SSHRC written brief for the House of Commons Standing Committee Science and Research

Canadian Research Partnerships with Entities Connected to the People's Republic of China

December 2023

SSHRC would like to thank the Committee for undertaking on this study and drawing attention to an important topic for the research ecosystem in Canada. The agency is pleased to provide input to this work.

To complement the information shared during the October 25, 2023, appearance of SSHRC senior officials at the committee, this brief responds directly to the questions posed in the Committee's September 18, 2023, motion.

RISK MITIGATION AND CONTROLS

What controls does your institution have in place to limit risk exposure on issues such as influence, intellectual property theft, and potential espionage from the entities connected to the People's Republic of China?

Recognizing that security risks evolve and can come from anywhere in the world, The Government of Canada's approach to research security is country-agnostic and includes a number of measures to address the various methods that foreign actors may use to appropriate Canadian research and data. The federal granting agencies (the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC), the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR)) acknowledge that Canadian world-class science and research is made possible by domestic and international collaborations between researchers and research institutions, and in partnership with organizations from the public, for-profit, and not-for-profit sectors.

The Government of Canada continues to support research security and responsible internationalization through its involvement in ongoing multi-country dialogues, such as the Five-Eyes countries and alignment of Canada's approach with international best practices, notably, the G7 Common Values and Principles of Research Security and Integrity. Currently, Canada is co-chairing the G7 Working Group on the Security and Integrity of the Global Research Ecosystem and NSERC is chairing the Global Research Council.

Canada's federal granting agencies have a number of initiatives in place that aim to preserve a collaborative and open approach to research and discovery, while also protecting Canada's national security interests. These controls include policy requirements that have been issued by the federal government to safeguard research partnerships from foreign interference, espionage, intellectual property theft, and unauthorized knowledge transfer. The National Security Guidelines for Research Partnerships (the Guidelines) were published in July 2021, and were applied immediately to NSERC's Alliance grants program. Following the Guidelines, applicants seeking federal funding for research partnerships with private sector partner organizations must complete a Risk Assessment Form as an integral part of their application. This questionnaire requires applicants to consider any risks associated with the nature of their research and proposed private sector partner organizations. Applicants must also develop a tailored risk mitigation plan, commensurate with the risks identified while considering open science principles. Following the principles of the Guidelines, risk mitigation measures must never lead to discrimination against or profiling of any group or member of the research community.

The risks identified and risk mitigation plan are considered through a rigorous Risk Assessment Review Process. If the application is funded, the mitigation plan must be implemented as a condition for funding and for the duration of the project. In cases where the granting agency is advised by Public Safety Canada that the proposed project poses a high risk to national security and/or where risks cannot be appropriately mitigated, the application will not be funded, consistent with the parameters of the Guidelines. In 2023, following the pilot phase of the Guidelines in

NSERC's Alliance Program, the implementation of the Guidelines was extended to the Canada Biomedical Research Fund and Biosciences Research Infrastructure Fund (CBRF-BRIF) program, jointly administered by the Canada Foundation for Innovation (CFI) and the Tri-agency Institutional Programs Secretariat (TIPS) housed at Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC).

Capacity building for the identification and mitigation of research security risks by post-secondary institutions is also being supported by two initiatives launched following new investments in Budget 2022. This includes the development of an additional Research Security stream of the Research Support Fund, managed by TIPS on behalf of the three granting agencies. These investments are aligned with the Research Support Fund's objectives to help Canadian postsecondary institutions ensure their federally funded research projects are conducted in world-class facilities with the best equipment and administrative support available. A first call for applications launched in December 2022, through which funding is currently being allocated to 49 universities across Canada. In addition, Budget 2022 supported the launch of a Research Security Centre at Public Safety Canada, with six regional research security advisors providing advice and guidance directly to post-secondary research institutions across Canada.

Researchers that receive federal funding can also find best practices and tools to protect their research on ISED's [Safeguarding Your Research](#) portal. This portal is the Government of Canada's main public resource to raise awareness about research security; the granting agencies contribute to the content of this portal, on an ongoing basis. The Portal offers three free online courses, regional factsheets, and a CSIS threat briefing and checklist, as well as other resources to raise awareness and inform the research community, including information on best practices and guidance on how to identify and mitigate potential national security risks in research and science, and international content.

Through the [February 14th policy statement on research security](#), the Government of Canada requested that granting agencies and the Canada Foundation for Innovation adopt an enhanced research security posture, wherein grant applicants whose proposed research will advance a sensitive research area will not be funded if any researchers working on the project are affiliated with a university, research institute, or laboratory connected to military, national defence, or state security entities of foreign state actors that pose a risk to Canada's national security. Following the announcement of the implementation framework of this new policy, the federal granting agencies and the CFI will publish up-to-date guidance for the research community, including any relevant forms and procedures that will be implemented to adhere to this enhanced research security posture.

When were these controls put into effect?

On September 14, 2020, the government released a [policy statement](#) instructing all organizations to remain vigilant to potential security threats. It also launched the [Safeguarding Your Research](#) portal.

As stated earlier, the Guidelines were launched on July 12th, 2021, applying as a pilot program to NSERC's Alliance grants program where a private sector partner was involved in the grant application. The Guidelines were revised in March 2023, following the pilot phase, and they are currently being expanded to include other research partnership funding opportunities across all three federal granting agencies, including application to the CBRF – BRIF program as of March 1st, 2023.

A new policy will be released soon, following the [February 14th policy statement on research security](#). Following this release, the granting agencies and the CFI will publish up-to-date guidance for the research community, including any relevant forms and

procedures that will be implemented to adhere to this enhanced research security posture. These new measures will come into force in early 2024.

Are these controls regularly audited for efficacy?

The federal granting agencies, in collaboration with national security departments and agencies, conduct an annual random validation across funded applications where the Guidelines apply. This validation exercise ensures continued calibration of the processes conducted by the granting agencies to determine whether an application requires a national security risk assessment.

To monitor effectiveness of the Guidelines, the Government of Canada has developed a performance measurement strategy to monitor and assess the results and outcomes of the implementation of the Guidelines. The results that inform this evaluation each year include data from the granting agencies' and Public Safety Canada's internal databases and key findings from ISED's annual Research Security Survey. The goal of this performance measurement strategy is to track the following objectives, including but not limited to:

— The availability of information and tools that help to safeguard research;

— An increase in research security and risk awareness among academic institutions;

— The identification of potential research partnership risks and mitigation measures; and

— The systematic application of risk-proportionate due diligence that avoids unintended consequences.

In order to remain transparent with the research community, the findings and impact of the Guidelines year-to-year will be published in an Annual Report. This publication will include information on the results of the implementation of the Guidelines and highlights other initiatives that are underway to safeguard Canadian science, data, and research.

FUNDING

If applicable, what percentage of your institution's operating budget is dependent on funding from entities connected to the People's Republic of China?

None of SSHRC's operating budget is dependent on funding from entities connected to the People's Republic of China.

If applicable, what percentage of your institution's grants and contributions currently are supported by match funding from entities connected to the People's Republic of China?

Our data shows that 0.2% of active grants from programs administered by SSHRC, including the Tri-Agency Institutional Programs Secretariat housed at SSHRC, are supported in part by funding from organizations based in the People's Republic of China. This translates to 21 awards partially funded by organizations based in China out of 8,258 active awards.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR SUPPORT

How could the government better support your institution in limiting risk exposure on issues such as influence, intellectual property theft, and potential espionage from the entities connected to the People's Republic of China?

The federal government and stakeholders in the research enterprise have a shared responsibility to protect the integrity of the research ecosystem and safeguard it from activities that undermine the foundational principles of openness, transparency, merit, and reciprocity that underlie the research ecosystem in Canada. Accordingly, SSHRC is committed to continually improving its suite of research security measures to better safeguard Canadian research, in close coordination with NSERC, CIHR, and the CFI as well as other federal departments and agencies. SSHRC continues to work collaboratively with other federal departments and agencies to ensure clear and timely communication of the information, training of select staff, capital, and human resources required to deliver on commitments and to limit exposure.

We will also continue to support and to work with the research community, to safeguard Canada's research alongside our continued commitments to open science, to international collaboration, and to equity, diversity, and inclusion. Together, we can cultivate a strong, globally competitive research and innovation system in Canada, such that the fruits of Canadian research and development are realized by those that conduct it and for the benefit of Canadians.

ORGANIZATIONAL PROFILE

SSHRC promotes and supports postsecondary-based research and training in the social sciences and humanities. Through grants, fellowships and scholarships, SSHRC helps Canada's researchers: train the next generation of talented, creative thinkers and doers; build knowledge and understanding about people, cultures and societies; and work with partners across all sectors to drive innovations that address the challenges of today and tomorrow.

SSHRC oversees the delivery of a number of tri-agency programs, including the Canada Research Chairs, the Canada First Research Excellence Fund, and the New Frontiers in Research Fund, which supports international, interdisciplinary, fast-breaking and high-risk research.

SSHRC also hosts the Canada Research Coordinating Committee (CRCC) secretariat, and works closely with the other members of the CRCC to advance collaboration across Canada's research funding system.