



Submission to the Standing Committee on Finance Council of Canadian Academies – Seeking Funding Renewal

Summary

An effective public policy process needs an independent organization that identifies, assesses, and communicates the best evidence drawn from various disciplines, sectors, and regions, in Canada and abroad. This has been the role of the Council of Canadian Academies (“the Council”)¹ since 2006. The Council selects and supports independent expert panels to conduct authoritative studies in response to questions submitted by the Government of Canada on significant issues to inform wise development of public policy. This provides unique value to the federal government in three main ways:

1. The Council offers a standing capability for the government to obtain credible answers to a broad range of policy-relevant questions.
2. The specific value of the Council’s work derives from a unique combination of authority, credibility, and cost efficiency. Over the course of the Council’s 10-year mandate, the volunteer effort of more than 850 experts will have contributed an estimated \$16 million of value, amplifying taxpayer investment in the Council.
3. This work complements the policy responsibilities of government, engendering public confidence that important issues are given due consideration by policy-makers. Council assessments constitute a public service by assembling, analyzing, and synthesizing evidence relevant to the responsibilities of a range of government departments.

The breadth and prominence of the 33 assessments conducted by the Council to date encompass most pre-budget consultation themes, with a particular focus on “Increasing the competitiveness of Canadian businesses through research, development, innovation and commercialization”.

Sufficient and stable funding is needed for the Council so that the government can continue to rely on it as an independent and cost-effective resource for sound policy development. The Council is therefore requesting renewal of its funding – \$30 million over a five-year period – as part of Budget 2015. In return, it will undertake up to 25 assessments for the Government of Canada.

The Panel concluded that the Council has had substantial impact on a number of policy and program areas, and given its rigorous, methodological approach, will continue to have impact beneficial to the government of Canada, opinion leaders, and Canadian society.

2013 External Evaluation
Panel

¹ The Council is composed of a Board of Governors, a Scientific Advisory Committee, and a small secretariat led by a President/CEO, supported by three founding member academies (the Royal Society of Canada, the Canadian Academy of Engineering, and the Canadian Academy of Health Sciences).



Introduction

The Council identifies and supports independent panels of experts to conduct authoritative studies of significant issues to inform the wise development of public policy. The Council, which began operations in early 2006, was initiated with a 10-year, \$30-million investment by the Government of Canada. In return, it has conducted a large number of expert assessments in response to questions posed by a range of federal government sponsors including Industry Canada, Health Canada, Natural Resources Canada, and Environment Canada. Other sponsors include the granting councils, the government of Ontario, and the Canadian Consortium of Ocean Research Universities.

To date, the Council has undertaken 33 studies covering a broad range of topics related to Canada's innovation, economic performance, health, education and training, resource production, the environment, Canada's Arctic, and the evidence required by various areas of regulatory policy. In short, the Council's work is directly relevant to most 2014 pre-budget consultation themes (Box 1).

Box 1: Alignment of Council Reports with Consultation Themes

Increasing the competitiveness of Canadian businesses through research, development, innovation and commercialization

Innovation is the fundamental driver of Canadian business competitiveness. A range of Council assessments explore the connection in depth:

- *The State of Science and Technology in Canada* helped lay the groundwork for the government's science and technology (S&T) funding priorities as demonstrated in the government's S&T Strategy announced in 2007.
- The report of the Expert Panel on Business Innovation (2009), a mainstay of public policy work in this area, is highly cited in Canada and internationally.
- Both reports, along with the 2012 follow-up on the *State of Science and Technology* and its sister assessment, *The State of Industrial Research and Development in Canada* (2013), impact the government's current priority of jobs and growth as they provide additional evidence upon which policies can be developed.
- *Paradox Lost: Explaining Canada's Research Strength and Innovation Weakness* (2013) synthesizes the findings of seven Council assessments and demonstrates that Council reports, as the gold standard of evidence, have reshaped the science and innovation debate in Canada.



Supporting families and helping vulnerable Canadians by focusing on health, education, and training

A number of assessments have been conducted in the health area including children's therapeutics, influenza transmission, aboriginal food security, health impacts of conducted energy weapons, and animal health. When coupled with assessments that analyze Canadian STEM skills, business training, and women in research, the Council contributes directly to this theme.

Improving Canada's taxation and regulatory regime

Assessments have considered aspects of Canadian regulation in areas ranging from nanotechnology and "green" information technology to groundwater management and chemical safety assessment.

Value Proposition

The Council provides unique value to the Government of Canada in three main ways:

1. The Council gives the government a *standing capability* to obtain credible answers to a broad range of policy-relevant questions. This avoids the delay and costs of setting up *ad hoc* panels and commissions. Most major developed countries have organizations conducting similar independent expert assessments to those of the Council. The most notable is the National Research Council of the U.S. National Academies, an organization formed in 1916 and upon which the Council has been closely patterned.
2. The specific value of the Council's work derives from a unique combination of authority, credibility, and cost efficiency. The *authority* of Council reports reflects the quality of expert panels and a rigorous peer review process that is overseen by an eminent Scientific Advisory Committee and Board of Governors. The *credibility* of the Council's work is further enhanced by its independence. The sponsors of studies do not select panellists or vet reports prior to their public release. The *cost efficiency* of the Council's methodology, confirmed in external evaluations, derives from (a) the voluntary service of all expert panellists and reviewers, with the Council covering out-of-pocket costs only (this effort by more than 850 experts will have contributed an estimated \$16 million of value, amplifying taxpayer investment in the Council); and (b) the cost-benefit inherent in a fully occupied standing capacity with an efficient set of procedures and skills built up over the past nine years. Box 2 highlights how the Council's process creates value in a typical assessment.



3. The Council's work complements the policy responsibilities of government. Council assessments constitute a public service by assembling, analyzing, and synthesizing evidence in response to questions posed by the government. Since assessments do not make policy recommendations, they do not compromise the government's decision-making prerogatives. Findings are published in clear language designed to inform policy discussions and engender public confidence that important issues are given due consideration by policy-makers.

Box 2: Council Assessment Process

Over the past decade, the Council has refined its process as follows:

- A sponsor, usually a federal minister (e.g., Minister of Industry, Minister of Natural Resources), proposes a question.
- The Council, with the approval of its Board of Governors, agrees to undertake a study (e.g., "How could new and existing technologies be used to reduce the environmental footprint of oil sands development?").
- The Council identifies a panel of 10-15 relevant Canadian and international experts, who meet 3-4 times in person (and frequently online) to debate evidence and draft a report. Council staff handles all logistics and assists the panel, as requested, with research and writing.
- The draft report is (anonymously) peer reviewed and the panel meets in person one final time to revise as appropriate.
- The final report is approved by the Council's Board and posted to its website in English and French.

Impact

In September 2013, an External Evaluation Panel, reporting to the Minister of Industry, confirmed that the Council had achieved its expressed objectives and that its output has had substantial impact on a number of policy areas and will "continue to have impact beneficial to the Government of Canada, opinion leaders and Canadian Society." A 2013 Performance Audit found that when benchmarked against comparable work undertaken by the National Research Council in the U.S. and by the U.K.'s Royal Society, the Council's work, despite the organization's relative youth, was of equivalent quality and cost effectiveness.

In the relatively short time since its creation, the Council has done an excellent job of producing high-quality reports that are being used by decision makers to provide Canadians with better evidence-based public policy.

2009 External Evaluation Panel



Council reports have been recognized or cited by Parliament's Standing Committee on Finance, Budget 2013, Canadian Chamber of Commerce, Library of Parliament, and Genome Canada, among many others. They are also regularly referenced in public communications by ministers and senior public servants in the federal and several provincial governments. These tangible impacts on policy-making, coupled with steadily increasing growth in Council website traffic and social media, speak to increased visibility of assessments.

Arguably, the most telling indicator of impact has been the steadily increasing demand for Council studies, not only from a widening range of federal sponsors but also from provincial governments and non-governmental groups.

It is clear the Council is well on its way to becoming recognized as a powerful organization for all aspects of research and evidence critical to Canadian policy development and, at the same time, useful for science globally.

Rita R. Colwell, former
Director of the U.S. National
Science Foundation
(December 2012)

Looking Forward

The need for an organization such as the Council has only become more apparent since its launch in 2006. The public policy process needs an organization that can identify, assess, and communicate the best evidence drawn from various disciplines, sectors, and regions, in Canada and abroad. This is precisely what the Council was created to do. Most significantly, the Council's mission closely complements the internal capabilities of government since governments everywhere are relying increasingly on externally sourced expert analysis as input to the policy process. The Council is a uniquely authoritative, credible, and cost-efficient source of such evidence-based analysis.

The Council has earned its reputation based on thorough, well-buttressed assessments of issues relevant to contemporary policy-making. Going forward, this hallmark must be maintained. But the pace of policy-making today has quickened in step with so many other aspects of business and cultural life. The Council will keep pace with this new rhythm by complementing its comprehensive studies with others that are more focused and quickly delivered. It will not, however, compromise its methodology, which remains the source of its credibility.

The Council will continue to expand the range of federal departments it serves and respond to the growing number of requests from provinces and public-sector NGOs (non-federal clients are required to cover the cost of any Council work on their behalf).

Funding Proposition

The government's founding \$30-million investment in the Council covered a 10-year period, including the initial start-up phase. Spending in the early years, as the Council built its reputation and staff, was thus far below the level now required to meet growing demand from a much broader spectrum of federal agencies. Annual expenditure is



currently more than \$6 million. The Council is therefore requesting renewed funding of \$30 million over five fiscal years beginning in 2015/2016. A five-year funding period is requested in consideration of the fact that assessments may take between 12 and 18 months to complete. This funding will be augmented by revenue from a limited amount of non-federal work, primarily for provinces, for which the Council will be fully compensated by these other sponsors. In return for federal funding, the Council will undertake up to 25 assessments proposed by the Government of Canada. Sufficient and stable funding will ensure that the Council continues to be Canada's preeminent source of authoritative, cost-effective assessment of the evidence needed for sound policy development.