

Program Management Response to the 2009 Evaluation of the Networks of Centres of Excellence International Partnership Initiative

Context

In 2006, the Networks of Centres of Excellence (NCE) program, in collaboration with the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), launched the International Partnership Initiative (IPI) as a pilot initiative. The goal of the IPI was to provide existing NCE networks with additional support to develop and enhance linkages with the best centres of excellence in the rest of the world. The IPI objectives were to enable the networks to:

- raise Canada's profile on the world stage and ensure that Canada is part of international cutting edge initiatives;
- provide a richer training environment to develop highly qualified people with skills and awareness critical to Canadian productivity, economic growth, public policy and quality of life;
- stimulate or reinforce partnerships with foreign organizations to develop large coordinated and concerted efforts leading to economic and social impact; and
- enhance the sharing and dissemination of knowledge, resources and technology to Canada.

The initial award ran from 2007 to 2009. The award period was recently extended until 2010 without additional funding. In December 2008, the NCE Steering Committee and IDRC commissioned an evaluation of the IPI pilot, to inform decision-making regarding the future of the initiative. R.A. Malatest & Associates was contracted to design and implement the evaluation. The final report and recommendations were provided to the NCE Steering Committee in June 2009. The purpose of this evaluation was to examine the following elements:

- The extent to which the IPI funded activities have contributed to the achievement of the IPI objectives;
- The extent to which the IPI has contributed added value to advancing the goals of the funded networks;
- Major achievements arising from the IPI; and
- Lessons learned on the benefits and challenges of programs promoting international collaboration of this type.

NCE management response to the conclusions of the evaluation and an action plan table are provided.

Management Response

1) Overall value and impact of the IPI funding:

Conclusion 1. *Findings from key informant interviews and program documentation suggest that the funded networks have achieved several positive outcomes that collectively contribute to achieving several of the IPI objectives.*

Conclusion 2. *The activities undertaken by the networks indicate progress toward in-depth partnerships with organizations outside of Canada. It is too early to ascertain the full extent of the initiative's impact on the networks' ability to develop large coordinated and concerted efforts leading to economic and social impact.*

Conclusion 3. *To date, not all the IPI funded networks were able to implement Highly Qualified Personnel training as initially planned.*

NCE management is pleased with the early progress towards accomplishment of the IPI objectives, mainly the establishment of partnerships with international consortia that was reported by the evaluation. NCE Management also noted that the evaluation was performed before the end of the pilot, and that the final outcomes and impacts of the IPI funding could not be fully reviewed in this study. NCE management agrees that delays in the initiation of some IPI partnership and Highly Qualified Personnel (HQP) training activities can be attributed to the added complexity of the logistics to establish partnerships and training activities in an international context.

2) Added value of the IPI for NCEs and their international partners

Conclusion 4. *The IPI has allowed NCEs and their international partners to pursue their strategies globally, enabling a more concerted approach to finding solutions to problems that are of global importance.*

Conclusion 5. *Given the focus of the initiative on stimulating and enabling partnerships, networks that have positioned themselves in a strategic advisory role in terms of influencing public policy, awareness and knowledge about a particular issue appeared to benefit more clearly than other networks from the IPI with respect to advancing their overall strategic mission.*

Management agrees with these conclusions, which seem to support the premises of the IPI that structured international collaborations as an important element of achieving benefits to Canada. International collaborations and partnerships should be part of each network's strategic plans, to ensure a better integration with the networks on-going plans.

NCE management also recognizes that the evaluation was implemented early in the life of the initiative and was unable to measure the full impacts of the IPI funding, and that an analysis of the IPI final reports will be useful to document the impacts of the IPI funding.

3) Utilization of the IPI funding

Conclusion 6. *The IPI funding was used to support activities designed to establish relationships with organizations outside of Canada and initiate sharing of knowledge and tools. Funded networks reported a broader range of activities with respect to international collaboration than non-funded networks.*

NCE management agrees, and is pleased to note, that the IPI funds were used towards the development and implementation of broader international activities, allowing the funded networks to reach their IPI objectives. However, management also recognizes that the implementation and monitoring of international activities requires additional funds and resources, which need to be well integrated with the network's long-term strategy to become sustainable.

4) Lessons learned from the IPI design and delivery

Conclusion 7. *The IPI design and delivery was seen as appropriate. However, networks reported that the time required to establish relationships with international*

partners has adversely affected their ability to meet some of the IPI objectives within the funding time frame.

NCE management agrees that, although implementation was found appropriate overall, there were issues with the design, mainly with the time lines to plan and implement complex international partnerships. Management noted that some networks did not find the level of advice and best practices provided by the NCE Secretariat to be sufficient.

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NCE management decision and action plan

Overall, although the evaluation was conducted prior to the end of the pilot and only partial performance data were available, NCE management agrees with the conclusions of the report and considers that the evaluation provided useful information that was used in making decisions regarding the future of the IPI.

NCE management was pleased with the positive outcomes reported by the evaluation, which seem to support the premise of the IPI, that structured international collaborations integrated in the planning of a network's activities are an important element of achieving benefits to Canada.

In that light, NCE management recommends that all NCE networks be encouraged to consider how they can take advantage of international collaborations to enhance the overall capacity of the network to bring the best research to bear on Canadian problems. New or renewal NCE applications will be expected to include an international dimension where world class expertise may exist outside of Canada and would significantly enhance the impacts of the network. At the same time, existing networks should strengthen international linkages where appropriate.

| Conclusions | Actions | Responsibility | Time line |
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| Overall value and impact of the IPI funding: | | | |
| <p>#1 - Findings from key informant interviews and program documentation suggest that the funded networks have achieved several positive outcomes that collectively contribute to achieving several of the IPI objectives.</p> <p>#2 - The activities undertaken by the networks indicate progress toward in-depth partnerships with organizations outside of Canada. It is too early to ascertain the full extent of the initiative's impact on the networks' ability to develop large coordinated and concerted efforts leading to economic and social impact.</p> <p>#3 - To date, not all IPI funded networks were able to implement HQP training as initially planned.</p> | <p>NCE management agrees with the findings of the evaluation and recognizes that, due to the early timing of the evaluation, the full impacts of the IPI funding could not be reviewed in this study.</p> | NCE Secretariat | 2009-2010 |
| | <p>NCE management has decided to provide the IPI funded networks an additional year (from 2009 to 2010) to complete its planned partnership and networking and HQP Training activities.</p> | | |
| | <p>The NCE Secretariat will collect and compile final reports at the end of this extended period (2010) and provide an overview of the results and impacts from the IPI funding.</p> | | |
| What has been the value-added of the IPI for NCEs and their international partners? | | | |
| # 4 - The IPI has allowed NCEs and their international partners to pursue their strategies globally, enabling a more concerted approach to finding solutions to problems that are of global importance. | <p>NCE management will integrate the IPI program in the regular NCE program and recommends that all networks consider how they can take advantage of international collaborations to enhance the overall capacity of the networks to bring the best research to bear on Canadian problems. All future NCE applications (whether new or renewals) will be expected to include an international dimension where world-class expertise may exist outside of Canada and would significantly enhance the impacts of the Network. At the same time, existing networks should strengthen those international linkages where appropriate.</p> | NCE Secretariat | 2009-2010 |
| | <p>NCE Secretariat will revise NCE Program literature and competition guides to include an international dimension as part of the program criteria for new and renewing networks, and inform the networks of these changes.</p> | | |
| # 5 - Given the focus of the initiative on stimulating and enabling partnerships, networks that have positioned themselves in a strategic advisory role in terms of influencing public policy, awareness and knowledge about a particular issue appeared to benefit more clearly than other networks from the IPI with respect to advancing their overall strategic mission. | <p>NCE Secretariat will consider the relation between the type of network and focus (technology/biotech or advisory/public policy) in its compilation of the IPI benefits and results from the IPI final reports.</p> <p>The NCE program, when reviewing its performance framework, will analyse the need to capture additional information on the type of networks and focus (technology/biotech or advisory/public policy).</p> | NCE Secretariat | 2010-2011 |

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| Utilization of the IPI funding | | | |
| # 6 – The IPI funding was used to support activities designed to establish relationships with organizations outside of Canada and initiate sharing of knowledge and tools. Funded networks reported a broader range of activities with respect to international collaboration than non-funded networks. | NCE Secretariat will review and modify, where needed, the performance framework of the NCE program, as well as the annual and financial reports templates, to reflect the incorporation of international activities in the regular NCE program and inform the networks of these changes. | NCE Secretariat | 2009-2010 |
| Lessons learned from program design and delivery | | | |
| # 7 - Program design and delivery was seen as appropriate; however, networks reported that the time required to establish relationships with international partners has adversely affected their ability to meet some of the IPI objectives within the funding time frame. | The NCE Secretariat will develop best practices and tools with regard to international partnerships implementation and monitoring by networks' Boards. | NCE Secretariat | 2009-2011 |