science Policy Research Unit [SPRU]
University of Sussex, UK

Professor Gibbons took up his current position upon retirement as Secretary General of the Association of Commonwealth Universities in August 2004. From 1999 to 2004, he was Director of the Science Policy Research at Sussex University. He has been an active participant in academia as well as a consultant for public and private organizations and committees. He was the Founding Director of the Programme of Policy Research in Engineering Science and Technology

at the University of Manchester and Director of Research and Technology Transfer in that University. Professor Gibbons has an active research interest in science and technology policy. From 2000 to 2003, he was a member of the UK Economic and Social Research Council and Chair of its Research Priorities Board. He has acted as a special advisor for the UK Parliamentary Science and Technology Committee, and has been a consultant with OECD for many years.

He is the author/co-author/editor of nine other books and more than 80 articles in national and international journals, with an emphasis on science and technology policy.

Linda HUTCHEON

Professor of English and Comparative Literature, University of Toronto

A specialist in postmodernist culture and in critical theory, on which she has published 9 books, Dr. Hutcheon has also worked collaboratively in large projects involving hundreds of scholars (the multi-volumed *Rethinking Literary History*, which was awarded a Major Collaborative Research Initiatives grant from the SSHRC in 1996) and many smaller ones.

The recipient of major fellowships and awards (Woodrow Wilson, Killam Research, Guggenheim, Rockefeller, Connaught, Northrop Frye Award) and numerous honorary degrees (in Canada and Europe), in 2000 she was elected the 117th President of the Modern Language Association of America, the third Canadian to hold this position, and the first Canadian woman.

Dr. Hutcheon is currently researching the ethics and politics of reviewing.

Ursula LEHMKUHL

First Vice President of the Freie Universität Berlin and Full Professor of Modern History at John F. Kennedy Institute at Freie Universität Berlin since 2002.

Dr. Lehmkühl held several governance/administrative positions including: Coordinator of the Center for Area Studies, Member of the Executive Board of the Graduate School "North American Studies" and, Coordinator of the Master Program "North American Studies" (all at Freie Universität Berlin). She is co-director of a coordinated research center (SFB) on "Governance in Areas of Limited Statehood" which comprises 135 researchers from history, political science, economics and law.

Published several scholarly books, articles and book chapters in German and English. Teaching and research fields include: International Relations/History, Canadian and American History, American and British Social and Cultural History, 19th and 20th century, Colonial History, Atlantic History and Transnational History

Toni SCARPA

Director of the Center for Scientific Review, NIH
Bethesda, MD

Dr. Scarpa has served as a permanent member of three NIH peer review committees between 1983 and 2003 as well as a member of peer review committees for the American Heart Association.

He came to NIH from Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, where he was the David and Inez Myers professor and chair of the Department of Physiology. He oversaw the development of a small physiology and biophysics department into one now ranked among the best in the country. His studies were supported by grants from the National Heart, Lung and

Blood Institute, the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, and the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, as well as the American Heart Association.

Dr. Scarpa has more than 225 peer-reviewed publications and has edited or co-edited 9 books or special journal supplements.

Mark WEISS

Director, Division of Behavioral and Cognitive Sciences
National Science Foundation, Arlington, VA

Mark Weiss received his doctorate in physical anthropology from the University of California, Berkeley in 1969 at which time he became a member of the Anthropology Faculty at Wayne State University. He left the university in 2000 for the US National Science Foundation after having risen to Professor and Chair of the Department of Anthropology.

Until 2005 Weiss was program director of physical anthropology at NSF when he was seconded to the Office of Science and Technology Policy at the White House where he served as Assistant Director for Social, Behavioral and Economic Sciences for a year. In this capacity he assisted the President's Senior Science Advisor on matters involving the social and behavioral sciences.

Since returning to NSF he has served as Senior Science Advisor in the Directorate for Social, Behavioral and Economic Sciences and as Division Director for the Division of Behavioral and Cognitive Sciences. As the latter, he oversees approximately 10 programs funding research in psychology and cognition, linguistics, geography and spatial sciences and the anthropological sciences. He has also served on a number of Interagency Working Groups tasked with coordinating federal activities in specific areas of science.

COORDINATOR OF THE PANEL

Camille LIMOGES

Emeritus Member, Centre interuniversitaire de Recherche sur la Science et la Technologie [CIRST] and Consultant
Montreal, QC

Recently retired as deputy minister of Québec's ministère de la Recherche, de la Science, et de la Technologie. His three decades of work, both as a scholar and a civil servant, has made a visible mark on science and technology research policies. Well-known as a pioneer in the field of the history of science and technology in Québec, Limoges founded the Institut d'histoire et de sociopolitique des sciences at the Université de Montréal in 1973. Ten years later, he became the deputy minister of Québec's newly-created ministère de la Science et de la Technologie (later, de l'Enseignement supérieur et de la Science). Returning to academia in 1987, this time to the Université du Québec à Montréal, Limoges joined a multi-university team to create the Centre de recherche en évaluation sociale des technologies. Thereafter, he went on to found and serve as director of the Centre interuniversitaire de recherche sur la science et la technologie (CIRST). He also served from 1989 to 1990 as president of ACFAS (Association canadienne-française pour l'avancement des sciences), and from 1997 to 2000, as president of the Conseil de la science et de la technologie (CST).

SSHRC STAFF SUPPORT TO THE PANEL

Marilyn TAYLOR, Vice-President, Grants and Fellowships

François SIMARD, Team Leader, Research and Dissemination Grants Programs

Nicolas GERMAIN, Program Officer, Research and Dissemination Grants Programs

APPENDIX 2. Peer Review Characteristics by Program

Fellowships

Program Name	# of ctees and # of members per ctee	# of readers per file	Assessments		Notes
			Yes/ No	Number per File	
J.-A. Bombardier Canada Graduate Scholarships Program - Master's Scholarships	1 ctee, 8 members	3	No	0	2 appraisal letters and one departmental letter*
Doctoral Awards	<u>Pre-selection:</u> 5 ctees, 5 – 7 members; 31 ctees, 3 members + chair	3	No	0	2 appraisal letters and one departmental letter*
Aileen D. Ross Fellowship / Queen's Fellowship / SSHRC William E. Taylor Fellowship	1 ctee, 5 chairs of nat. Doc. Awards ctees	All members	No	0	Adjudicated by a revision committee composed of the chairs from Doctoral Awards committees
Postdoctoral Fellowships	5 ctees, 5 - 7 members	3	No	0	Requires 2 appraisal letters, one research appraisal letter, and one institutional nomination form
SSHRC Postdoctoral Prize	1 ctee, 7 - 8 members	All members	No	0	

* No departmental letter for direct applications

Research, Dissemination and Strategic Grants

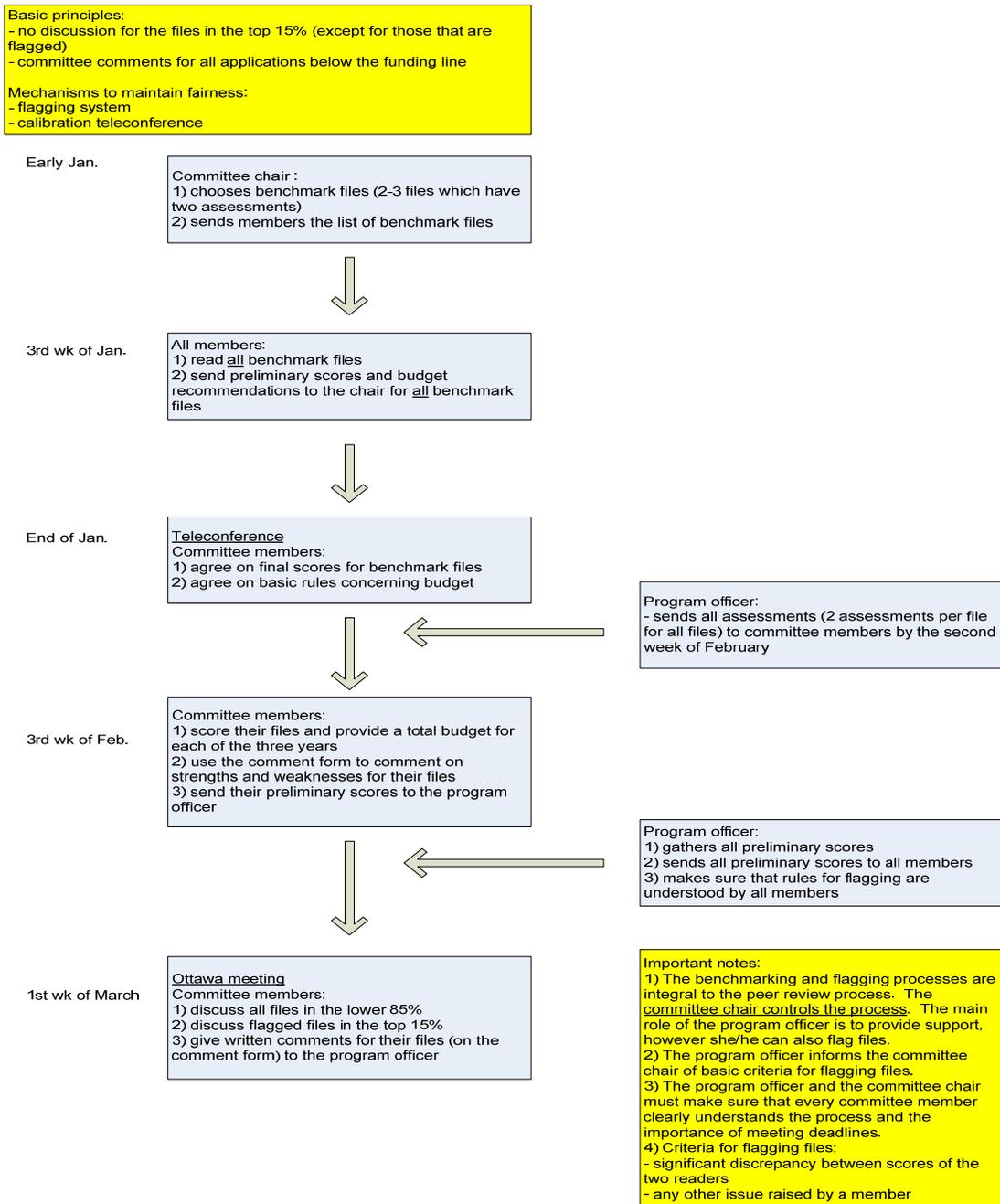
Program Name	# of ctees and # of members per ctee	# of readers per file	Assessments		Notes
			Yes / No	Number per file	
Standard Research Grants	24 ctees, 7 to 12 members	2	Yes	2	
Major Collaborative Research Initiatives (MCRI)	1 ctee, 8 members	All members	yes	6	Two stages process: 1) Letter of intent: no external assessment 2) formal application: 6 external assessors required
Community-University Research Alliances (CURA)	1 ctee, 8-9 members	2	Yes	1 or 2	Two stages process: 1) Letter of intent: no external assessment 2) formal application: 1 or 2 external assessments required

Program Name	# of ctees and # of members per ctee	# of readers per file	Assessments		Notes
			Yes / No	Number per file	
Aboriginal Research: Development Grants / Research Grants	1 Relevance ctee: 7-10 members 1 Adjudication ctee: 7-11 members	2	Possibly	0	Two stage process. Assessments collected only if requested by ctee.
Image, Text, Sound and Technology: Research Grants / Summer Institute, Workshop and Conference Grants	1 ctee, 5 members	2	No	0	
International Opportunities Fund: Development Grants / Project Grants	1 ctee, 5 to 11 members	2	Possibly	0	Assessments are collected only if requested by committee.
International Opportunities Fund – Special Call in Management, Business and Finance	1 ctee, 5 to 11 members	2	Possibly	0	Assessments are collected only if requested by committee.
Northern Research Development Program	1 ctee, 5 members	2 or all (see note)	No	0	If # of applications is low, all members read all files. If large # of applications, 2 readers per file.
Research Development Initiatives	1 ctee, 6 members	2	No	0	
Research Development Initiatives – Special Call in Management, Business and Finance	1 ctee, 5 members	2	No	0	
Research Grants – Special Call in Management, Business and Finance	3 ctees, 9 members	2	Possibly	0	Assessments collected only if requested by committee.
Strategic Knowledge Clusters	1 ctee, 5 to 6 members	2	Yes	2	
Canadian Initiative on Social Statistics (CISS) Access to Research Data Centers	3 members: 2 for SSHRC, 1 for Stats Can	1	No	0	Done on an ad-hoc basis. When an application is received, 2 experts evaluate scholarly merit. Should they accept the proposal, it is sent to StatsCan for final approval.
Homelessness and Diversity Issues in Canada	1 ctee, 5 members	2 or all (see note)	No	0	If # of applications is low, all members read all files. If large # of applications, 2 readers per file.

Program Name	# of ctees and # of members per ctee	# of readers per file	Assessments		Notes
			Yes / No	Number per file	
Infrastructure Canada: Peer Reviewed Research Studies Program	1 ctee, 5 members	All members read all files	Yes	2	
Metropolis Project	0	0	yes	2	SSHRC collects assessments regarding scholarly merit then other federal funding partners evaluate policy relevance.
Aid to Research Workshops and Conferences in Canada	1 ctee, 10-12 members	3	No	0	
Aid to Scholarly Journals	5 ctees, 6 members	3	No	0	
Research/Creation Grants in Fine Arts	1 ctee, 12-14 members	2	Possibly	0	Assessments are collected only if requested by committee.
Bora Laskin National Fellowship / Thérèse F.-Casgrain Fellowship / The Jules and Gabrielle Léger Fellowship	1 ctee, 4 to 5 members	All members	Yes	2	Offered on alternating years. The same committee adjudicates all 3.

APPENDIX 3. Standard Research Grants (SRG) Adjudication Process

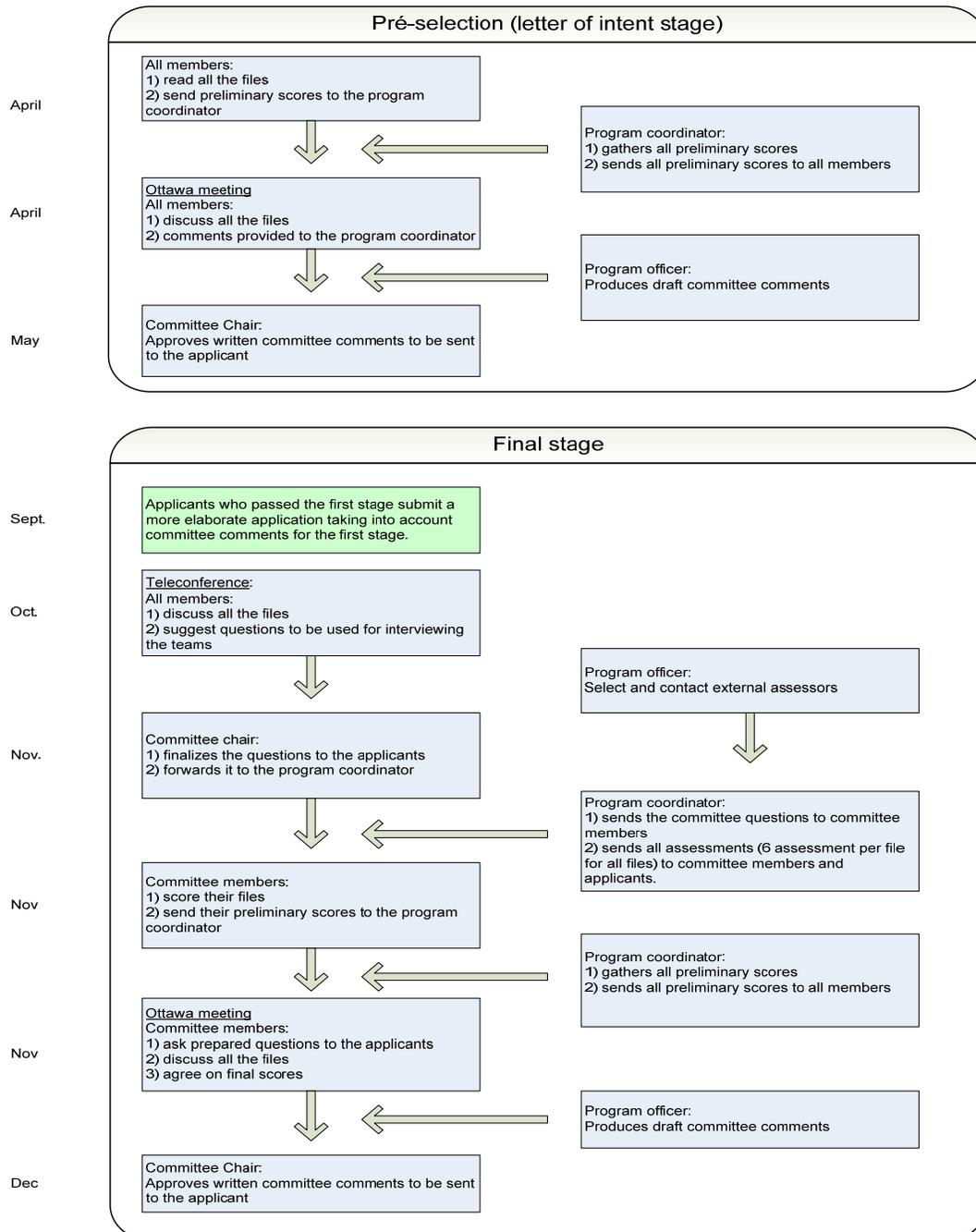
Chart 1: Adjudication process, SRG, 2008



APPENDIX 4. Major Collaborative Research Initiatives (MCRI) Adjudication Process

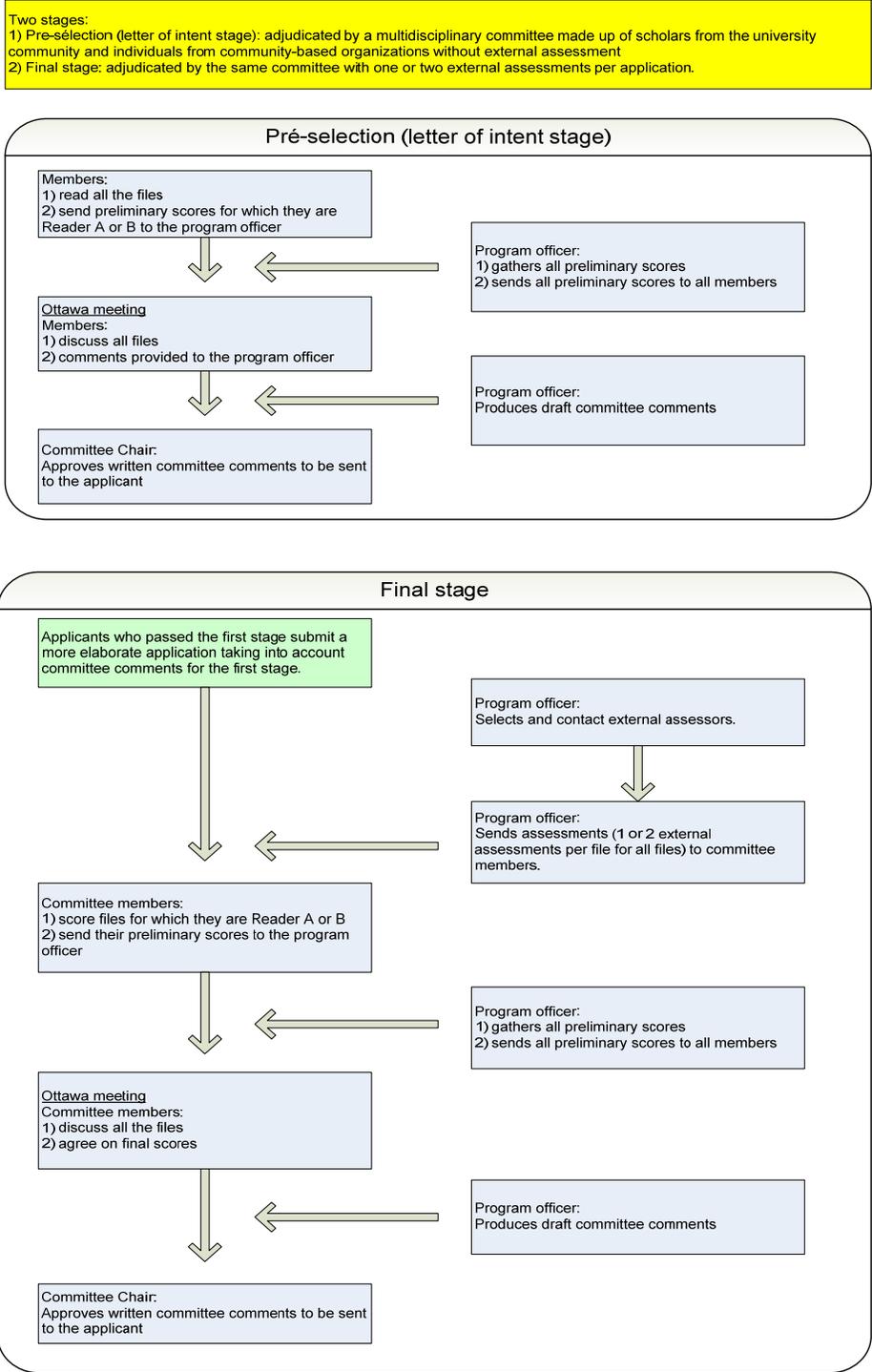
Chart 2: Adjudication process, MCRI, 2009

Two stages:
 1) Pre-selection (letter of intent stage): adjudicated by a multidisciplinary committee without external assessment
 2) Final stage: adjudicated by the same committee with six external assessments per application. Research teams come to Ottawa to present their project to the committee.



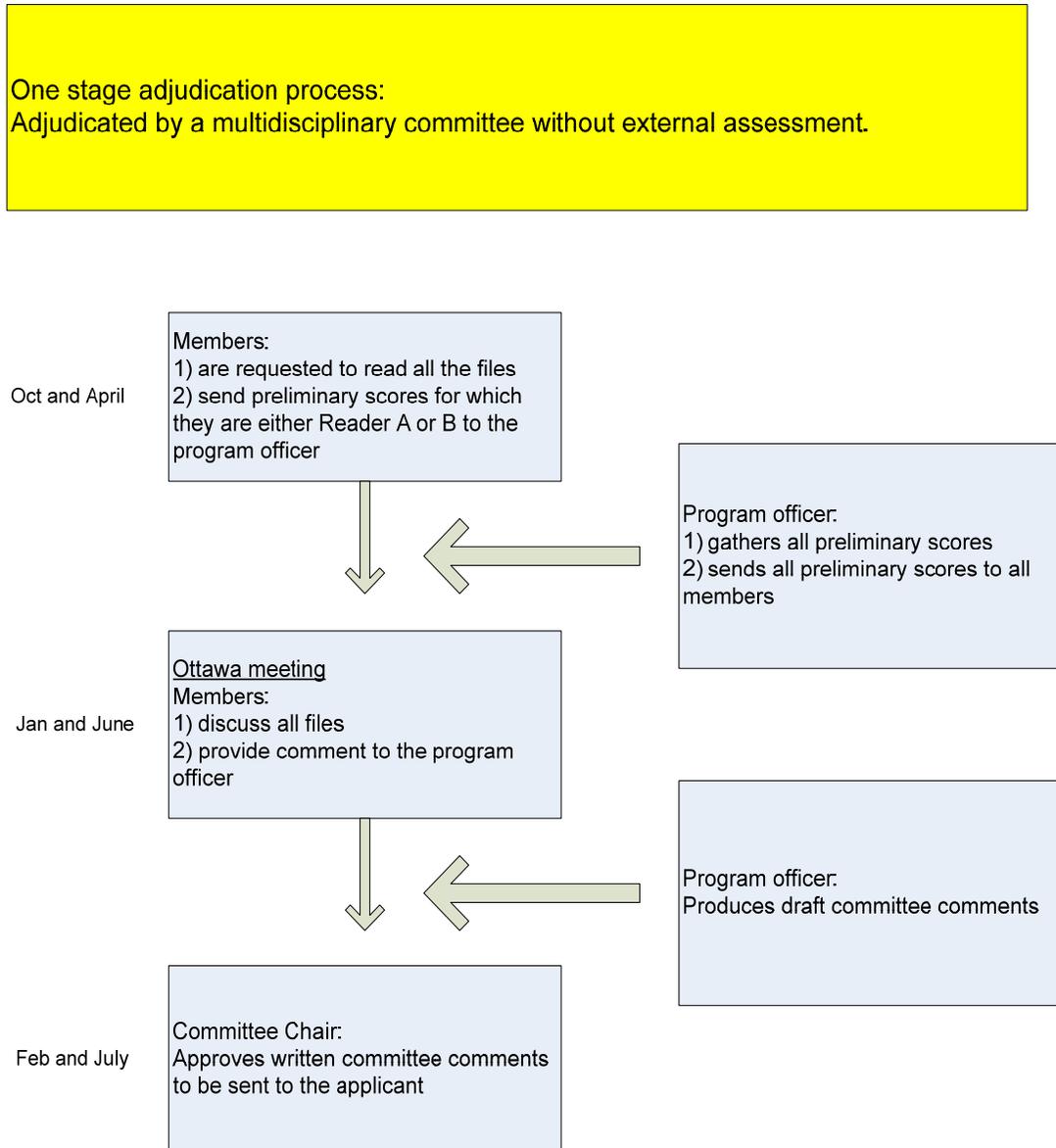
APPENDIX 5. Community University Research Alliance (CURA) Adjudication Process

Chart 3: Adjudication process, CURA, 2009



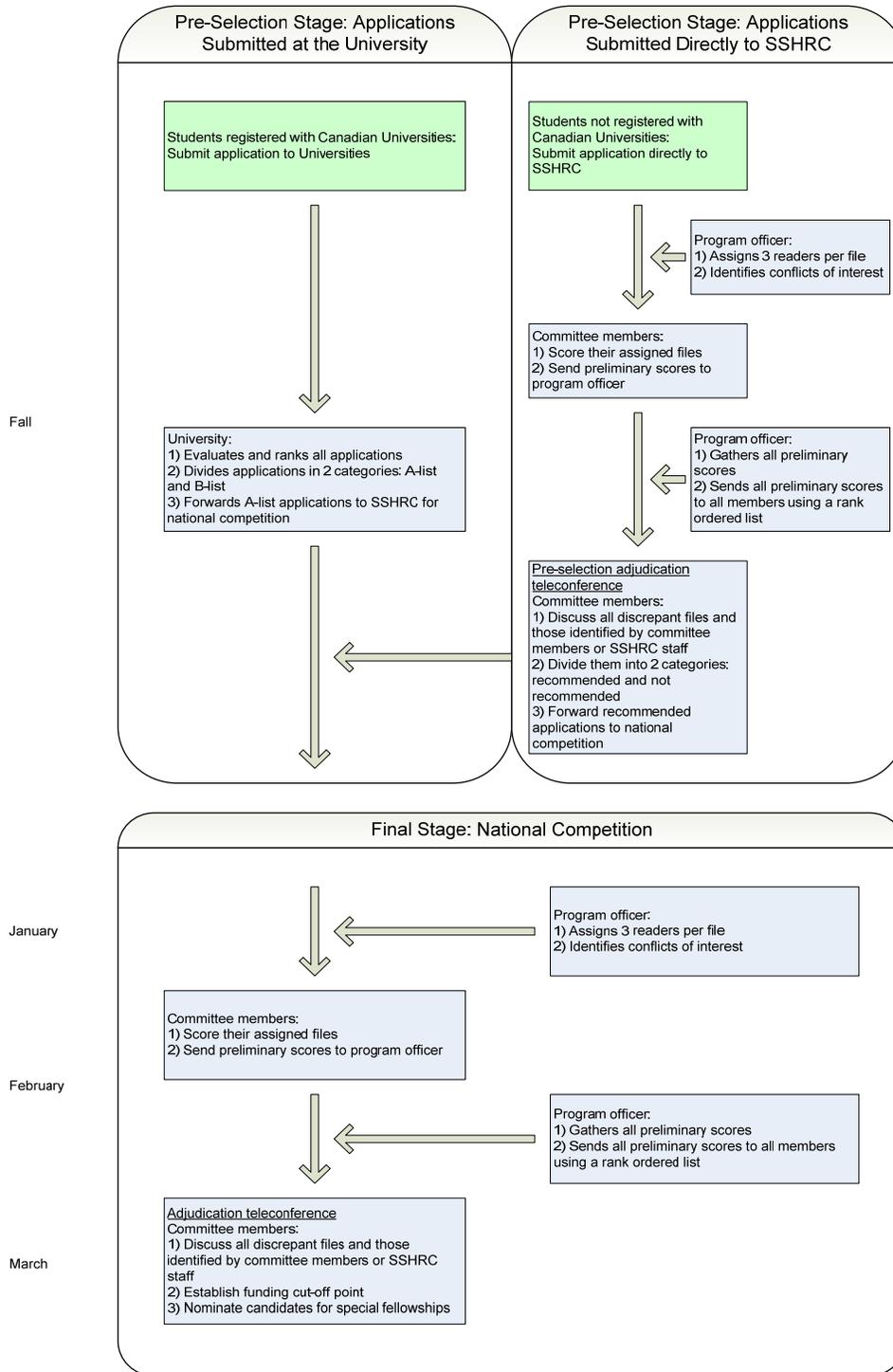
APPENDIX 6. Research Development Initiatives (RDI) Adjudication Process

Chart 4: Adjudication process, RDI, 2009



APPENDIX 7. Doctoral Awards Adjudication Process

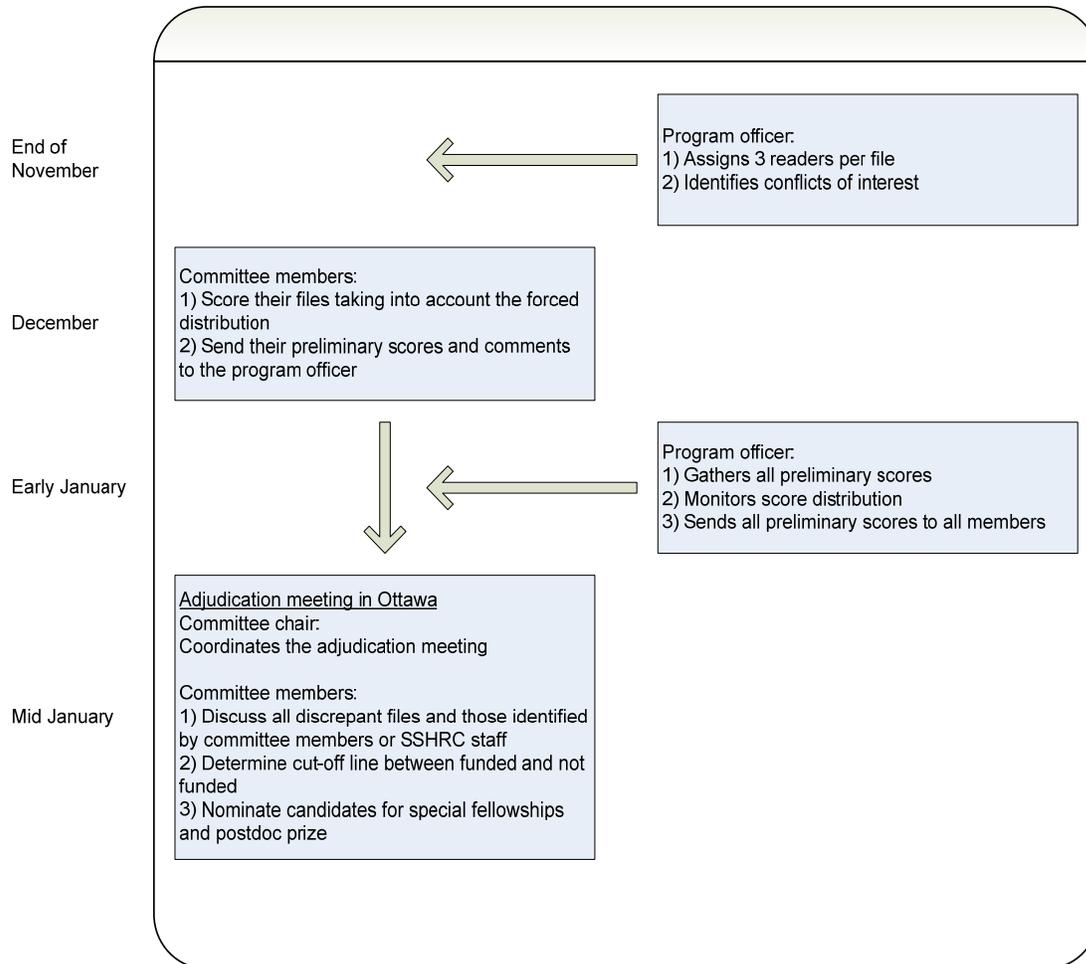
Chart 5: Adjudication Process, Doctoral Awards, 2009



Note:
 1) Discrepant files are defined as files for which there is a difference of more than 3 points between the readers' scores.

APPENDIX 8. Postdoctoral Fellowships Adjudication Process

Chart 6: Adjudication process, Postdoctoral Fellowships, 2009



Note:

1) Discrepant files are defined as files for which there is a difference more than 3 points between the readers' scores.

APPENDIX 9. List of Standard Research Grants (SRG) Committees

1	Classics, ancient and mediaeval studies, religious studies, classical archaeology
2	History: history of science, technology and medicine
3	Fine arts: history and philosophy of art, architecture, theatre, music, film, dance
5	Linguistics, applied linguistics and translation
7	Economics
8	Sociology and demography
9	Geography, urban planning, environmental studies
10	Psychology 1: Social, personality and individual differences; behavioural, community and environmental; industrial/organizational; cultural
12	Education 1: Curriculum; arts, civic, environmental, geography, history, mathematics and science education; second language education; reading and writing; moral, values and religious education
15	Interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary studies
16	Anthropology and archaeology
17	Education 2: Library/archival science; educational administration; adult, continuing, community and vocational education; history, philosophy, sociology and theory of education; higher education; comparative and distance education; educational technology
18	Literature 1: English (from the Mediaeval to the Victorian period), French, German, Slavic
19	Literature 2: American, modern and contemporary literatures in English, English Canadian, First Nations, French Canadian & Québec, romance, other languages & literatures
20	Health studies and social work
21	Human resources management, organizational studies, industrial relations, management
22	Accounting, finance, management science, productions and operations management
23	Law, socio-legal studies and criminology
24	Political science and public administration
25	Philosophy
26	Communication, cultural studies and women's studies
27	Psychology 2: Counselling, developmental, psychotherapy, sports and health psychology
28	Education 3: Career guidance; early childhood and exceptional education; educational psychology; physical and health education; measurement and evaluation; pedagogy; teaching methods and teacher education
29	Marketing, international business, management of information systems, business policy

APPENDIX 10. Refusal from Potential Committee Members, Standard Research Grants (SRG), 2009 Competition

Ctee number	Ctee name	N of new members to be recruited	N of potential members contacted	Refusal rate (%)
1	Classics, ancient and mediaeval studies, religious studies, classical archaeology	7	37	81
2	History: history of science, technology and medicine			
3	Fine arts: history and philosophy of art, architecture, theatre, music, film, dance	3	6	50
5	Linguistics, applied linguistics and translation	3	3	0
7	Economics	8	14	43
8	Sociology and demography	4	14	71
9	Geography, urban planning, environmental studies	7	19	63
10	Psychology 1: Social, personality and individual differences; behavioural, community and environmental; industrial/organizational; cultural	7	28	75
12	Education 1: Curriculum; arts, civic, environmental, geography, history, mathematics and science education; second language education; reading and writing; moral, values and religious education	8	12	33
15	Interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary studies	7	84	92
16	Anthropology and archaeology			
17	Education 2: Library/archival science; educational administration; adult, continuing, community and vocational education; history, philosophy, sociology and theory of education; higher education; comparative and distance education; educational technology	6	24	75
18	Literature 1: English (from the Mediaeval to the Victorian period), French, German, Slavic			
19	Literature 2: American, modern and contemporary literatures in English, English Canadian, First Nations, French Canadian & Québec, romance, other languages & literatures	7	41	83
20	Health studies and social work			

Ctee number	Ctee name	N of new members to be recruited	N of potential members contacted	Refusal rate (%)
21	Human resources management, organizational studies, industrial relations, management	6	17	65
22	Accounting, finance, management science, productions and operations management	3	17	82
23	Law, socio-legal studies and criminology	8	36	78
24	Political science and public administration	3	12	75
25	Philosophy	5	11	55
26	Communication, cultural studies and women's studies	8	16	50
27	Psychology 2: Counselling, developmental, psychotherapy, sports and health psychology	2	18	89
28	Education 3: Career guidance; early childhood and exceptional education; educational psychology; physical and health education; measurement and evaluation; pedagogy; teaching methods and teacher education	4	6	33
29	Marketing, international business, management of information systems, business policy	5	26	81
Median		n.a	n.a	73

APPENDIX 11. Average Success Rates by Committee for Team Applications and Applications from Single Researchers, Standard Research Grants (SRG), 2005-2008

Committee		Total Applications	Awarded Grants		Success Rate	
			Single Applicants	Team Applications	Single Applicants	Team Applications
1	Classics/Rel. Studies	394	103	33	33.33%	38.82%
2	History	602	201	31	38.36%	39.74%
3	Fine Arts	432	121	35	36.23%	35.71%
5	Linguistics	293	46	66	30.67%	46.15%
7	Economics	584	160	82	43.72%	37.61%
8	Sociology	450	97	72	37.16%	38.10%
9	Geography	434	96	67	37.94%	37.02%
10	Psychology 1	559	135	71	39.02%	33.33%
12	Education 1	599	72	147	32.43%	38.99%
15	Inter/Multidisciplinary	442	101	69	42.98%	33.33%
16	Anthropo./Archaeo.	396	84	58	32.06%	43.28%
17	Education 2	540	105	84	37.63%	32.18%
18	Litterature 1	400	119	22	34.49%	40.00%
19	Litterature 2	484	149	24	35.56%	36.92%
20	Health/Wom./Soc.Work	506	67	117	37.02%	36.00%
21	Management 1	612	138	88	39.77%	33.21%
22	Management 2	353	59	70	31.72%	41.92%
23	Law/Socio Legal	368	93	44	37.96%	35.77%
24	Pol. Sc./Pub. Adm.	557	162	48	38.85%	34.29%
25	Philosophy	347	94	27	33.10%	42.86%
26	Comm./Cult.Stu./Women	425	103	50	34.68%	39.06%
27	Psychology 2	174	15	33	25.42%	28.70%
28	Education 3	199	7	44	12.28%	30.99%
29	Management 3	74	20	11	52.63%	30.56%
Total		10 224	2 347	1 393	36.58%	36.58%

APPENDIX 12. Appeals by Program Category, 2006-2008

Year	Program and Program Category	Appeal Requests Received	Appeals reviewed by Appeal Ctee	Successful Appeals
2008	Standard Research Grants	15	1	0
	Strategic Programs and Joint Initiatives ¹	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Major Collaborative Research Initiatives	0	0	0
	Aid to Scholarly Journals, Workshops and Conferences	0	0	0
	Doctoral Fellowships	2	0	0
	Post-Doctoral Fellowships	0	0	0
	Total 2008	17	1	0
2007	Standard Research Grants	13	1	1
	Strategic Programs and Joint Initiatives	5	2	1
	Major Collaborative Research Initiatives	0	0	0
	Aid to Scholarly Journals, Workshops and Conferences	0	0	0
	Doctoral Fellowships	7	0	0
	Post-Doctoral Fellowships	1	0	0
	Total 2007	26	3	2
2006	Standard Research Grants	24	4	1
	Strategic Programs and Joint Initiatives	0	0	0
	Major Collaborative Research Initiatives	0	0	0
	Aid to Scholarly Journals, Workshops and Conferences	0	0	0
	Doctoral Fellowships	0	0	0
	Post-Doctoral Fellowships	1	0	0
	Total 2006	25	4	1

APPENDIX 13. Survey Questionnaire

BLUE RIBBON PANEL ON SSHRC'S PEER-REVIEW PROCESS INTERNET SURVEY: LOGIN

GROUPE D'EXPERTS SUR LE PROCESSUS D'ÉVALUATION PAR LES PAIRS DU CRSH SONDAGE INTERNET: OUVERTURE DE SESSION

Id.name **Username** (your email used for the invitation)
Nom d'utilisateur (votre adresse courriel utilisée pour l'invitation)

ID.Pass **Password** (5 digits provided in the invitation)
word **Mot de passe** (5 chiffres fournis dans l'invitation)

BLUE RIBBON PANEL ON SSHRC'S PEER-REVIEW PROCESS INTERNET SURVEY: LANGUAGE SELECTION

GROUPE D'EXPERTS SUR LE PROCESSUS D'ÉVALUATION PAR LES PAIRS DU CRSH SONDAGE INTERNET: CHOIX DE LA LANGUE

ID.Lang **In what language would you like to take the survey?**
uage **Dans quelle langue voulez-vous répondre à ce sondage ?**

- English
- Français

SECTION I: YOUR PROFILE

Q1. What is your current academic status?

- Assistant Professor
- Associate Professor
- Full Professor
- Professor Emeritus
- Other (Please specify below)

Q2. For how long have you been employed as a professor?

Less than 5 years

6 to 10 years

11 to 20 years

More than 20 years

Q3. Are you presently a chairholder?

No

Yes, I am a **Junior** Chairholder of a Canada Research Chair

Yes, I am a **Senior** Chairholder of a Canada Research Chair

Yes, other (Please specify below)

Q3a. OPEN QUESTION/LITERAL RESPONSE

Q4. On a scale ranging from strongly interdisciplinary to exclusively disciplinary, how would you characterize your research?

<i>Extremely interdisciplinary (1)</i>	2	3	<i>Exclusively disciplinary (4)</i>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q5. From the following list of main disciplines funded by SSHRC, please choose the one that best corresponds to your research activities:

- Anthropology
- Archaeology
- Archival, Library and Information Sciences
- Business Administration
- Classical Studies
- Communications and Journalism
- Criminology
- Demography
- Economics
- Education, Counseling and Career Guidance
- Fine Arts
- Gender Studies
- Geography and Urban Studies
- Health Studies
- History
- Industrial Relations
- Interdisciplinary Studies
- Law
- Linguistics and Translation Studies
- Literature
- Philosophy
- Political Science and Public Administration
- Psychology
- Religious Studies
- Sociology
- Social Work

Q6. What is your gender?

- Female
- Male

Q7. To which age group do you belong?

- 30 years or less
- 31 to 40 years
- 41 to 50 years
- 51 to 65 years
- 65 years or older

Please provide some details about your university/research institution:

Q8. Region:

- Atlantic (Newfoundland/Labrador, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick)
- Quebec
- Ontario
- Prairies (Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta)
- British Columbia
- Yukon, Nunavut and Northwest Territories

Q9. Size:

- Less than 5,000 students
- 5,000 to 15,000 students
- More than 15,000 students

Q10. In your research area, your university/research institution has:

- Doctoral level** program(s)
- Only **master level** program(s)
- No graduate level** programs

SECTION II: RESEARCH FUNDING

Q11. Select the statement that best describes your current situation :

- I have already been funded by SSHRC as a principal investigator
- I have already been funded by SSHRC but only as a co-applicant
- I have submitted applications to SSHRC as a principal investigator or as a co-applicant but I have never been funded by SSHRC
- I never have submitted applications to SSHRC as a principal investigator or as a co-applicant

Select the statement that best describes both your current situation and your intentions:

- Q12. I have already been funded by SSHRC as a principal investigator**
- and in the coming years, I intend to submit further applications as a principal investigator
- but in the next 5 years, I **do not** intend to submit further applications as a principal investigator
- Q13. I have already been funded by SSHRC but only as a co-applicant**
- and in the coming years, I intend to submit further applications as a principal investigator
- and in the next 5 years, I **do not** intend to submit any applications as a principal investigator
- Q14. I have submitted applications to SSHRC as a principal investigator or as a co-applicant but I have never been funded by SSHRC**
- and I intend to apply to SSHRC as a principal investigator in the **next 3 years**
- and I intend to apply to SSHRC as a principal investigator in the **next 5 years**
- and I **do not** intend to submit any applications as a principal investigator in the next 5 years
- Q15. I never have submitted applications to SSHRC as a principal investigator or as a co-applicant**
- but I intend to apply to SSHRC as a principal investigator in the **next 3 years**
- but I intend to apply to SSHRC as a principal investigator in the **next 5 years**
- and I **do not** intend to submit any applications as a principal investigator in the next 5 years
- Q16. Please explain why you do not intend to submit any applications as a principal investigator in the next 5 years:**
- I will not need additional funds to complete my research
- I expect to receive funding from other sources
- I believe that there is little chance of receiving funds from SSHRC
- Other reason(s) (Please specify below)
- Q16a.** OPEN QUESTION/LITERAL RESPONSE

In total, how many research grants have you received from:

	None (0)	1 to 3	4 to 10	11 or more
Q17a. SSHRC as a <u>principal investigator</u>?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q17b. SSHRC as a <u>co-applicant</u>?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q17c. organizations <u>other than SSHRC</u> as a <u>principal investigator</u>?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- Q18. From which SSHRC programs have you obtained funding over the past 10 years (excluding grants allocated through mechanisms internal to the university)? Please select one or more programs from the following list:**
- Standard Research Grants
- Major Collaborative Research Initiatives (MCRI)
- Community-University Research Alliances (CURA)
- Initiatives on the New Economy (INE)
- Aid to Research Workshops and Conferences in Canada
- Research Development Initiatives

- Grants related to social and economic development
- International Opportunities Fund
- Management, Business and Finance
- Society, Culture and Health of Canadians
- Issues regarding social cohesion in the globalization era
- Strategic Knowledge Clusters
- Other(s) (Please specify below)

Q18a. OPEN QUESTION/LITERAL RESPONSE

Q19. Which category best describes how successful you have been at obtaining SSHRC grants in the past 10 years?

- From 76% to 100%
- From 51% to 75%
- From 26% to 50%
- Less than 25%

Q20. Which category best describes how successful you have been at obtaining grants from organizations other than SSHRC in the past 10 years?

- From 76% to 100%
- From 51% to 75%
- From 26% to 50%
- Less than 25%
- Does not apply (no applications)

Q21. When you are preparing a SSHRC grant application, to what degree do you pay attention to the program's adjudication criteria?

- | <i>No attention
(1)</i> | <i>Little attention
(2)</i> | <i>A moderate level
of attention (3)</i> | <i>A great deal of
attention (4)</i> | <i>Don't know/Does not
apply</i> |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|--|--|--------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Q22. When preparing your SSHRC grant applications, how often do you have access to:

- | | <i>Never (1)</i> | <i>Sometimes
(2)</i> | <i>Frequently
(3)</i> | <i>Always (4)</i> | <i>Don't
know/Does
not apply</i> |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| Q22a. direct contact with SSHRC program officers (phone, email) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Q22b. the help of the research services/office at your university/institution | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Q22c. the help or advices of colleague(s) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Q23. How would you characterize the quality of the information received from the following resources?					
	<i>Very low quality (1)</i>	<i>Low quality (2)</i>	<i>Good quality (3)</i>	<i>Excellent quality (4)</i>	<i>Don't know/Does not apply</i>
Q23a. SSHRC program officers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q23b. Research services at your university/institution	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q23c. Colleague(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q24. How would you characterize your level of knowledge with respect to program regulations and adjudication criteria for SSHRC grant applications?					
<i>Not very informed (1)</i>	<i>Somewhat informed (2)</i>	<i>Well informed (3)</i>	<i>Highly knowledgeable (4)</i>	<i>Don't know/Does not apply</i>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

SECTION III: PEER-REVIEW PROCESS

Q25. How important are the following aspects of the evaluation process for grant applications in general?						
	<i>Not at all important (1)</i>	<i>Not important (2)</i>	<i>Neither important nor unimportant (3)</i>	<i>Important (4)</i>	<i>Very important (5)</i>	<i>Don't know</i>
Q25a. the choice of external assessors that reviewed your application(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q25b. the selection of committee members that adjudicated your application(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q25c. the objectivity of the evaluation of your application(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q25d. the adequacy of the amount of the grant(s) awarded	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q25e. the quality and usefulness of the comments provided by the adjudication committee(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q25f. the quality and usefulness of the comments provided by the external assessor(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q26. Have you been involved in the peer-review process (i.e. as an external assessor, adjudication committee member or a Chair):		
	Yes	No
For SSHRC?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
For another granting organization?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q27. In the context of SSHRC programs, how many times have you acted:				
	<i>Never</i>	<i>Once</i>	<i>Twice</i>	<i>Three times or more</i>
Q27a. as a MEMBER of an adjudication committee responsible for the evaluation of research grants?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q27b. as the CHAIR of an adjudication committee responsible for the evaluation of research grants?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q27c. as an EXTERNAL ASSESSOR for the evaluation of a research grant?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q27d. as a MEMBER of an adjudication committee responsible for reviewing doctoral or postdoctoral award applications?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q27e. as the CHAIR of an adjudication committee responsible for reviewing doctoral or postdoctoral award applications?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q28. In the context of which SSHRC programs have you been a MEMBER of an adjudication committee (excluding grants allocated through mechanisms internal to the university)? Please select all that apply.

- Standard Research Grants
- Major Collaborative Research Initiatives (MCRI)
- Community-University Research Alliances (CURA)
- Initiatives on the New Economy (INE)
- Aid to Research Workshops and Conferences in Canada
- Research Development Initiatives
- Grants related to social and economic development
- International Opportunities Fund
- Management, Business and Finance
- Society, Culture and Health of Canadians
- Issues regarding social cohesion in the globalization era
- Strategic Knowledge Clusters
- Other(s) (Please specify below)

Q28a. OPEN QUESTION/LITERAL RESPONSE

Q29. In the context of which SSHRC programs have you been the CHAIR of an adjudication committee (excluding grants allocated through mechanisms internal to the university)? Please select all that apply.

- Standard Research Grants
- Major Collaborative Research Initiatives (MCRI)
- Community-University Research Alliances (CURA)

- Initiatives on the New Economy (INE)
- Aid to Research Workshops and Conferences in Canada
- Research Development Initiatives
- Grants related to social and economic development
- International Opportunities Fund
- Management, Business and Finance
- Society, Culture and Health of Canadians
- Issues regarding social cohesion in the globalization era
- Strategic Knowledge Clusters
- Other(s) (Please specify below)

Q29a. OPEN QUESTION/LITERAL RESPONSE

Q30. In the context of granting organizations other than SSHRC, how many times have you acted:

	<i>Never</i>	<i>Once</i>	<i>Twice</i>	<i>Three times and more</i>
Q30a. as a MEMBER of an adjudication committee responsible for the <u>evaluation of research grants?</u>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q30b. as the CHAIR of an adjudication committee responsible for the <u>evaluation of research grants?</u>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q30c. as an EXTERNAL ASSESSOR for the <u>evaluation of a research grant?</u>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q30d. as a MEMBER of an adjudication committee responsible for <u>reviewing doctoral or postdoctoral award applications?</u>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q30e. as the CHAIR of an adjudication committee responsible for <u>reviewing doctoral or postdoctoral award applications?</u>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q31. What is your level of agreement with the following statements?					
	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Agree (3)	Strongly agree (4)	Don't know
Q31a. Grant applications that are characterized as <u>interdisciplinary in nature</u> are evaluated in a competent manner at SSHRC.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q31b. Grant applications that are submitted to SSHRC from <u>new scholars (who have held an academic position for less than 5 years)</u> are evaluated in a fair and equitable manner because the scholar's level of experience is taken into consideration.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q31c. Grant applications that are submitted to SSHRC from <u>researchers employed at small universities/institutions</u> are evaluated in a fair and equitable manner.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q31d. Grant applications that are submitted to SSHRC from <u>researchers employed at small universities/institutions</u> are evaluated <u>taking into account the potential lack of resources</u> for these applicants.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q32. How satisfied are you with the following aspects of the evaluation process for grant applications that you have submitted to SSHRC?						
	Very dissatisfied (1)	Dissatisfied (2)	Neither dissatisfied nor satisfied (3)	Satisfied (4)	Very satisfied (5)	Don't know
Q32a. the choice of external assessors that reviewed your application(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q32b. the selection of committee members that adjudicated your application(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q32c. the objectivity of the evaluation of your application(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q32d. the adequacy of the amount of the grant(s) awarded	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q32e. the quality and usefulness of the comments provided by the adjudication committee(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q32f. the quality and usefulness of the comments provided by the external assessor(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q33. In general, how would you rate SSHRC's reputation for providing a credible peer-review process?

<i>Very poor (1)</i>	<i>Poor (2)</i>	<i>Average (3)</i>	<i>Good (4)</i>	<i>Excellent (5)</i>	<i>Don't know</i>
<input type="checkbox"/>					

Q34. How would you rate the reputation (credibility) of SSHRC's peer-review process compared to that of other granting Canadian and international organizations IN?

	<i>Very poor (1)</i>	<i>Poor (2)</i>	<i>Average (3)</i>	<i>Good (4)</i>	<i>Excellent (5)</i>	<i>Don't know</i>
Q34a. in the Humanities ?	<input type="checkbox"/>					
Q34b. in the Social Sciences?	<input type="checkbox"/>					
Q34c. in the Natural Sciences and Engineering?	<input type="checkbox"/>					
Q34d. in the Medical/Health Sciences?	<input type="checkbox"/>					

Q35. In your opinion, is there a bias in the evaluation process that occurs at SSHRC which would have a negative impact on the type of research that you do?

No
 Yes

Q35a. If yes, please explain: OPEN QUESTION/LITERAL RESPONSE

Do you have any suggestions for improving the peer-review process at SSHRC?

Q36. For Fellowship applications? OPEN QUESTION/LITERAL RESPONSE

Q37. For Research Grant applications? OPEN QUESTION/LITERAL RESPONSE

SECTION IV: REACH AND IMPACT OF RESEARCH

Q38. Compared to the most advanced countries in your research area, how do you evaluate:

	<i>Very poor (1)</i>	<i>Poor (2)</i>	<i>Average (3)</i>	<i>Good (4)</i>	<i>Excellent (5)</i>	<i>Don't know/Does not apply</i>
Q38a. the quality of Canadian research?	<input type="checkbox"/>					
Q38b. the reputation/visibility of Canadian research?	<input type="checkbox"/>					
Q38c. the influence of Canadian research on the development of knowledge?	<input type="checkbox"/>					

Q39. To what extent would you agree with the following:

	<i>Strongly disagree (1)</i>	<i>Disagree (2)</i>	<i>Agree (3)</i>	<i>Strongly agree (4)</i>	<i>Don't know/Does not apply</i>
Q39a. My research is well-known and the results are used by international scholars who work in the same research area or discipline.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q39b. My research is well-known and the results are used by Canadian-based scholars who work in the same area of research or discipline.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q39c. My research is well-known and the results are used by researchers in other research areas or disciplines.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q39d. My research is well-known and the results are used outside of the academic community.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q40. For each of the following sectors, who were or are the main users of your research results at the national and/or international levels? Please select all that apply.

	<i>In Canada/National</i>	<i>Outside Canada/International</i>	<i>Don't know/Does not apply</i>
Q40a. Academic sector	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q40b. NGOs and community organizations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q40c. General public	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q40d. Government(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q40e. Private sector	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q41. For each sector selected previously, please rate the significance of identifiable impacts (changes or effects) arising from the utilization of the results of your research:

	<i>No impact (1)</i>	<i>Limited impact (2)</i>	<i>Important impact (3)</i>	<i>Very important impact (4)</i>	<i>Too early to say</i>	<i>Don't know/Does not apply</i>
Q41a. Academic sector	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q41b. NGOs and community organizations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q41c. General public	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q41d. Government(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q41e. Private sector	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q42. Outside of the academic community, please describe the nature of main identifiable impact(s) (changes or effects) attributable to your research results:

OPEN QUESTION/LITERAL RESPONSE

SECTION V: COMMENTS

Q43. Do you have any comments to share on this initiative in general or on this survey in particular?

If yes, please provide your comments in the box below.

OPEN QUESTION/LITERAL RESPONSE

APPENDIX 14 : Survey Results

INTERNET SURVEY: BLUE RIBBON PANEL ON SSHRC'S PEER-REVIEW PROCESS

Descriptive Statistics

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SAMPLE

Table 1: Sample Disposition Table of the Internet Survey

Sample Disposition	#
Number of e-mails obtained/collected* (a)	
Number of bounced e-mails/unreached client (b)	2,169
Survey population: Number of potential survey repondents (c=a-b)	17,657
Completed (d)	6,224
Response rate (d / c)	35.2%
Margin of error*	1.31%

* Calculated for a response distribution of 50% (i.e. 50% yes/50% no); Confidence level at 99%

SECTION I: YOUR PROFILE

Table 2: Language, gender and age (Q6, Q7)

In what language would you like to take the survey?	#	%
English/Anglais	4,954	79.6%
Français/French	1,270	20.4%
N	6,224	100%
What is your gender? (Q6)		
Female	2,726	45.1%
Male	3,313	54.9%
n	6,039	100.0%
To which age group do you belong? (Q7)		
30 years or less	36	0.6%
31 to 40 years	1,291	20.9%
41 to 50 years	1,879	30.4%
51 to 65 years	2,407	38.9%
65 years or older	575	9.3%
n	6,188	100.0%

Table 3: Work experience (Q1, Q2, Q3)

What is your current academic status? (Q1)	#	%
Assistant Professor	1,281	20.6%
Associate Professor	2,178	35.1%
Full Professor	1,983	31.9%
Professor Emeritus	364	5.9%
Other	403	6.5%
n	6,209	100.0%
For how long have you been employed as a professor? (Q2)		
Less than 5 years	1,297	21.1%
6 to 10 years	1,630	26.5%
11 to 20 years	1,524	24.7%
More than 20 years	1,710	27.8%
n	6,161	100.0%
Are you presently a chairholder? (Q3)		
No	5,710	92.6%
Yes, I am a Junior Chairholder of a Canada Research Chair	129	2.1%
Yes, I am a Senior Chairholder of a Canada Research Chair	82	1.3%
Yes, other	243	3.9%
n	6,164	100.0%

Table 4: On a scale ranging from strongly interdisciplinary to exclusively disciplinary, how would you characterize your research? (Q4)

Degree of interdisciplinarity (Q4)	#	%
Extremely interdisciplinary (1)	1,638	27.7%
2	2,250	38.1%
3	1,710	28.9%
Exclusively disciplinary (4)	309	5.2%
n	5,907	100.0%

Table 5: Details about Respondents' Institution (Q8, Q9, Q10)

Region: (Q8)	#	%
Atlantic	541	8.7%
Quebec	1,475	23.8%
Ontario	2,508	40.5%
Prairies	867	14.0%
British Columbia	799	12.9%
Yukon, Nunavut and Northwest Territories	3	0.0%
n	6,193	100.0%
Size: (Q9)		
Less than 5,000 students	579	9.4%
5,000 to 15,000 students	1,147	18.6%
More than 15,000 students	4,451	72.1%
n	6,177	100.0%
In your research area, your university/research institution has: (Q10)		
Doctoral level program(s)	4,769	77.0%
Only master level program(s)	910	14.7%
No graduate level programs	516	8.3%
n	6,195	100.0%

Table 6: From the following list of main disciplines funded by SSHRC, please choose the one that best corresponds to your research activities: (Q5)

Discipline (Q5)	#	%
Anthropology	188	3.0%
Archaeology	99	1.6%
Archival, Library and Information Sciences	43	0.7%
Business Administration	466	7.5%
Classical Studies	60	1.0%
Communications and Journalism	107	1.7%
Criminology	46	0.7%
Demography	26	0.4%
Economics	291	4.7%
Education, Counseling and Career Guidance	552	8.9%
Fine Arts	336	5.4%
Gender Studies	63	1.0%
Geography and Urban Studies	244	3.9%
Health Studies	320	5.2%
History	461	7.5%
Industrial Relations	31	0.5%
Interdisciplinary Studies	291	4.7%
Law	168	2.7%
Linguistics and Translation Studies	190	3.1%
Literature	536	8.7%
Philosophy	218	3.5%
Political Science and Public Administration	331	5.4%
Psychology	508	8.2%
Religious Studies	111	1.8%
Social Work	143	2.3%
Sociology	354	5.7%
n	6,183	100.0%

SECTION II: RESEARCH FUNDING

Table 7: Select the statement that best describes your current situation: (Q11)

Current Situation (Q11)	#	%
I have already been funded by SSHRC as a principal investigator	3,790	60.9%
I have already been funded by SSHRC but only as a co-applicant	781	12.5%
I have submitted applications to SSHRC as a principal investigator or as a co-applicant but I have never been funded by SSHRC	1,245	20.0%
I never have submitted applications to SSHRC as a principal investigator or as a co-applicant	408	6.6%
n	6,224	100.0%

Table 8: Select the statement that best describes both your current situation and your intentions: (Q12, Q13, Q14, Q15)

	I have already been funded by SSHRC as a principal investigator (Q12)		I have already been funded by SSHRC but only as a co-applicant (Q13)	
	#	%	#	%
and in the coming years, I intend to submit further applications as a principal investigator	3,173	83.9%	570	73.5%
and in the next 5 years, I do not intend to submit any applications as a principal investigator	608	16.1%	206	26.5%
n	3,781	100.0%	776	100.0%

	I have submitted applications to SSHRC as a principal investigator or as a co-applicant but I have never been funded by SSHRC (Q14)		I never have submitted applications to SSHRC as a principal investigator or as a co-applicant (Q15)	
	#	%	#	%
and I intend to apply to SSHRC as a principal investigator in the next 3 years	848	68.6%	161	39.8%
and I intend to apply to SSHRC as a principal investigator in the next 5 years	133	10.8%	52	12.8%
and I do not intend to submit any applications as a principal investigator in the next 5 years	256	20.7%	192	47.4%
n	1,237	100.0%	405	100.0%

Table 9: Please explain why you do not intend to submit any applications as a principal investigator in the next 5 years: (Q16)

	#	%
I will not need additional funds to complete my research	228	19.6%
I expect to receive funding from other sources	156	13.4%
I believe that there is little chance of receiving funds from SSHRC	344	29.6%
Other reason(s)	436	37.5%
n	1,164	100.0%

Table 10: In total, how many research grants have you received from: (Q17)

	None (0)	1 to 3	4 to 10	11 or more	n
SSHRC as a principal investigator?	10 0.3%	3,019 79.9%	698 18.5%	51 1.3%	3,778 100.0%
SSHRC as a co-applicant?	951 28.5%	2,055 61.5%	320 9.6%	15 0.4%	3,341 100.0%
Organizations other than SSHRC as a principal investigator?	1,017 19.3%	2,512 47.7%	1,345 25.5%	395 7.5%	5,269 100.0%

Table 11: From which SSHRC programs have you obtained funding over the past 10 years (excluding grants allocated through mechanisms internal to the university)? Please select one or more programs from the following list: (Q18)

	#	%
Standard Research Grants	3,695	55.6%
Major Collaborative Research Initiatives (MCRI)	349	5.3%
Community-University Research Alliances (CURA)	343	5.2%
Initiatives on the New Economy (INE)	239	3.6%
Aid to Research Workshops and Conferences in Canada	588	8.9%
Research Development Initiatives	330	5.0%
Grants related to social and economic development	42	0.6%
International Opportunities Fund	123	1.9%
Management, Business and Finance	174	2.6%
Society, Culture and Health of Canadians	47	0.7%
Issues regarding social cohesion in the globalization era	31	0.5%
Strategic Knowledge Clusters	190	2.9%
Other(s) (Please specify below)*	490	7.4%
n*	6,641	100%
<i>No answer</i>	1,814	--
N	6,224	--

* n value is greater than N because this question allowed multiple responses

Table 12: Success Rate (Q19, Q20)

Which category best describes how successful you have been at obtaining SSHRC grants in the past 10 years? (Q19)	#	%
From 76% to 100%	2,423	54.4%
From 51% to 75%	851	19.1%
From 26% to 50%	738	16.6%
Less than 25%	443	9.9%
n	4,455	100.0%

Which category best describes how successful you have been at obtaining grants from organizations other than SSHRC in the past 10 years? (Q20)	#	%
From 76% to 100%	2,895	47.3%
From 51% to 75%	1,264	20.7%
From 26% to 50%	516	8.4%
Less than 25%	354	5.8%
Does not apply (no applications)	1,092	17.8%
n	6,121	100.0%

Table 13: When you are preparing a SSHRC grant application, to what degree do you pay attention to the program's adjudication criteria? (Q21a)

Degree of attention (Q21a)	#	%
No attention (1)	37	0.6%
Little attention (2)	112	1.9%
A moderate level of attention (3)	814	14.2%
A great deal of attention (4)	4,639	80.7%
Don't know / Does not apply	148	2.6%
n	5,750	100.0%

Table 14: When preparing your SSHRC grant applications, how often do you have access to: (Q22a-c)

Accessibility	Never (1)	Sometimes (2)	Frequently (3)	Always (4)	Don't know/Does not apply	n
a) direct contact with SSHRC program officers (phone, email)	1,889 33%	2,860 50%	434 8%	311 5%	238 4%	5,732 100.0%
b) the help of the research services/office at your university/institution	483 8%	2,078 34%	1,351 22%	1,919 31%	321 5%	6,152 100.0%
c) the help or advices of colleague(s)	284 5%	1,693 28%	1,752 29%	2,129 35%	283 5%	6,141 100.0%

Table 15: How would you characterize the quality of the information received from the following resources? (Q23a-c)

Quality of information from: (Q23a-c)	Very low quality (1)	Low quality (2)	Good quality (3)	Excellent quality (4)	Don't know/Does not apply	n
a) SSHRC program officers	86 2.4%	374 10.4%	1,846 51.6%	1,072 30.0%	201 5.6%	3,579 100.0%
b) Research services at your university/institution	141 2.7%	706 13.3%	2,507 47.2%	1,895 35.7%	64 1.2%	5,313 100.0%
c) Colleague(s)	35 0.6%	368 6.7%	2,652 48.5%	2,321 42.5%	89 1.6%	5,465 100.0%

Table 16: How would you characterize your level of knowledge with respect to program regulations and adjudication criteria for SSHRC grant applications? (Q24)

Level of knowledge (Q24)	#	%
Not very informed (1)	267	4.3%
Somewhat informed (2)	1,571	25.6%
Well informed (3)	3,153	51.3%
Highly knowledgeable (4)	1,058	17.2%
Don't know/Does not apply	95	1.5%
n	6,144	100.0%

SECTION III: PEER-REVIEW PROCESS

Table 17: How important are the following aspects of the evaluation process for grant applications in general? (Q25a-f)

Aspects of the evaluation process (Q25a-f)	Not at all important (1)	Not important (2)	Neither important nor unimportant (3)	Important (4)	Very important (5)	Don't know	n
a) the choice of external assessors that reviewed your application(s)	24 0.4%	38 0.6%	193 3.1%	1,861 30.0%	3,890 62.7%	194 3.1%	6,200 100.0%
b) the selection of committee members that adjudicated your application(s)	19 0.3%	42 0.7%	222 3.6%	1,892 30.5%	3,667 59.2%	354 5.7%	6,196 100.0%
c) the objectivity of the evaluation of your application(s)	25 0.4%	33 0.5%	168 2.7%	1,367 22.2%	4,285 69.5%	287 4.7%	6,165 100.0%
d) the adequacy of the amount of the grant(s) awarded	35 0.6%	89 1.4%	521 8.4%	2,652 43.0%	2,528 41.0%	342 5.5%	6,167 100.0%
e) the quality and usefulness of the comments provided by the adjudication committee(s)	120 1.9%	318 5.1%	727 11.7%	2,307 37.3%	2,517 40.7%	202 3.3%	6,191 100.0%
f) the quality and usefulness of the comments provided by the external assessor(s)	58 0.9%	181 2.9%	487 7.9%	2,275 36.7%	3,016 48.7%	176 2.8%	6,193 100.0%

Table 18: Have you been involved in the peer-review process (i.e. as an external assessor, adjudication committee member or a Chair): (Q26)

	Yes	No	n
For SSHRC?	3,552 57.7%	2,606 42.3%	6,158 100.0%
For another granting organization?	3,912 65.4%	2,067 34.6%	5,979 100.0%

Table 19: In the context of SSHRC programs, how many times have you acted: (Q27a-e)

	Never	Once	Twice	Three times or more	n
a) as a MEMBER of an adjudication committee responsible for the evaluation of research grants?	2,341	430	303	333	3,407
	68.7%	12.6%	8.9%	9.8%	100.0%
b) as the CHAIR of an adjudication committee responsible for the evaluation of research grants?	3,132	114	44	25	3,315
	94.5%	3.4%	1.3%	0.8%	100.0%
c) as an EXTERNAL ASSESSOR for the evaluation of a research grant?	144	853	718	1,786	3,501
	4.1%	24.4%	20.5%	51.0%	100.0%
d) as a MEMBER of an adjudication committee responsible for reviewing doctoral or postdoctoral award applications?	2,516	346	234	286	3,382
	74.4%	10.2%	6.9%	8.5%	100.0%
e) as the CHAIR of an adjudication committee responsible for reviewing doctoral or postdoctoral award applications?	3,173	83	28	42	3,326
	95.4%	2.5%	0.8%	1.3%	100.0%

Table 20: In the context of which SSHRC programs have you been a MEMBER of an adjudication committee (excluding grants allocated through mechanisms internal to the university)? Please select all that apply. (Q28)

	#	%
Standard Research Grants	851	64.5%
Major Collaborative Research Initiatives (MCRI)	80	6.1%
Community-University Research Alliances (CURA)	44	3.3%
Initiatives on the New Economy (INE)	51	3.9%
Aid to Research Workshops and Conferences in Canada	44	3.3%
Research Development Initiatives	32	2.4%
Grants related to social and economic development	8	0.6%
International Opportunities Fund	26	2.0%
Management, Business and Finance	22	1.7%
Society, Culture and Health of Canadians	16	1.2%
Issues regarding social cohesion in the globalization era	3	0.2%
Strategic Knowledge Clusters	25	1.9%
Other(s)	117	8.9%
n*	1,319	100.0%
<i>No answer</i>	5,214	--
N	1,010	--

* this question allowed multiple responses

Table 21: In the context of which SSHRC programs have you been the CHAIR of an adjudication committee (excluding grants allocated through mechanisms internal to the university)? Please select all that apply. (Q29)

	#	%
Standard Research Grants	120	66.3%
Major Collaborative Research Initiatives (MCRI)	8	4.4%
Community-University Research Alliances (CURA)	4	2.2%
Initiatives on the New Economy (INE)	10	5.5%
Aid to Research Workshops and Conferences in Canada	5	2.8%
Research Development Initiatives	6	3.3%
Grants related to social and economic development	0	0.0%
International Opportunities Fund	1	0.6%
Management, Business and Finance	1	0.6%
Society, Culture and Health of Canadians	1	0.6%
Issues regarding social cohesion in the globalization era	1	0.6%
Strategic Knowledge Clusters	5	2.8%
Other(s)	19	10.5%
n*	181	100.0%
<i>No answer</i>	6,064	--
N	160	--

* this question allowed multiple responses

Table 22: In the context of granting organizations other than SSHRC, how many times have you acted: (Q30a-e)

	Never	Once	Twice	Three times or more	n
a) as a MEMBER of an adjudication committee responsible for the evaluation of research grants?	1,517 40.3%	598 15.9%	477 12.7%	1,176 31.2%	3,768 100.0%
b) as the CHAIR of an adjudication committee responsible for the evaluation of research grants?	3,129 85.7%	221 6.1%	126 3.5%	174 4.8%	3,650 100.0%
c) as an EXTERNAL ASSESSOR for the evaluation of a research grant?	552 14.6%	612 16.2%	634 16.8%	1,971 52.3%	3,769 100.0%
d) as a MEMBER of an adjudication committee responsible for reviewing doctoral or postdoctoral award applications?	2,121 56.8%	487 13.0%	399 10.7%	728 19.5%	3,735 100.0%
e) as the CHAIR of an adjudication committee responsible for reviewing doctoral or postdoctoral award applications?	3,282 89.2%	170 4.6%	82 2.2%	146 4.0%	3,680 100.0%

Table 23: What is your level of agreement with the following statements? (Q31a-d)

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Agree (3)	Strongly agree (4)	Don't know	n
a) Grant applications that are characterized as <u>interdisciplinary in nature</u> are evaluated in a competent manner at SSHRC.	463 7.5%	1,225 19.7%	1,584 25.5%	271 4.4%	2,666 42.9%	6,209 100.0%
b) Grant applications that are submitted to SSHRC from <u>new scholars (who have held an academic position for less than 5 years)</u> are evaluated in a fair and equitable manner because the scholar's level of experience is taken into consideration.	284 4.6%	770 12.4%	2,210 35.6%	951 15.3%	1,987 32.0%	6,202 100.0%
c) Grant applications that are submitted to SSHRC from <u>researchers employed at small universities/institutions</u> are evaluated in a fair and equitable manner.	382 6.2%	688 11.1%	1,139 18.4%	469 7.6%	3,526 56.8%	6,204 100.0%
d) Grant applications that are submitted to SSHRC from <u>researchers employed at small universities/institutions</u> are evaluated <u>taking into account the potential lack of resources</u> for these applicants.	466 7.5%	834 13.4%	774 12.5%	316 5.1%	3,813 61.5%	6,203 100.0%

Table 24: How satisfied are you with the following aspects of the evaluation process for grant applications that you have submitted to SSHRC? (Q32a-f)

	Very dissatisfied (1)	Dissatisfied (2)	Neither (3)	Satisfied (4)	Very satisfied (5)	Don't know	n
a) the choice of external assessors that reviewed your application(s)	298 5.2%	654 11.3%	994 17.2%	2,129 36.9%	931 16.1%	769 13.3%	5,775 100.0%
b) the selection of committee members that adjudicated your application(s)	317 5.5%	630 10.9%	1,163 20.2%	1,604 27.8%	476 8.3%	1,571 27.3%	5,761 100.0%
c) the objectivity of the evaluation of your application(s)	434 7.6%	874 15.2%	1,040 18.1%	2,119 36.9%	706 12.3%	570 9.9%	5,743 100.0%
d) the adequacy of the amount of the grant(s) awarded	384 6.7%	763 13.3%	858 15.0%	2,108 36.9%	840 14.7%	767 13.4%	5,720 100.0%
e) the quality and usefulness of the comments provided by the adjudication committee(s)	621 10.8%	1,082 18.8%	1,393 24.2%	1,870 32.4%	492 8.5%	305 5.3%	5,763 100.0%
f) the quality and usefulness of the comments provided by the external assessor(s)	390 6.8%	730 12.7%	1,055 18.3%	2,240 38.8%	1,036 18.0%	318 5.5%	5,769 100.0%

Table 25: In general, how would you rate SSHRC's reputation for providing a credible peer-review process? (Q33)

	Very poor (1)	Poor (2)	Average (3)	Good (4)	Excellent (5)	Don't know	n
In general, how would you rate SSHRC's reputation for providing a credible peer-review process?	188	592	1,391	2,556	1,089	395	6,211
	3.0%	9.5%	22.4%	41.2%	17.5%	6.4%	100.0%

Table 26: How would you rate the reputation (credibility) of SSHRC's peer-review process compared to that of other granting Canadian and international organizations IN? (Q34a-d)

	Very poor (1)	Poor (2)	Average (3)	Good (4)	Excellent (5)	Don't know	n
a) in the Humanities ?	98	295	756	1,227	653	3,123	6,152
	1.6%	4.8%	12.3%	19.9%	10.6%	50.8%	100.0%
b) in the Social Sciences?	94	325	866	1,441	785	2,619	6,130
	1.5%	5.3%	14.1%	23.5%	12.8%	42.7%	100.0%
c) in the Natural Sciences and Engineering?	76	211	295	380	194	4,921	6,077
	1.3%	3.5%	4.9%	6.3%	3.2%	81.0%	100.0%
d) in the Medical/Health Sciences?	80	193	334	434	252	4,768	6,061
	1.3%	3.2%	5.5%	7.2%	4.2%	78.7%	100.0%

Table 27: In your opinion, is there a bias in the evaluation process that occurs at SSHRC which would have a negative impact on the type of research that you do? (Q35)

	#	%
No	2,959	49.3%
Yes	3,045	50.7%
n	6,004	100.0%

Table 28: Code occurrence (cases) of Q37 - Sorted by count of code occurrence (descending)

Category	Code	Description	Cases	% Cases
Suggestions\Evaluation and Adjudication\External Reviews	Ensure that external reviewers are experts/experienced/highly-regarded scholars	Experienced researchers are better placed to evaluate proposals than more junior colleagues.	329	10.3%
Suggestions\Evaluation and Adjudication\Feedback	Provide more detailed/useful feedback from external reviewers	External reviewers should be encouraged to provide detailed, constructive comments that may help the applicant to improve their research.	218	6.8%
Suggestions\Evaluation and Adjudication\Feedback	Provide more detailed/useful feedback from adjudication committee	The committee should be encouraged to provide detailed, constructive comments that may help the applicant to improve their research.	152	4.8%
Suggestions\Evaluation and Adjudication\General Peer-Review Process	The process should give more weight to external reviews than to the adjudication committee	Given that the external reviewers are experts, their opinion should carry more weight in the decision process.	141	4.4%
Suggestions\Evaluation and Adjudication\Evaluation Criteria	Develop different evaluation criteria for smaller/less research intensive institutions	Recognise that smaller/less-research intensive institutes do not have the same resources available as larger institutions do in terms of available graduate students, research support office etc	126	3.9%
Suggestions\Application Process	Provide a greater choice of funding category/research fields (choice of committee)	Having more (specialised) committees to choose from would be beneficial to ensure that the proposal is evaluated by appropriate individuals.	115	3.6%
Suggestions\Evaluation and Adjudication\Adjudication Committee	Take more care in the selection of committee members (general)		115	3.6%
Suggestions\Evaluation and Adjudication\Evaluation Criteria	Place more weight to quality/potential rather than on track record	The track record of the applicant should carry less weight for the purposes of evaluation than the proposal.	115	3.6%
Suggestions\Evaluation and Adjudication\Adjudication Committee	Ensure more care in the selection of committee members (especially for interdisciplinary proposals)	Given the difficulty in evaluating interdisciplinary proposal, extreme care should be taken in choosing appropriate committee members.	109	3.4%
Suggestions\Evaluation and Adjudication\Adjudication Committee	Create specific committees that are better able to evaluate the area/topic of the applications	e.g. In there could be more specialists to evaluate projects in the domains of law, finance, or development studies.	98	3.1%
Suggestions\Evaluation and Adjudication\External Reviews	SSHRC should provide more detailed instructions/guidelines/training to external reviewers	External reviewers should be informed of the evaluation criteria and what is expected of them.	90	2.8%
Suggestions\Evaluation and Adjudication\General Peer-Review Process	Ensure transparency on the selection of committee members and external reviewers	Provide clarity to applicants on how committee member and external reviewers are selected.	89	2.8%
Suggestions\Evaluation and Adjudication\General Peer-Review Process	Develop methods to detect bias and conflict of interest	To ensure an objective review process, it is important, as far as possible, to detect potential biases and conflicts of interest of the external reviewers/committee members	87	2.7%
Suggestions\Funding	More funding, more funded proposals	More funding would allow an increase in the success rate of applicants.	83	2.6%
Suggestions\Evaluation and Adjudication\General Peer-Review Process	Make the review process either completely blind or completely open		81	2.5%
Suggestions\Evaluation and Adjudication\Evaluation Criteria	More sensitive and open to new/different research approaches/methods	SSHRC should be more supportive of innovative research which may not be funded elsewhere.	80	2.5%
Suggestions\Funding	Create distinct funding program for young researchers	Young/first time applicants should have access to a different funds and be evaluated according to different criteria.	72	2.3%
Suggestions\Evaluation and Adjudication\External Reviews	Review the quality of external reviewers/reviews	Screen reviewers comments to ensure that there are no unprofessional/insulting comments.	66	2.1%
Suggestions\Evaluation and Adjudication\External Reviews	Include more international peers in the process	Given the relatively small academic community in Canada, it may be useful/prudent to include more international peers in the process.	62	1.9%
Suggestions\Funding	Provide more small scale grants to support more researchers		61	1.9%
Suggestions\Application Process	Revise and simplify the application process		59	1.8%
Suggestions\Evaluation and Adjudication\External Reviews	Ensure more care in the selection of external reviewers (especially for interdisciplinary proposals)	Given the difficulty in evaluating interdisciplinary proposal, extreme care should be taken in choosing appropriate reviewers.	59	1.8%
Suggestions\Evaluation and Adjudication\Evaluation Criteria	Place more weight on the track record	The track record of the applicant should carry more weight than the proposal itself.	57	1.8%
Suggestions\Evaluation and Adjudication\General Peer-Review Process	Resolve/explain strongly divergent external reviews	External reviewers should provide consistent feedback and explain why a negative review appears to carry more weight than a positive review.	52	1.6%
Suggestions\Application Process	Simplify application forms (shorter)		50	1.6%
Suggestions\Application Process	Make application instructions clearer in terms of expectation and adjudication criteria		49	1.5%
Suggestions\Evaluation and Adjudication\External Reviews	Ensure three (or more) external reviews	To minimise biases in the external review process three or more external reviews should be solicited.	49	1.5%
Suggestions\Evaluation and Adjudication\General Peer-Review Process	Don't overload the external reviewers or committee members	If external reviewers/committee members are given too many applications to evaluate, the quality of each evaluation will suffer. Also, this allow reviewers more time to ensure integrity of the process	48	1.5%

Category	Code	Description	Cases	% Cases
Suggestions\Evaluation and Adjudication\Adjudication Committee	Diversify committee membership on a regular basis	Committee membership should be changed regularly to ensure that evaluation based on personal preferences are minimised.	42	1.3%
Suggestions\Evaluation and Adjudication\Feedback	Implement mechanisms to ensure the quality of feedbacks from the committee and external reviewers		42	1.3%
Suggestions\Evaluation and Adjudication\External Reviews	Expand the pool of external reviewers	Increase the number of reviewers and recruit more diverse reviewers.	41	1.3%
Suggestions\Evaluation and Adjudication\Adjudication Committee	Eliminate bilingual requirements for committee membership	Competent academics are excluded from the process because of the bilingual requirements, translation services could be provided if necessary.	40	1.3%
Suggestions\Evaluation and Adjudication\General Peer-Review Process	Develop formal mechanisms to ensure consistency/continuity in the evaluation of proposals	Proposals submitted more than once often receive very divergent evaluations, a mechanism to recognise previous feedback should be devised to ensure consistency of the evaluation process. Also, ensure resubmitted applications (unfunded applications in past competitions) ARE reviewed by the same people.	39	1.2%
Suggestions\Application Process	SSHRC could make a better use of suggested external reviewers by applicants		38	1.2%
Suggestions\Evaluation and Adjudication\Adjudication Committee	Maintain a balanced committee in terms of representation of the discipline/research area		37	1.2%
Suggestions\Evaluation and Adjudication\Evaluation Criteria	Develop and disseminate clear criteria to explain how track records/publications are evaluated	Recognise the quality of publications/research outputs as opposed to sheer volume of output.	37	1.2%
Suggestions\Evaluation and Adjudication\Feedback	Allow applicants to access full reviews and to reply to reviewer's comments before funding decision is made	Applicants should have the opportunity to identify inaccuracies in the reviewers comments or provide further clarification if necessary before a final funding decision is made.	35	1.1%
Suggestions\Application Process	Improve the online application process	There are too many technical/usability issues with the online application form.	34	1.1%
Suggestions\Evaluation and Adjudication\General Peer-Review Process	Ensure that the evaluators are experts in the discipline/field/topic/methods/approach	Ensure that the proposal is evaluated by competent individuals.	33	1.0%
Suggestions\Evaluation and Adjudication\Adjudication Committee	Diversify committee structure to include scholars from all disciplines (including outside SSH)		30	0.9%
Suggestions\Application Process	Increase the choice of funding category/research fields (interdisciplinary in particular)	Provision of more funding categories, particularly for interdisciplinary research, would be helpful for the applicants.	28	0.9%
Suggestions\Evaluation and Adjudication\General Peer-Review Process	Implement a screening process to exclude incompetent external reviewers	Ensure that external reviewers that have previously provided unfair/poor reviews are not included in the peer-review process again (create a blacklist)	27	0.8%
Suggestions\Evaluation and Adjudication\General Peer-Review Process	Provide formal recognition for peer-reviewers	Develop a system whereby external reviewers/committee members receive formal recognition for their efforts either in the form of compensation or recognition from their institution for the time they devote to the review process	27	0.8%
Suggestions\Application Process	Develop a clear revision/re-submission process	Develop a clear revision/re-submission process which would involve the same external reviewers to ensure appropriate revision of the proposal.	26	0.8%
Suggestions\Evaluation and Adjudication\Adjudication Committee	Create a balance between assessors from large and small/regional universities		26	0.8%
Suggestions\Evaluation and Adjudication\External Reviews	Ensure external review of the proposal	Committee adjudication alone is not sufficient for making funding decisions.	25	0.8%
Suggestions\Evaluation and Adjudication\Feedback	Develop a fair appeals process	Allow applicants to appeal decisions based on inadequate or incorrect reviews	25	0.8%
Suggestions\Evaluation and Adjudication\General Peer-Review Process	Ensure that the reviewers are bilingual	Assessors in general should be able to understand French and English.	25	0.8%
Suggestions\Funding	High ranked proposals should be funded at least partially		25	0.8%
Suggestions\Evaluation and Adjudication\Evaluation Criteria	Place more weight on interdisciplinary research	Place more weight on interdisciplinary research and improve SSHRC's expertise in evaluating this kind of research.	24	0.8%
Suggestions\Evaluation and Adjudication\Feedback	More timely feedback/quicker decisions from adjudication committee	SSHRC should make quicker decisions regarding applications. For example, SSHRC could provide feedback to applicants as soon as the LOI Stage	23	0.7%
Suggestions\Funding	More generous allowance for teaching release time embedded in grant	More money should be available for teaching buy out, so that the applicant can devote more time to research.	23	0.7%
Suggestions\Funding	Justify cuts in budgets	If a successful applicant is to receive less funding than requested, this cut in budget should be explained.	21	0.7%
Suggestions\Eligibility	Take into account particular situations of researchers		20	0.6%

Category	Code	Description	Cases	% Cases
Suggestions\Application Process	Have SSHRC program officers that are more accessible and informed/qualified	Program officers should be in a position to help applicants not only with the initial application but also after funding decisions have been made and address any concerns the applicants may have concerning potential biases/conflicts of interest.	18	0.6%
Suggestions\Evaluation and Adjudication\Adjudication Committee	Create a balance between young and established scholars on committees		18	0.6%
Suggestions\Evaluation and Adjudication\General Peer-Review Process	Make sure that french language applications are fairly evaluated		18	0.6%
Suggestions\Application Process	More guidance from SSHRC officers for the selection of adjudication committees	Program officers should be available to provide advice to applicants concerning the selection of appropriate adjudication committee.	17	0.5%
Suggestions\Evaluation and Adjudication\Evaluation Criteria	CVs should be reviewed separately from proposal	CVs should be reviewed separately from the proposal to ensure that the proposal is evaluated on its merit alone and that reviewers are not influenced by the applicant's reputation/institution	17	0.5%
Suggestions\Funding	Increase grant length and grant renewal	Grants should be provided for longer, e.g. five years, and grant renewal should be possible.	17	0.5%
Suggestions\Eligibility	Change deadline for grant applications	It is suggested that SSHRC changes the date of the deadline for applications or provide several deadlines throughout the year. It is suggested that this would alleviate the burden on both reviewers and applicants.	16	0.5%
Suggestions\Funding	Distribute funds more equitably across fields and areas of research		16	0.5%
Suggestions\Funding	Distribute funds throughout the country (regional fairness)		16	0.5%
Suggestions\Evaluation and Adjudication\Adjudication Committee	Diversify committee to include minorities		15	0.5%
Suggestions\Evaluation and Adjudication\Evaluation Criteria	Create different criteria for individual and team-based projects	Recognise that individual projects and collaborative projects have different needs	15	0.5%
Suggestions\Evaluation and Adjudication\Evaluation Criteria	Track outputs from funded projects and reward researcher who generate knowledge		15	0.5%
Suggestions\Evaluation and Adjudication\Adjudication Committee	Include non-academic reviewers if appropriate for the discipline	Such as professionals, university administrators, or community stakeholders	14	0.4%
Suggestions\Evaluation and Adjudication\Adjudication Committee	Make the membership of the committees public	The people serving on the committee should be made known to the applicants.	14	0.4%
Suggestions\Funding	Resolve overlaps between different granting agencies	e.g. integration of Interdisciplinary Grant with Tri-Councils	13	0.4%
Suggestions\Application Process	Provide template for completed application forms/copies of successful applications		12	0.4%
Suggestions\Application Process	Use the Canadian common CVs	Use of the Canadian common CV would ease some of the burden associated with application preparation.	12	0.4%
Suggestions\Evaluation and Adjudication\Evaluation Criteria	Place more weight on applied/outcome-oriented projects	Applied research and community oriented research should be more valued in the course of the evaluation process.	12	0.4%
Suggestions\Eligibility	Allow more flexibility for non-university researchers	Develop different criteria to promote the inclusion of researchers that are not affiliated to a university.	11	0.3%
Suggestions\Eligibility	Consider less conventional career path	Develop criteria for those who have not followed the standard academic path (PhD, Postdoc)	11	0.3%
Suggestions\Evaluation and Adjudication\Evaluation Criteria	Recognise the importance of research training for students	Recognise that training students comprises an important part of research and adjust criteria for paying students accordingly.	11	0.3%
Suggestions\Application Process	Provide support/workshops to help both applicants and adjudicators		10	0.3%
Suggestions\Evaluation and Adjudication\Adjudication Committee	Make sure that the president of the committee ensures that the ideological/theoretical disparities are not an issue		10	0.3%
Suggestions\Evaluation and Adjudication\General Peer-Review Process	Committees should not be overly influenced by the view of an external reviewer	One external review (either extremely negative or positive) should not bear too much influence on the committee's final decision.	10	0.3%
Suggestions\Funding	High ranked, unfunded proposals should have priority in subsequent competitions		10	0.3%
Suggestions\Eligibility	Address question concerning career interruption(s)	Researchers may have to interrupt their career for various reasons (parental leave, personal reasons). This should be accounted for in the evaluation process	9	0.3%
Suggestions\Evaluation and Adjudication\Feedback	Inform reviewers of final decision	As a courtesy, inform external reviewers of the final funding decision.	9	0.3%
Suggestions\Funding	Provide more funding for particular research areas	Certain researcher perceive their research area to be disadvantaged in SSHRC competitions e.g., nursing and health, Canadian heritage, food studies	9	0.3%
Suggestions\Application Process	Introduce a two step application process to minimize effort associated with the application process	A mandatory LOI step with appropriate feedback to the applicant would greatly reduce the effort involved with application.	8	0.3%

Category	Code	Description	Cases	% Cases
Suggestions\Application Process	Provide a completely online process	Develop an automated process for both submission and feedback.	8	0.3%
Suggestions\Funding	Fund best proposals, regardless of location or size of institute		8	0.3%
Suggestions\Evaluation and Adjudication\Evaluation Criteria	More openness to international research topics	Develop a less Canada-centric approach to evaluating research proposals	7	0.2%
Suggestions\Evaluation and Adjudication\General Peer-Review Process	Make sure that some francophones are implicated in the evaluation process		7	0.2%
Suggestions\Evaluation and Adjudication\Evaluation Criteria	Place more weight on theory-oriented projects	Theory-oriented research should be more valued in the course of the evaluation process.	6	0.2%
Suggestions\Funding	Handicap successful applicants in future competitions	Successful applicants should be barred from future competition for a number of years or the amount of fund they receive should be capped.	6	0.2%
Suggestions\Evaluation and Adjudication\Evaluation Criteria	Provide rankings	Inform applicants of how they rate relative to other applications, both successful and unsuccessful	5	0.2%
Suggestions\Funding	Increase the amount of funding available to support travel		5	0.2%
Suggestions\Application Process	Make application forms available at the same time as call for proposals	application forms should be made available as soon as the call for proposals go out	4	0.1%
Suggestions\Evaluation and Adjudication\Adjudication Committee	Create separate anglophone and francophone evaluation committees	Applications from anglophone and francophone investigators should be treated in separate committees.	4	0.1%
Suggestions\Evaluation and Adjudication\Evaluation Criteria	Place more weight on qualitative research	Qualitative research should be more valued in the course of the evaluation process.	4	0.1%
Suggestions\Funding	Conference funding should be less rigid	The criteria for receiving support for conferences should be made more flexible.	4	0.1%
Suggestions\Application Process	Add an interview step to the application process		3	0.1%
Suggestions\Application Process	Applications to SSHRC should be copyright protected	Copyright protection should ensure that proposal are not plagiarised by the reviewers.	2	0.1%
Suggestions\Evaluation and Adjudication\External Reviews	Have more french-speaking external reviewers	SSHRC should be able to count on more french-language external reviewers in the evaluation process.	2	0.1%
Suggestions\Funding	Make investigators accountable for their use of the funds	Ensure that funds received by the applicants are used for the purpose(s) outlined in the application.	1	0.0%
Suggestions\Other	Other comments	Comments or suggestions mentioned by only a few of the respondents; SSHRC should manage and reform the publications assistance program, SSHRC should coordinate with universities to decide funding priorities, avoid the Canadian common CV, etc.	266	8.3%
Suggestions\Other	No/I dont know		253	7.9%
Suggestions\Other	Positive comments		91	2.8%
Suggestions\Other	General comments	Comments that do not contain any explicit suggestion for change	63	2.0%

SECTION IV: CROSS REFERENCING

Table 29: Q15-Q1, Q2

Q15-Q1, Q2	Q1. What is your current academic status?						Q2. For how long have you been employed as a professor?				
Q15. I never have submitted applications to SSHRC as a principal investigator or as a co-applicant	Assistant Professor	Associate Professor	Full Professor	Professor Emeritus	Other	n	Less than 5 years	6 to 10 years	11 to 20 years	More than 20 years	n
but I intend to apply to SSHRC as a principal investigator in the next 3 years	72	59	20		10	161	67	39	38	14	158
but I intend to apply to SSHRC as a principal investigator in the next 5 years	10	20	8	2	12	52	12	14	17	8	51
and I do not intend to submit any applications as a principal investigator in the next 5 years	11	44	67	32	38	192	6	29	38	114	187
n	93	123	95	34	60	405	85	82	93	136	396
Q15-Q1, Q2 (% Row)											
but I intend to apply to SSHRC as a principal investigator in the next 3 years	44.7%	36.6%	12.4%	0.0%	6.2%	100.0%	42.4%	24.7%	24.1%	8.9%	100.0%
but I intend to apply to SSHRC as a principal investigator in the next 5 years	19.2%	38.5%	15.4%	3.8%	23.1%	100.0%	23.5%	27.5%	33.3%	15.7%	100.0%
and I do not intend to submit any applications as a principal investigator in the next 5 years	5.7%	22.9%	34.9%	16.7%	19.8%	100.0%	3.2%	15.5%	20.3%	61.0%	100.0%
n	23.0%	30.4%	23.5%	8.4%	14.8%	100.0%	21.5%	20.7%	23.5%	34.3%	100.0%
Q15-Q1, Q2 (% Column)											
but I intend to apply to SSHRC as a principal investigator in the next 3 years	77.4%	48.0%	21.1%	0.0%	16.7%	39.8%	78.8%	47.6%	40.9%	10.3%	39.9%
but I intend to apply to SSHRC as a principal investigator in the next 5 years	10.8%	16.3%	8.4%	5.9%	20.0%	12.8%	14.1%	17.1%	18.3%	5.9%	12.9%
and I do not intend to submit any applications as a principal investigator in the next 5 years	11.8%	35.8%	70.5%	94.1%	63.3%	47.4%	7.1%	35.4%	40.9%	83.8%	47.2%
n	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 30: Q15-Q6, Q8, Q9

Q15-Q6, Q8, Q9	Q6. What is your gender?			Q8. Region:							Q9. Size:			
	Female	Male	n	Atlantic	Quebec	Ontario	Prairies	Yukon, BC Nunavut & NWT	n	Less than 5,000 students	5,000 to 15,000 students	More than 15,000 students	n	
but I never have submitted applications to SSHRC as a principal investigator or as a co-applicant														
but I intend to apply to SSHRC as a principal investigator in the next 3 years	69	86	155	15	35	64	30	15	0	159	17	44	100	161
but I intend to apply to SSHRC as a principal investigator in the next 5 years	21	30	51	7	5	19	15	6	0	52	14	12	26	52
and I do not intend to submit any applications as a principal investigator in the next 5 years	60	127	187	21	34	76	36	21	1	189	30	34	125	189
n	150	243	393	43	74	159	81	42	1	400	61	90	251	402
Q15-Q6, Q8, Q9 (% Row)														
but I intend to apply to SSHRC as a principal investigator in the next 3 years	44.5%	55.5%	100.0%	9.4%	22.0%	40.3%	18.9%	9.4%	0.0%	100.0%	10.6%	27.3%	62.1%	100.0%
but I intend to apply to SSHRC as a principal investigator in the next 5 years	41.2%	58.8%	100.0%	13.5%	9.6%	36.5%	28.8%	11.5%	0.0%	100.0%	26.9%	23.1%	50.0%	100.0%
and I do not intend to submit any applications as a principal investigator in the next 5 years	32.1%	67.9%	100.0%	11.1%	18.0%	40.2%	19.0%	11.1%	0.5%	100.0%	15.9%	18.0%	66.1%	100.0%
n	38.2%	61.8%	100.0%	10.8%	18.5%	39.8%	20.3%	10.5%	0.3%	100.0%	15.2%	22.4%	62.4%	100.0%
Q15-Q6, Q8, Q9 (% Column)														
but I intend to apply to SSHRC as a principal investigator in the next 3 years	46.0%	35.4%	39.4%	34.9%	47.3%	40.3%	37.0%	35.7%	0.0%	39.8%	27.9%	48.9%	39.8%	40.0%
but I intend to apply to SSHRC as a principal investigator in the next 5 years	14.0%	12.3%	13.0%	16.3%	6.8%	11.9%	18.5%	14.3%	0.0%	13.0%	23.0%	13.3%	10.4%	12.9%
and I do not intend to submit any applications as a principal investigator in the next 5 years	40.0%	52.3%	47.6%	48.8%	45.9%	47.8%	44.4%	50.0%	100.0%	47.3%	49.2%	37.8%	49.8%	47.0%
n	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 31: Q25a.-Q19, Q27a

Q25a.-Q19, Q27a.	Q19. Which category best describes how successful you have been at obtaining SSHRC grants in the past 10 years?					Q27a. In the context of SSHRC programs, how many times have you acted as a MEMBER of an adjudication committee responsible for the evaluation of research grants?				
Q25. How important are the following aspects of the evaluation process for grant applications in general?	From 76% to 100%	From 51% to 75%	From 26% to 50%	Less than 25%	n	Never	Once	Twice	Three times and more	n
Q25a. the choice of external assessors that reviewed your application(s)										
Not at all important (1)	6	3	1	3	13	12	1	0	0	13
Not important (2)	12	2	10	4	28	12	4	1	4	21
Neither important nor unimportant (3)	57	23	30	15	125	43	19	7	13	82
Important (4)	707	276	207	123	1,313	712	132	91	65	1,000
Very important (5)	1,583	524	461	286	2,854	1,505	266	201	236	2,208
Don't know	55	21	24	11	111	53	6	3	13	75
n	2,420	849	733	442	4,444	2,337	428	303	331	3,399
Q25a.-Q19, Q27a. (% Row)										
Not at all important (1)	46.2%	23.1%	7.7%	23.1%	100.0%	92.3%	7.7%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Not important (2)	42.9%	7.1%	35.7%	14.3%	100.0%	57.1%	19.0%	4.8%	19.0%	100.0%
Neither important nor unimportant (3)	45.6%	18.4%	24.0%	12.0%	100.0%	52.4%	23.2%	8.5%	15.9%	100.0%
Important (4)	53.8%	21.0%	15.8%	9.4%	100.0%	71.2%	13.2%	9.1%	6.5%	100.0%
Very important (5)	55.5%	18.4%	16.2%	10.0%	100.0%	68.2%	12.0%	9.1%	10.7%	100.0%
Don't know	49.5%	18.9%	21.6%	9.9%	100.0%	70.7%	8.0%	4.0%	17.3%	100.0%
n	54.5%	19.1%	16.5%	9.9%	100.0%	68.8%	12.6%	8.9%	9.7%	100.0%
Q25a.-Q19, Q27a. (% Column)										
Not at all important (1)	0.2%	0.4%	0.1%	0.7%	0.3%	0.5%	0.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.4%
Not important (2)	0.5%	0.2%	1.4%	0.9%	0.6%	0.5%	0.9%	0.3%	1.2%	0.6%
Neither important nor unimportant (3)	2.4%	2.7%	4.1%	3.4%	2.8%	1.8%	4.4%	2.3%	3.9%	2.4%
Important (4)	29.2%	32.5%	28.2%	27.8%	29.5%	30.5%	30.8%	30.0%	19.6%	29.4%
Very important (5)	65.4%	61.7%	62.9%	64.7%	64.2%	64.4%	62.1%	66.3%	71.3%	65.0%
Don't know	2.3%	2.5%	3.3%	2.5%	2.5%	2.3%	1.4%	1.0%	3.9%	2.2%
n	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 32: Q26-Q32a, Q32b

Q26.-Q32a, Q32b.	Q32. How satisfied are you with the following aspects of the evaluation process for grant applications that you have submitted to SSHRC? Q32a. the choice of external assessors that reviewed your application(s)							Q32. How satisfied are you with the following aspects of the evaluation process for grant applications that you have submitted to SSHRC? Q32b. the selection of committee members that adjudicated your application(s)						
	Very dis-satisfied (1)	Dis-satisfied (2)	Neither (3)	Satisfied (4)	Very satisfied (5)	Don't know	n	Very dis-satisfied (1)	Dis-satisfied (2)	Neither (3)	Satisfied (4)	Very satisfied (5)	Don't know	n
Q26. Have you been involved in the peer-review process (i.e. as an external assessor, adjudication committee member or a Chair):														
Q26a. For SSHRC? Yes.	142	345	567	1,351	598	323	3,326	153	326	656	1,000	300	881	3,316
Q26a. For SSHRC? No.	152	303	419	760	326	437	2,397	163	299	497	590	170	674	2,393
n	294	648	986	2,111	924	760	5,723	316	625	1,153	1,590	470	1,555	5,709
Q26b. For another granting organization? Yes	175	420	651	1,394	587	421	3,648	204	427	741	1,026	302	940	3,640
Q26b. For another granting organization? No.	111	206	319	648	297	324	1,905	100	185	389	508	152	566	1,900
n	286	626	970	2,042	884	745	5,553	304	612	1,130	1,534	454	1,506	5,540
Q26.-Q32a, Q32b. (% Row)														
Q26a. For SSHRC? Yes.	4.3%	10.4%	17.0%	40.6%	18.0%	9.7%	100.0%	4.6%	9.8%	19.8%	30.2%	9.0%	26.6%	100.0%
Q26a. For SSHRC? No.	6.3%	12.6%	17.5%	31.7%	13.6%	18.2%	100.0%	6.8%	12.5%	20.8%	24.7%	7.1%	28.2%	100.0%
n	5.1%	11.3%	17.2%	36.9%	16.1%	13.3%	100.0%	5.5%	10.9%	20.2%	27.9%	8.2%	27.2%	100.0%
Q26b. For another granting organization? Yes	4.8%	11.5%	17.8%	38.2%	16.1%	11.5%	100.0%	5.6%	11.7%	20.4%	28.2%	8.3%	25.8%	100.0%
Q26b. For another granting organization? No.	5.8%	10.8%	16.7%	34.0%	15.6%	17.0%	100.0%	5.3%	9.7%	20.5%	26.7%	8.0%	29.8%	100.0%
n	5.2%	11.3%	17.5%	36.8%	15.9%	13.4%	100.0%	5.5%	11.0%	20.4%	27.7%	8.2%	27.2%	100.0%
Q26.-Q32a, Q32b. (% Col)														
Q26a. For SSHRC? Yes.	48.3%	53.2%	57.5%	64.0%	64.7%	42.5%	58.1%	48.4%	52.2%	56.9%	62.9%	63.8%	56.7%	58.1%
Q26a. For SSHRC? No.	51.7%	46.8%	42.5%	36.0%	35.3%	57.5%	41.9%	51.6%	47.8%	43.1%	37.1%	36.2%	43.3%	41.9%
n	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Q26b. For another granting organization? Yes	61.2%	67.1%	67.1%	68.3%	66.4%	56.5%	65.7%	67.1%	69.8%	65.6%	66.9%	66.5%	62.4%	65.7%
Q26b. For another granting organization? No.	38.8%	32.9%	32.9%	31.7%	33.6%	43.5%	34.3%	32.9%	30.2%	34.4%	33.1%	33.5%	37.6%	34.3%
n	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 33: Q31b.-Q26

Q31b.-Q26	Q26. Have you been involved in the peer-review process (i.e. as an external assessor, adjudication committee member or a Chair):					
Q31. What is your level of agreement with the following statements?						
Q31b. Grant applications that are submitted to SSHRC from new scholars are evaluated in a fair and equitable manner because the scholar's level of experience is taken into consideration.	For SSHRC? Yes.	For SSHRC? No.	n	For another granting organization? Yes.	For another granting organization? No.	n
Strongly disagree (1)	106	177	283	146	123	269
Disagree (2)	358	404	762	413	333	746
Agree (3)	1,416	778	2,194	1,440	691	2,131
Strongly agree (4)	656	290	946	624	286	910
Don't know	1,006	947	1,953	1,272	631	1,903
n	3,542	2,596	6,138	3,895	2,064	5,959
Q31b.-Q26 (% Row)						
Strongly disagree (1)	37.5%	62.5%	100.0%	54.3%	45.7%	100.0%
Disagree (2)	47.0%	53.0%	100.0%	55.4%	44.6%	100.0%
Agree (3)	64.5%	35.5%	100.0%	67.6%	32.4%	100.0%
Strongly agree (4)	69.3%	30.7%	100.0%	68.6%	31.4%	100.0%
Don't know	51.5%	48.5%	100.0%	66.8%	33.2%	100.0%
n	57.7%	42.3%	100.0%	65.4%	34.6%	100.0%
Q31b.-Q26 (% Column)						
Strongly disagree (1)	3.0%	6.8%	4.6%	3.7%	6.0%	4.5%
Disagree (2)	10.1%	15.6%	12.4%	10.6%	16.1%	12.5%
Agree (3)	40.0%	30.0%	35.7%	37.0%	33.5%	35.8%
Strongly agree (4)	18.5%	11.2%	15.4%	16.0%	13.9%	15.3%
Don't know	28.4%	36.5%	31.8%	32.7%	30.6%	31.9%
n	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 34: Q32c.-Q26

Q32c.-Q26	Q26. Have you been involved in the peer-review process (i.e. as an external assessor, adjudication committee member or a Chair):					
Q32. How satisfied are you with the following aspects of the evaluation process for grant applications that you have submitted to SSHRC?						
Q32c. the objectivity of the evaluation of your application(s)	For SSHRC? Yes.	For SSHRC? No.	n	For another granting organization? Yes.	For another granting organization? No.	n
Very dissatisfied (1)	225	207	432	266	147	413
Dissatisfied (2)	432	432	864	548	299	847
Neither dissatisfied nor satisfied (3)	601	429	1,030	658	342	1,000
Satisfied (4)	1,336	767	2,103	1,395	647	2,042
Very satisfied (5)	463	237	700	460	218	678
Don't know	257	305	562	298	243	541
n	3,314	2,377	5,691	3,625	1,896	5,521
Q32c.-Q26 (% Row)						
Very dissatisfied (1)	52.1%	47.9%	100.0%	64.4%	35.6%	100.0%
Dissatisfied (2)	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%	64.7%	35.3%	100.0%
Neither dissatisfied nor satisfied (3)	58.3%	41.7%	100.0%	65.8%	34.2%	100.0%
Satisfied (4)	63.5%	36.5%	100.0%	68.3%	31.7%	100.0%
Very satisfied (5)	66.1%	33.9%	100.0%	67.8%	32.2%	100.0%
Don't know	45.7%	54.3%	100.0%	55.1%	44.9%	100.0%
n	58.2%	41.8%	100.0%	65.7%	34.3%	100.0%
Q32c.-Q26 (% Column)						
Very dissatisfied (1)	6.8%	8.7%	7.6%	7.3%	7.8%	7.5%
Dissatisfied (2)	13.0%	18.2%	15.2%	15.1%	15.8%	15.3%
Neither dissatisfied nor satisfied (3)	18.1%	18.0%	18.1%	18.2%	18.0%	18.1%
Satisfied (4)	40.3%	32.3%	37.0%	38.5%	34.1%	37.0%
Very satisfied (5)	14.0%	10.0%	12.3%	12.7%	11.5%	12.3%
Don't know	7.8%	12.8%	9.9%	8.2%	12.8%	9.8%
n	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 35: Q32c.-Q12, Q14

Q32c.-Q12, Q14	Q12. I have already been funded by SSHRC as a principal investigator			Q14. I have submitted applications to SSHRC as a principal investigator or as a co-applicant but I have never been funded by SSHRC			
Q32. How satisfied are you with the following aspects of the evaluation process for grant applications that you have submitted to SSHRC?	and in the coming years, I intend to submit further applications as a principal investigator	but in the next 5 years, I do not intend to submit further applications as a principal investigator	n	and I intend to apply to SSHRC as a principal investigator in the next 3 years	and I intend to apply to SSHRC as a principal investigator in the next 5 years	and I do not intend to submit any applications as a principal investigator in the next 5 years	n
Q32c. the objectivity of the evaluation of your application(s)							
Very dissatisfied (1)	154	41	195	117	14	58	189
Dissatisfied (2)	344	73	417	243	46	63	352
Neither dissatisfied nor satisfied (3)	522	98	620	190	30	50	270
Satisfied (4)	1,362	239	1,601	164	21	26	211
Very satisfied (5)	522	92	614	22	5	6	33
Don't know	239	54	293	98	15	49	162
n	3,143	597	3,740	834	131	252	1,217
Q32c.-Q12, Q14 (% Row)							
Very dissatisfied (1)	79.0%	21.0%	100.0%	61.9%	7.4%	30.7%	100.0%
Dissatisfied (2)	82.5%	17.5%	100.0%	69.0%	13.1%	17.9%	100.0%
Neither dissatisfied nor satisfied (3)	84.2%	15.8%	100.0%	70.4%	11.1%	18.5%	100.0%
Satisfied (4)	85.1%	14.9%	100.0%	77.7%	10.0%	12.3%	100.0%
Very satisfied (5)	85.0%	15.0%	100.0%	66.7%	15.2%	18.2%	100.0%
Don't know	81.6%	18.4%	100.0%	60.5%	9.3%	30.2%	100.0%
n	84.0%	16.0%	100.0%	68.5%	10.8%	20.7%	100.0%
Q32c.-Q12, Q14 (% Column)							
Very dissatisfied (1)	4.9%	6.9%	5.2%	14.0%	10.7%	23.0%	15.5%
Dissatisfied (2)	10.9%	12.2%	11.1%	29.1%	35.1%	25.0%	28.9%
Neither dissatisfied nor satisfied (3)	16.6%	16.4%	16.6%	22.8%	22.9%	19.8%	22.2%
Satisfied (4)	43.3%	40.0%	42.8%	19.7%	16.0%	10.3%	17.3%
Very satisfied (5)	16.6%	15.4%	16.4%	2.6%	3.8%	2.4%	2.7%
Don't know	7.6%	9.0%	7.8%	11.8%	11.5%	19.4%	13.3%
n	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 36: Q35.-Q12, Q14

Q35.-Q12, Q14	Q12. I have already been funded by SSHRC as a principal investigator			Q14. I have submitted applications to SSHRC as a principal investigator or as a co-applicant but I have never been funded by SSHRC			
Q35. In your opinion, is there a bias in the evaluation process that occurs at SSHRC which would have a negative impact on the type of research that you do?	and in the coming years, I intend to submit further applications as a principal investigator	but in the next 5 years, I do not intend to submit further applications as a principal investigator	n	and I intend to apply to SSHRC as a principal investigator in the next 3 years	and I intend to apply to SSHRC as a principal investigator in the next 5 years	and I do not intend to submit any applications as a principal investigator in the next 5 years	n
No	1,705	290	1,995	291	27	66	384
Yes	1,391	300	1,691	531	96	179	806
n	3,096	590	3,686	822	123	245	1,190
Q35.-Q12, Q14 (% Row)							
No	85.5%	14.5%	100.0%	75.8%	7.0%	17.2%	100.0%
Yes	82.3%	17.7%	100.0%	65.9%	11.9%	22.2%	100.0%
n	84.0%	16.0%	100.0%	69.1%	10.3%	20.6%	100.0%
Q35.-Q12, Q14 (% Column)							
No	55.1%	49.2%	54.1%	35.4%	22.0%	26.9%	32.3%
Yes	44.9%	50.8%	45.9%	64.6%	78.0%	73.1%	67.7%
n	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 37: Q31a.-Q4

Q31a.-Q4	Q4. On a scale ranging from strongly interdisciplinary to exclusively disciplinary, how would you characterize your research?				
Q31. What is your level of agreement with the following statements?					
Q31a. Grant applications that are characterized as interdisciplinary in nature are evaluated in a competent manner at SSHRC.	Extremely interdisciplinary (1)	2	3	Exclusively disciplinary (4)	n
Strongly disagree (1)	227	142	55	14	438
Disagree (2)	455	474	214	24	1,167
Agree (3)	449	666	365	31	1,511
Strongly agree (4)	96	88	53	14	251
Don't know	408	876	1,017	226	2,527
n	1,635	2,246	1,704	309	5,894
Q31a.-Q4 (% Row)					
Strongly disagree (1)	51.8%	32.4%	12.6%	3.2%	100.0%
Disagree (2)	39.0%	40.6%	18.3%	2.1%	100.0%
Agree (3)	29.7%	44.1%	24.2%	2.1%	100.0%
Strongly agree (4)	38.2%	35.1%	21.1%	5.6%	100.0%
Don't know	16.1%	34.7%	40.2%	8.9%	100.0%
n	27.7%	38.1%	28.9%	5.2%	100.0%
Q31a.-Q4 (% Column)					
Strongly disagree (1)	13.9%	6.3%	3.2%	4.5%	7.4%
Disagree (2)	27.8%	21.1%	12.6%	7.8%	19.8%
Agree (3)	27.5%	29.7%	21.4%	10.0%	25.6%
Strongly agree (4)	5.9%	3.9%	3.1%	4.5%	4.3%
Don't know	25.0%	39.0%	59.7%	73.1%	42.9%
n	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%