

Management Response to the 2015 Summative Evaluation of the Networks of Centres of Excellence (NCE) Program

CONTEXT

The Networks of Centres of Excellence (NCE) program was launched in 1989 with the goal to mobilize Canada's research talent in the academic, private and public sectors and apply it to the task of developing the economy and improving the quality of life of Canadians.

A review of the relevance and effectiveness of the NCE program was completed in June 2013 to meet the coverage requirements of Treasury Board's Policy on Evaluation and the requirements of Section 42.1 of the Financial Administration Act. This review covered the five-year period following the last summative evaluation, from fiscal year 2007-2008 to the end of fiscal year 2011-2012. The period under study for the current summative evaluation is 2008-09 to 2012-13 and builds upon the 2013 review of relevance and effectiveness of the NCE program.

This summative evaluation of the NCE program was undertaken to meet the information needs of program management and delivery personnel (i.e., the NCE Secretariat) and to comply with the Treasury Board Policy on Evaluation (2009) and Financial Administration Act regarding evaluation coverage. The networks funded under the NCE-Knowledge Mobilization initiative were not included in this evaluation given it is early in the funding cycle of this initiative (the first competition was held in 2011) and the pilot initiative, originally called the NCE New Initiatives (NCE-NI), was evaluated in 2009. The NCE evaluation was conducted jointly with the BL-NCE evaluation to allow for comparisons between the two programs. The 13 NCE networks included in this study are the following:

- GEOMatics for Informed Decisions Network – GEOIDE (\$45.4M)
- Canadian Photonic Industry Consortium – CPIC (previously called CIPI - \$52.8M)
- Canadian Arthritis Network – CAN (\$55.0M)
- Mprime Network Inc. (previously called MITACS - \$64.5M)
- Canadian Stroke Network – CSN (\$77.7M)
- Canadian Water Network – CWN (\$61.0M)
- Stem Cell Network – SCN (\$82.8M)
- AUTO21 Network of Centres of Excellence (\$81.1M)
- ArcticNet 2003-2018 (\$113.2M)
- Allergy, Genes and Environment Network – AllerGen (\$74.4M)
- NeuroDevNet (\$19.6M)
- Carbon Management Canada – CMC (\$20.8M)
- Graphics, Animation and New Media Canada – GRAND (\$23.3M)

NCE MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

OVERALL COMMENTS

NCE Management agrees with the conclusions of this report and the recommendations therein. This review was based on multiple sources of evidence, such as document reviews, interviews, case studies of seven NCE funded networks, administrative data, surveys of NCEs and comparable networks (BL-NCE, SNG, CIHR and SSHRC networks).

Overall, Management recognizes the amount of work invested in this review by Goss Gilroy Inc. for the detailed analysis and review of all sources of evidence. NCE Management agrees with the overarching conclusion that the program is relevant, performing well against its objectives, delivered efficiently, and that the model should be maintained, but with improvements in its performance monitoring and reporting system and sharing of best practices on IP agreement negotiation and knowledge translation.

NCE Management therefore agrees with the overarching conclusion that the program is relevant and brings added-value. Detailed responses to each recommendation are provided below and an action plan is presented in the following table.

RECOMMENDATION 1

The NCE program is relevant and achieving its objectives and should therefore be considered for continued support at the federal level. The NCE program is addressing a continued need using a network approach that has been shown to have many advantages. Demand for the program is strong.

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE: AGREED

Management agrees with this recommendation. The NCE program is reaching program objectives and plays a specific role in supporting the Government of Canada's S&T and Innovation Strategy.

PROPOSED ACTION:

The NCE Secretariat will continue to monitor progress in fully achieving the program's ultimate outcomes. The NCE Steering Committee is expected to launch the next NCE competition in spring of 2017 with funding to start in March of 2019.

RECOMMENDATION 2:

The impact of the recent (i.e. 2009) program change from a seven-year funding to a five-year funding cycle should continue to be monitored. While there are mixed views about this adjustment to the program implementation, there is still a lack of evidence to assess the impact and to recommend any change to the current five year funding cycle.

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE: AGREED

Management agrees with this recommendation.

PROPOSED ACTION:

The NCE Secretariat will continue to monitor the impact of the change from seven-year to five-year networks via annual reporting and cyclical summative evaluations.

EVALUATION RECOMMENDATION 3:

The sharing of best practices among networks is recommended in two areas: the management of IP; and knowledge and technology exploitation and exchange (KTEE). There are lower levels of less satisfaction with the management of IP and as it was identified as an area that is challenging for networks, it could be better supported through the sharing of best practices. NCE best practices in the area of KTEE, including tools and resources, should also be developed and shared broadly among the networks to embed and maximize translation of network research to meet partner needs. Knowledge translation is an area of strength for many networks, with tools and resources being developed by several networks to encourage mobilization of research results which could be shared and adopted by other networks.

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE: AGREED

Management agrees with the recommendation to share best practices on the negotiation of IP agreements and KTEE tools and resources. The NCE Secretariat has already taken action to share best practices related to IP agreements and developing a knowledge mobilization strategy. At the 2015 NCE Annual Best Practices Meeting, a specific session on sharing best practices for managing network agreements and IP was held which provided insight on the challenges of managing intellectual property in a network environment and provided information on successful and unsuccessful mitigation measures. At the same meeting, a session led by a panel on knowledge mobilization toolkits, their use, and how they fit into an overall knowledge mobilization strategy was held. Case studies were also presented by two NCE networks. All tools presented at the 2015 NCE Annual Best Practices Meeting have been posted to the NCE website and disseminated using social media and the NCE Newsletter to all NCE Secretariat clients.

PROPOSED ACTION:

1. The NCE Secretariat will review and if required, update the NCE Best Practices for Governance and Operations guide to provide additional guidance on the negotiation of IP agreements and KTEE tools and resources.
2. At the 2016 NCE Annual Best Practices Sessions, another session on sharing best practices for the negotiation of IP agreements and in the area of KTEE will be organized upon request.

EVALUATION RECOMMENDATION 4:

A review of the reporting requirements, with particular emphasis on the record keeping of the participation of researchers, partners and HQP in the NCE program should be undertaken to improve accuracy and consistency across networks. Assessment of the networked approach is based, in part, on how and to what extent researchers and partners are engaged by the network. As such, these data templates should be populated with a higher degree of reliability and currency. The conduct of the survey of researchers and partners was hampered by outdated lists of program participants and would have benefited from a validation phase with the networks. Improved post-project HQP employment data would be beneficial to demonstrate NCE's role in supporting the federal government's "People Pillar."¹ Any modifications to reporting requirements will need to be balanced with a need to keep burden to a minimum, as there were lower levels of satisfaction with reporting requirements among both partners and researchers.

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE: AGREED

Management agrees with this recommendation. The NCE Secretariat is currently undertaking a strategic planning exercise for the NCE program. Following the completion of this exercise, a review of the annual reporting will be undertaken.

PROPOSED ACTION:

Following the completion of a strategic planning exercise, a working group comprised of the NCE Secretariat and the NCE community will be organized to review and update the performance measurement strategy and annual reporting templates for the NCE program. Clarification of reporting expectations and an examination of mechanisms to capture post-project HQP employment will be part of the working group mandate. NCE Management will request that the NCE Secretariat work in collaboration with the network administrative centres to increase the ongoing accuracy of all data collection.

Contacts: For further information on the Program Management Response, please contact Stéphanie Michaud, Deputy Director, NCE Program. For information on the evaluation, please contact: Susan Morris, Director, Evaluation, NSERC.

¹ Government of Canada (2014). *Seizing Canada's Moment: Moving Forward in Science Technology and Innovations*. Ottawa: Industry Canada.

NCE Program Management Response (Summary)

Recommendations	Agree/ Disagree	Proposed Actions	Responsibility	Timeline
<p>Recommendation 1:</p> <p>The NCE program is relevant and achieving its objectives and should therefore be considered for continued support at the federal level.</p>	Agree	The NCE Secretariat will continue to monitor progress in fully achieving the program's ultimate outcomes. The NCE Steering Committee is expected to launch the next NCE competition in spring of 2017 with funding to start in March of 2019.	NCE Secretariat	Fall 2017
<p>Recommendation 2:</p> <p>The impact of the recent (i.e. 2009) program change from a seven-year funding to a five-year funding cycle should continue to be monitored.</p>	Agree	The NCE Secretariat will continue to monitor the impact of the change from seven-year to five-year networks via annual reporting and cyclical summative evaluations.	NCE Secretariat	Ongoing
<p>Recommendation 3:</p> <p>The sharing of best practices among networks is recommended in two areas: the management of IP; and knowledge and technology exploitation and exchange (KTEE).</p>	Agree	The NCE Secretariat will review and if required, update the NCE Best Practices for Governance and Operations guide for negotiation of IP agreements and additional KTEE tools and resources. Upon request, another session on best practices for IP agreement negotiation and KTEE will be held.	NCE Secretariat	Summer 2016
<p>Recommendation 4:</p> <p>A review of the reporting requirements, with particular emphasis on the record keeping of the participation of researchers, partners and HQP in the NCE program should be undertaken to improve accuracy and consistency across networks.</p>	Agree	Following the completion of a strategic planning exercise, a working group comprised of the NCE Secretariat and the NCE community will be organized to review and update the performance measurement strategy and annual reporting templates for the NCE program.	NCE Secretariat	Fall 2018