

Seizing the opportunity of the Science Review: Key messages for the HSS community

The work of the [Fundamental Science Review](#) advisory panel has opened an important window of opportunity to strengthen long-term investments in Canadian research across all disciplines. The Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences, in partnership with other organizations, is calling on the federal government to implement the panel's recommendations in its 2018 budget.

What follows are key messages to help members of the humanities and social sciences (HSS) community participate in this vital discussion. We hope they will prove useful to those of you who are working to support the adoption of the Science Review panel's recommendations. We invite you to visit the Federation's [Science Review resource page](#) for more supporting material and to consult our [recent submission](#) to the consultation process for Federal Budget 2018. Please let us know about your activities by contacting the Federation's Policy Analyst, Peter Severinson at pseverinson@ideas-idees.ca.

Key messages

A well-funded research system is essential to produce the knowledge, skills and understanding needed for a prosperous, inclusive and innovative society.

- Curiosity-driven research is responsible for some of humanity's most dramatic advancements. Ultimately, research helps us achieve things we all want, including physical and mental health, rich and diverse cultures, an inclusive and democratic society, and a prosperous economy.
- It often takes many years for research to have an impact, and the nature of the impact is often difficult to predict. The benefits of research can therefore only be achieved through long-term investments in diverse areas of exploration and discovery.

The Science Review provides a blueprint to build a truly world-leading Canadian research system; we must seize this opportunity.

- The Fundamental Science Review provides a long-overdue examination of Canada's research system — the first in 40 years. The federal government response will in many ways shape Canada's future prosperity.
- The review was led by an independent panel of respected advisors and informed by an inclusive consultation process. Their report presents a set of evidence-based recommendations on how to address some of the most pressing issues facing the Canadian research system. These recommendations have support from across the higher education sector.

Research in the humanities and social sciences is needed to help Canada and the world address some of our most pressing challenges.

- HSS programs provide essential training to half of Canada’s post-secondary students, helping to develop key skills needed in an increasingly knowledge- and service-oriented economy, such as critical thinking, creativity, design thinking, and the ability to connect and collaborate across cultures and languages.
- Knowledge from HSS research into human thinking, behaviour and relationships supports crucial aspects of innovation as well as our ability to capture the benefits of new technology.¹
- Canada is facing complex challenges — such as climate change, inequality, reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, and the maintenance of an open, multicultural society — that resist straightforward technical solutions. Knowledge from HSS research is needed to address the historical, social and cultural factors that shape these challenges.
- Maintaining a cohesive society and a healthy democracy in an era of rapid technological and social change will require new HSS research. These insights are needed to ensure meaningful participation among marginalized groups and strengthen vital social foundations, such as public institutions, legal protections, inclusive communities and cultural connections.

We need major new and long-term investments in the federal granting agencies to reverse declines in Canada’s research performance and ensure better balance of support across disciplines.

- Canadian research excellence is rightly a source of national pride, but our competitiveness has eroded. Canada must up its game or fall behind.²
- The advisory panel report underscores the vital contributions of HSS research, but notes with concern that HSS researchers have been disadvantaged by recent changes in the funding system, undercutting their full potential.³
- The Federation supports the panel’s recommendations for a multi-year funding plan that includes a \$485-million increase in base funding over the next four years to support investigator-led research via the granting agencies. The government must also take steps to improve the balance within the federal research funding system with particular attention to the humanities and social sciences.

¹ For example, implementing new biomedical and artificial intelligence-based innovations will require the development of effective legal frameworks, ethical practices and cultural norms informed by new research.

² For instance, Canada has fallen from fourth place to seventh in terms of R&D spending in the higher education sector as a share of GDP among OECD nations between 2007 and 2014.

³ For example, the Science, Technology and Innovation Council’s 2007 priority areas largely exclude the humanities and social sciences, restricting funding through the Canada Excellence Research Chairs and the Canada First Research Excellence Fund funding programs.

The research funding system needs improved support for multidisciplinary and international research.

- Canada is increasingly dealing with highly complex challenges — such as climate change, cybersecurity and immigration — that require insights from multidisciplinary and often international perspectives. The Science Review panel found significant gaps in Canada’s research system that limit opportunities for these kinds of collaborations.
- The Federation supports the panel’s recommendation to improve support for multidisciplinary and international research and recommends dedicated funding be allocated to support programs in these areas.

More support is needed to advance reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in the post-secondary education sector.

- The Truth and Reconciliation Commission highlighted the important role the post-secondary sector must play to support reconciliation. The Science Review panel adds that “the lead here will be taken overwhelmingly by Indigenous scholars and colleagues in the social sciences and humanities.”⁴
- Important efforts are already underway across the country, but more resources are needed to ensure that Indigenous communities are fully able to contribute to and benefit from higher education and research.
- The Federation recommends significant funding increases to programs that support access to post-secondary education for Indigenous students, including at the K-12 level; new financial support for Indigenous students at the graduate and post-graduate levels to help develop new Indigenous scholars; and dedicated funding to support programs within the granting councils to ensure long-term success of research by and with Indigenous peoples.

⁴ *Investing in Canada’s Future: Strengthening the Foundations of Canadian Research*, (2017), page 20.