

**EVALUATION OF THE MULTISECTOR TEAM GRANTS IN
PREVENTION RESEARCH PROGRAM**

FINDINGS REPORT

**Rudy Valentim
Senior Advisor, Research Monitoring and Evaluation
Canadian Cancer Society Research Institute**

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For additional information about this report, please contact Rudy Valentim rudy.valentim@cancer.ca

INTRODUCTION

The Multisector Team Grants in Prevention Research is a new program offered by the Canadian Cancer Society Research Institute (CCSRI) with the purpose of funding research and building capacity in the area of cancer prevention and risk reduction. It incorporates a unique element requiring groups of investigators to work collaboratively with the Canadian Cancer Society (CCS) on addressing key cancer prevention and/or risk reduction priorities to influence Canadian Cancer Society programs, activities, and/or public policy work. CCSRI decided to launch an in-depth evaluation of the Multisector Team Grants in Prevention Research program following its inaugural competition because it is a new program unlike any other offered by CCSRI. This report provides an outline of the intent and methodological design of the evaluation, a summary of results and a discussion of the findings.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The Multisector Team Grants in Prevention Research program was launched in July 2011. The purpose of the program is to fund research in cancer prevention and risk reduction and stimulate group interaction based on the premise that high impact work requires complementary skills and can be best carried out through a group effort. A central focus of the funding program is the requirement that investigators work collaboratively with the CCS and clearly describe how the proposed research will address key cancer prevention and/or risk reduction priorities to influence CCS programs, activities, and/or public policy work. Applications are invited for epidemiological, laboratory-based, social science, policy, health promotion and health services research aimed at addressing important questions related to cancer prevention and risk reduction that will have a clear impact on reducing the incidence of cancer for Canadians.

Applications must be submitted by a minimum of two investigators, designated as Principal Investigators, who are required to have formal affiliations with eligible host institutions. One of the two investigators must be designated as the Program Coordinator who will provide leadership and oversee all aspects of the integrated team grant including the administration of the funds provided. Each application must also include a partner from the CCS who will be integrally involved in formulating the research agenda, providing input into the development of the research, disseminating findings, and applying the outcomes of the research. The grant budget may be up to \$250,000 per year for a maximum of \$1,000,000 over a four year period. The program includes a two stage application and review process including a Letter of Intent (LOI) followed by a full application. Only applicants that submit successful LOIs are invited to submit full applications. Applications are only accepted through CCSRI's online grants management system (EGrAMS). A multidisciplinary peer review committee assesses the applications consisting of scientific experts, along with community representatives to provide patient/survivor/caregiver perspectives and appropriate CCS End Users to evaluate potential partnerships between researchers and CCS.

In the program's inaugural competition, CCSRI received 11 full applications. Of those, 3 were funded beginning in November 2012 representing a total investment of almost \$3M. A multidisciplinary peer

review committee was established to adjudicate the full applications. The committee was comprised of 16 scientific experts, 3 CCS End Users, and 1 Community Representative¹. A specific online application configuration was developed in EGrAMS for this competition requiring that each Team Grant Coordinator create and submit multiple applications as part of their Multisector Team Grant in Prevention Research application. The entire application was comprised of an Overview, Individual Project(s) and Core Support. As each of the separate applications had different requirements in EGrAMS, specific guides and tip sheets were made available to applicants to assist them in the application process.

PURPOSE OF THE EVALUATION

The objective of this evaluation was to assess the design and implementation of the program. Evaluation findings are intended to inform decisions related to future program design.

The following questions guided the evaluation:

- What is the perceived value of the program?
- Is the purpose of the program clear and appropriate?
- Are there any significant program implementation barriers?
- Is the application process clear and appropriate?
- Was the Letter of Intent stage used effectively?
- Was the review process appropriate?

Each of these questions and corresponding data sources were used to guide data collection and analysis.

METHODOLOGY AND DATA SOURCES

The entire evaluation was conducted over an eight month period from October 2012 to May 2013. The evaluation included multiple lines of evidence including: a document review, online surveys and key informant interviews. The lines of evidence were synthesized for this evaluation report as represented Figure 1.

Document Review

Program background documentation was reviewed to provide context for developing the evaluation plan. Documents reviewed included the program description, program information slides, program Q&A document, reviewer report instructions and EGrAMS Q&A.

Online Survey

An online survey was administered to applicants (i.e. Team Coordinators and project Principal Investigators who submitted a full application) following the application deadline in October 2012.

¹ The Community Representative was out of the scope of this evaluation.

Reviewers (i.e. scientific experts and CCS End Users) were administered online surveys following the completion of the panel review in November 2012. The aim of the surveys was to measure perceived program value and the effectiveness of the application and review process. The surveys were developed by CCSRI and a standardized distribution and reminder schedule was created to ensure the highest response rates possible. A structured survey analysis protocol was employed. Data were cleaned and a summary of survey results were generated using Microsoft Excel and QuestionPro survey software. Subsequent CCSRI team meetings were held to review the summarized results and determine how data should be further organized / synthesized to help address the evaluation questions and improve the program design.

Key Informant Interviews

Key informant interviews were conducted throughout March and April 2013 with a variety of program stakeholders including successful and unsuccessful applicants, successful and unsuccessful CCS partners and reviewers (i.e. scientific experts and CCS End Users). The purpose of the interviews was to gather in-depth feedback regarding the design and implementation of the program. Each key informant interview took approximately 45 minutes and was conducted by telephone. They followed a structured interview guide with open-ended questions (see Appendix A for the list of interview questions).

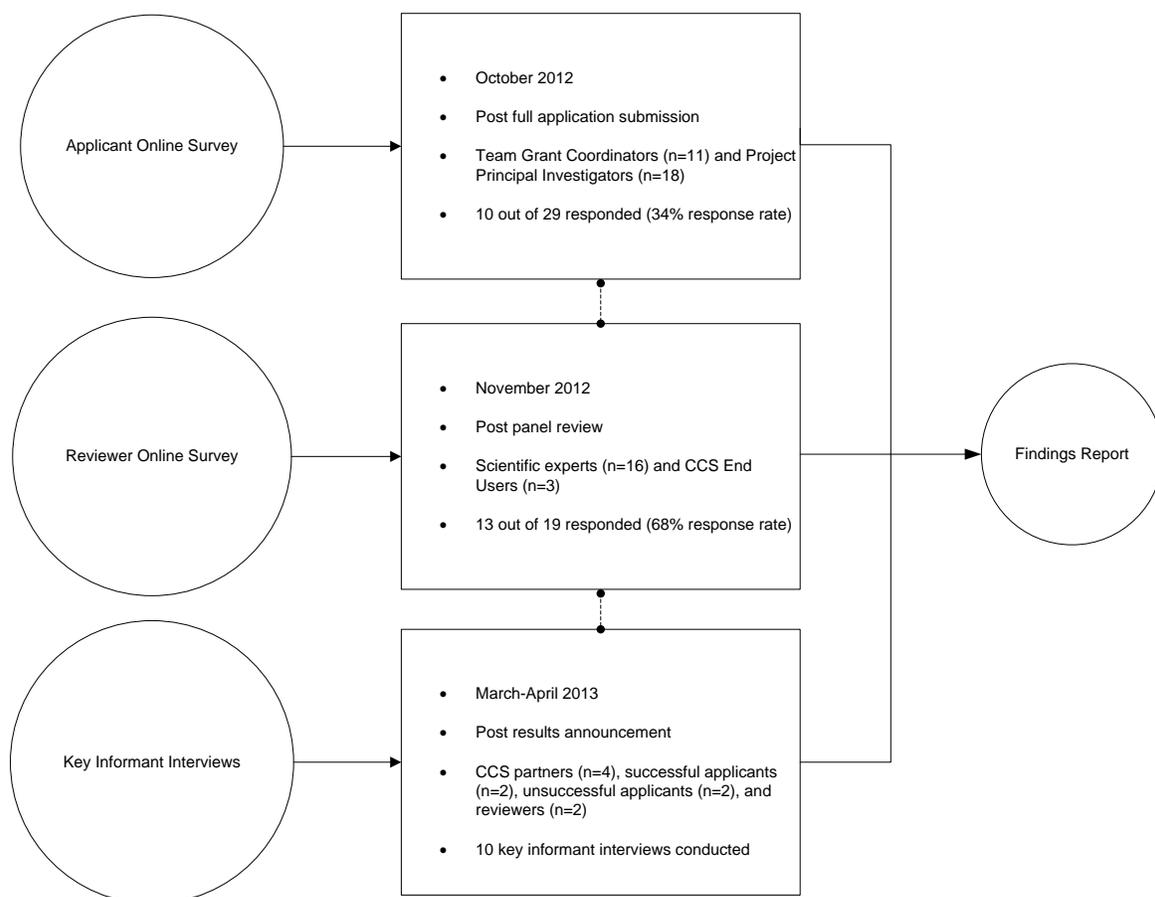


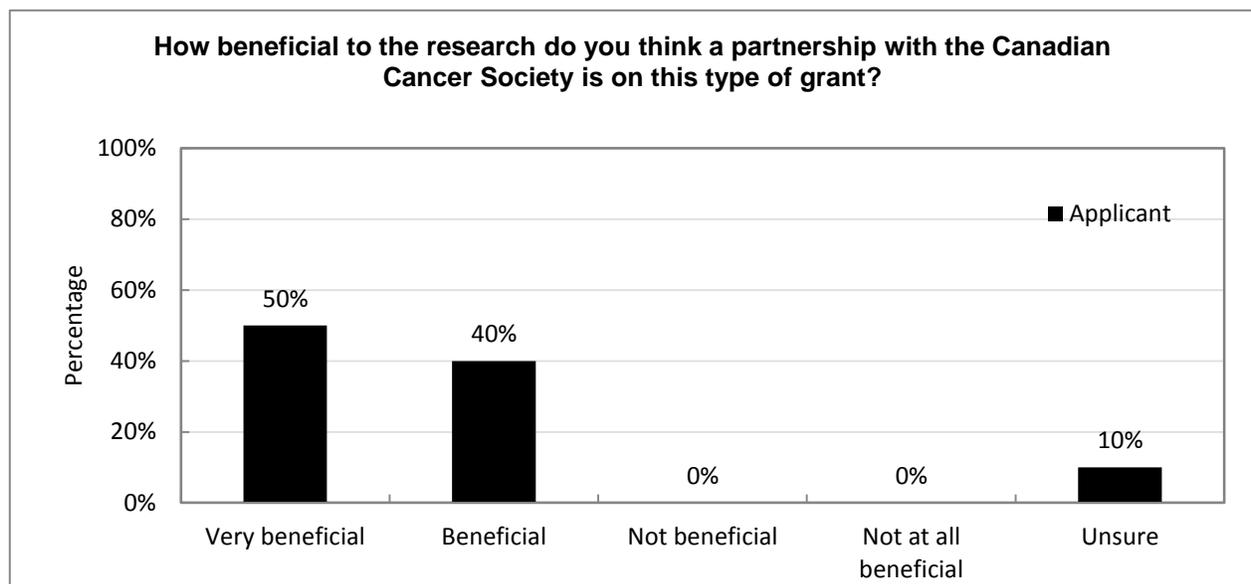
Figure 1. A visual representation of the methodology and data sources that informed the evaluation. The figure should be read from left to right.

EVALUATION FINDINGS

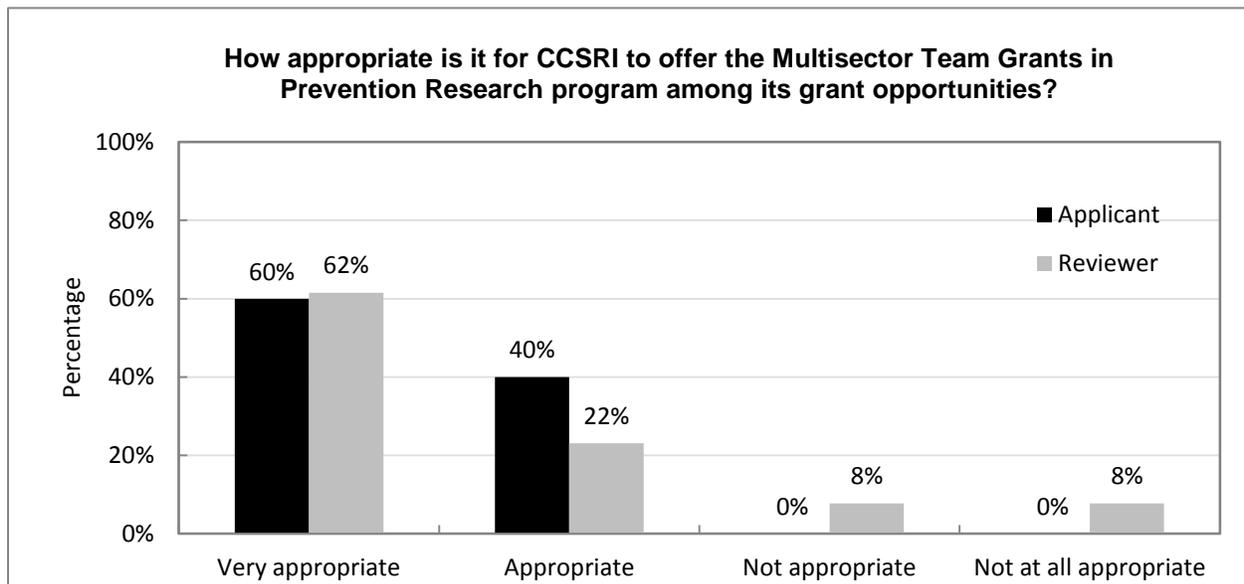
The applicant survey produced a 34% response rate with 10 out of 29 possible respondents (i.e. 11 Team Coordinators and 18 project Principal Investigators) completing the survey. The reviewer survey produced a 68% response rate with 13 out of 19 possible respondents (i.e. 16 scientific experts and 3 CCS End Users) completing the survey. The descriptors *few*, *some*, *many*, *most*, and *all* have been used to present statistical results (i.e. few = less than 25%, some = 26%-50%, many = 51%-75%, most = 76%-99%, all = 100%). Interviews were conducted with 10 key informants including CCS partners (n=4), successful applicants (n=2), unsuccessful applicants (n=2), and reviewers (n=2).

Program Value

- Most applicant survey respondents felt a partnership with CCS would be beneficial to their research. Some applicants interviewed also suggested that partnering with CCS could have a positive effect on their research.



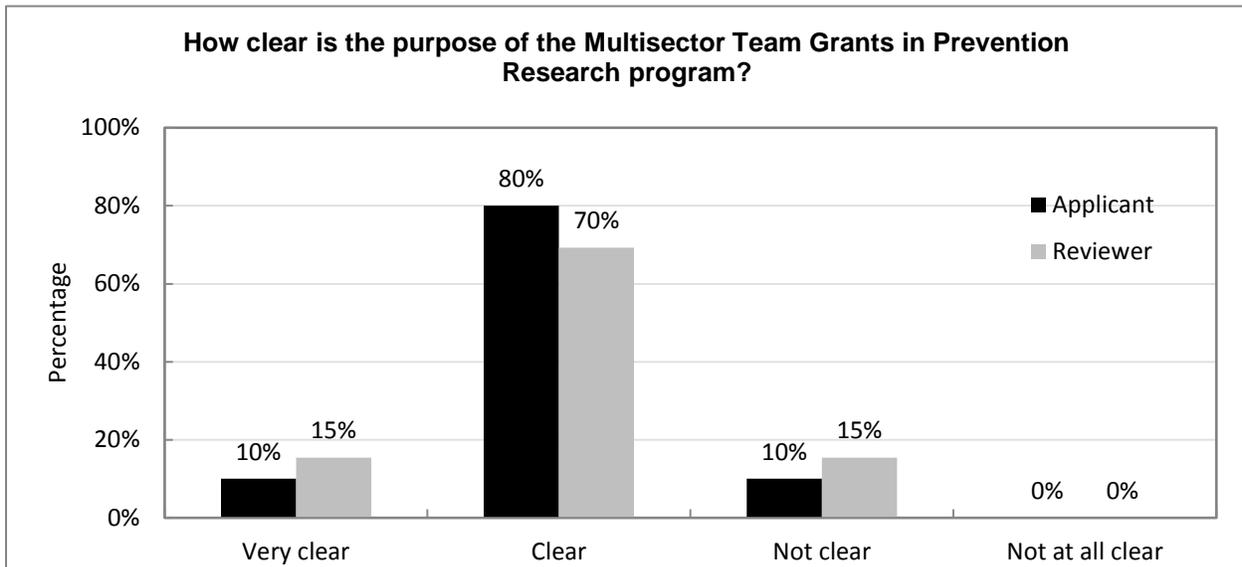
- CCS partners interviewed stated that the program will be beneficial to their work and that they value the increased linkages between CCS funded research and policy/practice. Research that addresses CCS priorities will help provide evidence and support for their program and/or policy related activities. They also appreciated that the program will help them make connections with the research community and will help them better understand the research process.
- All applicant and most reviewer survey respondents felt that it was appropriate for CCSRI to offer the Multisector Team Grants in Prevention Research program among its funding opportunities. Applicants, reviewers, and CCS partners interviewed also stated that it was appropriate for CCS to use the research it funds to inform its practice and/or policy activities.



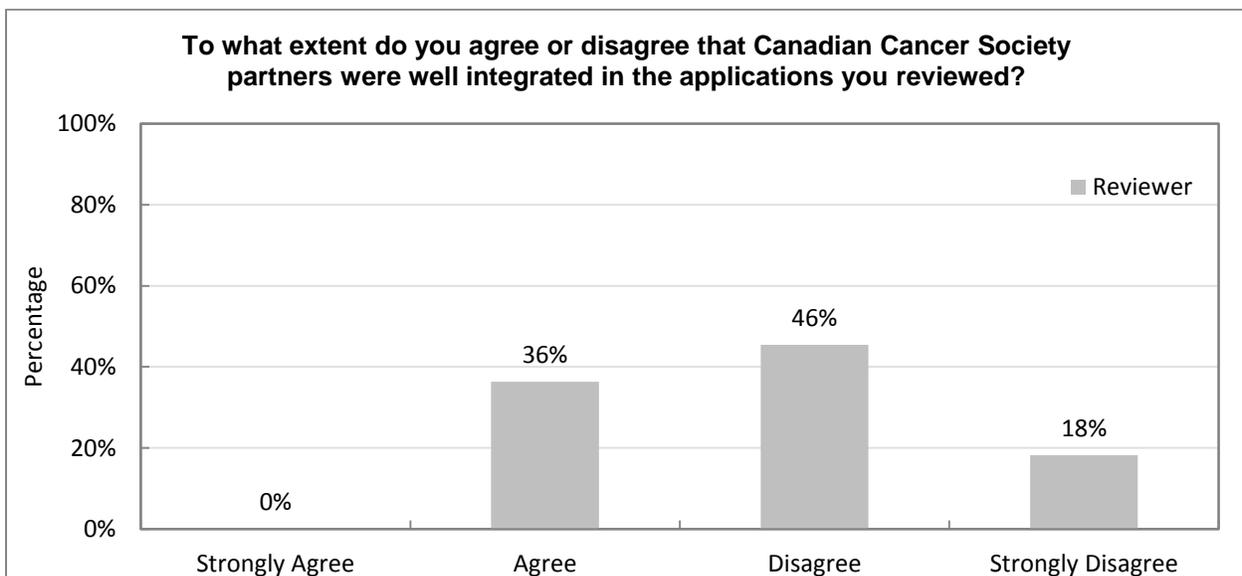
- All applicant and most reviewer survey respondents felt that this program represents a unique funding opportunity for Canadian researchers. In addition, applicants interviewed appreciated that the program encourages team science and multidisciplinary approaches. They also felt that the program represents an effective approach to knowledge translation and provides a good opportunity to build capacity in the area of cancer prevention and risk reduction research.
- Most applicant and reviewer survey respondents felt the program funding level and funding term was appropriate. Applicants and reviewers interviewed also expressed that the funding level and term was appropriate, but one did suggest that CCSRI consider removing the per year funding maximum to allow greater flexibility regarding how the funding is spent over the four year term.

Program Purpose

- Most applicant and reviewer survey respondents felt the purpose of the program was clear. However, applicants and CCS partners interviewed expressed some level of uncertainty about the intended role of CCS partners. Some applicants interviewed stated they were unsure about how CCS partners could collaborate on their specific project, others were unsure if they could collaborate with more than one CCS partner, while others felt that they were competing with other applicants for partnerships with CCS. CCS partners interviewed also expressed some confusion about their role and how to effectively partner with researchers. This was especially challenging for CCS partners from Divisions who had limited experience working with researchers and had no pre-existing relationships with members of the research community.



- Most reviewer survey respondents felt the applications they reviewed were appropriate for the program. However, many reviewer survey respondents felt that CCS partners were not well integrated in the applications they reviewed. This was reinforced by reviewers interviewed as they also felt that some of the applicants did not fully understand the intended role of the CCS partner.



- Most applicant survey respondents felt it was easy to establish a partnership with CCS. However, when specifically asked, applicants, reviewers and CCS partners interviewed suggested that CCSRI could help facilitate partnerships between investigators and potential CCS partners going forward. More specifically, they suggested that it would have been helpful for



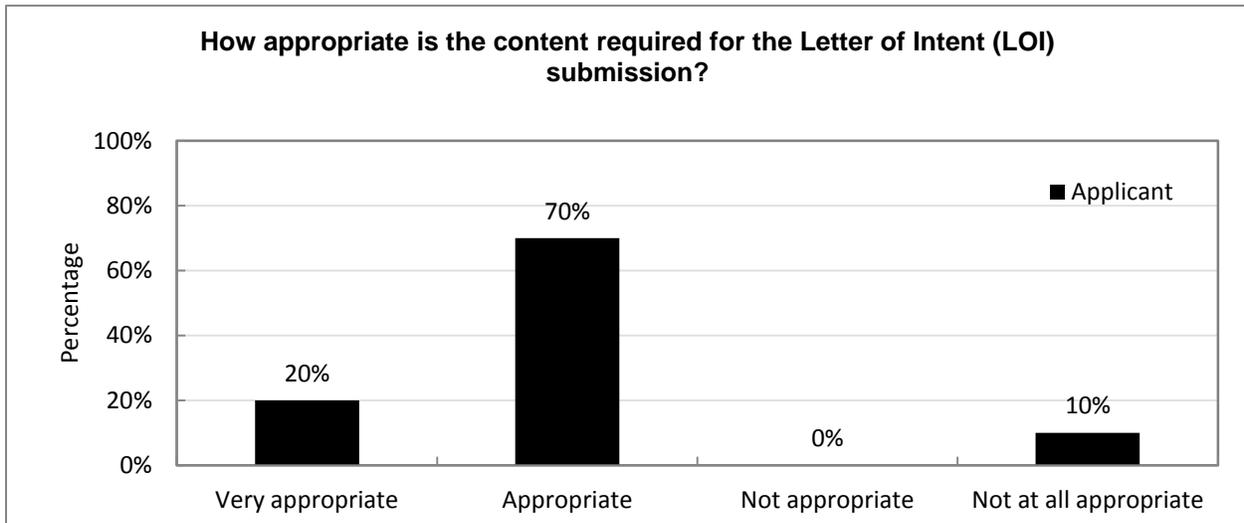
CCS mission staff to identify specific research priorities and key contact people at each Division, which CCSRI could facilitate. This information could then be made available to investigators through the CCSRI website and other relevant communication vehicles well in advance of the application deadline date.

Implementation Barriers

- CCS partners interviewed stressed that they liked the intent of the program and would like to see it offered in the future. However, they did acknowledge that there are some capacity issues at the Division level that could pose as barriers to effective program implementation. These issues could become even more apparent as they partner on more research projects in the future. Establishing partnerships with researchers requires time and resources, which Divisions need to plan for. It is especially difficult when initiating partnerships as Divisions must undertake this work with no funding support. Once a grant is funded Divisions can hire staff to manage the partnership, but before that time they have to invest in establishing relationships with no guarantee that the grant(s) they partner on will get funded. As such, there is an element of risk for Divisions with this program. While researchers appreciate this inherent challenge associated with research grant funding, it is something new and different for CCS staff. Capacity issues are especially challenging for smaller Divisions, which raises questions about the ability of all regions to participate. It was suggested that smaller Divisions could partner with larger Divisions on a research project(s) focussing on priority areas of relevance to both Divisions to help address this concern. While there was an opportunity for different CCS Divisions to partner on projects in the first round of the program, it was not explicit in the program description.
- When specifically asked, applicants, reviewers, and CCS partners presented opposing views about expanding the program to include partnerships with other organizations beyond CCS. Those in favour of expanding the program mentioned that it could help mitigate any capacity issues associated with CCS partners and help researchers more easily establish partnerships since they would no longer be relying solely on CCS. Those against expanding the program felt that including other partners could make the program more complicated and shift the focus away from CCS priorities. Some also felt that more time was needed to allow some good models to emerge within CCS on how to effectively integrate research, policy and practice before expanding the program to include other partners.

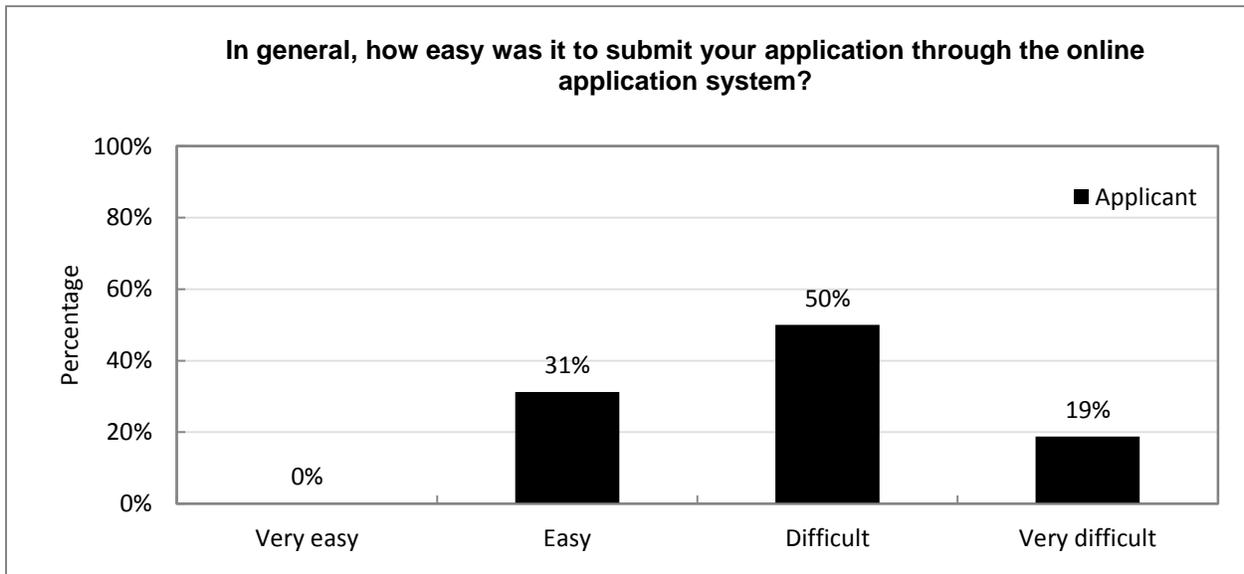
Letter of Intent

- Most applicant survey respondents felt the content required for the LOI stage was appropriate. However, reviewers and applicants interviewed did not feel that an established partnership should be required at the LOI stage. It was suggested that the LOI stage be the point where ideas for projects are submitted and assessed based on relevance and applicability to the program goals. The partnership could then be established by the time of full application submission.



Full Application Process

- Applicants interviewed found the full application process challenging stating that it was too long and repetitive. Likewise, many applicant survey respondents found it difficult to submit their online application.



- Applicants interviewed appreciated the team aspect and suggested that it continue to be a requirement. However, they thought the component² piece of the application was overly cumbersome and unnecessary as each component felt like a separate grant submission. They

² It was a requirement that each application include a minimum of two components or projects contributing to a central research focus or objective

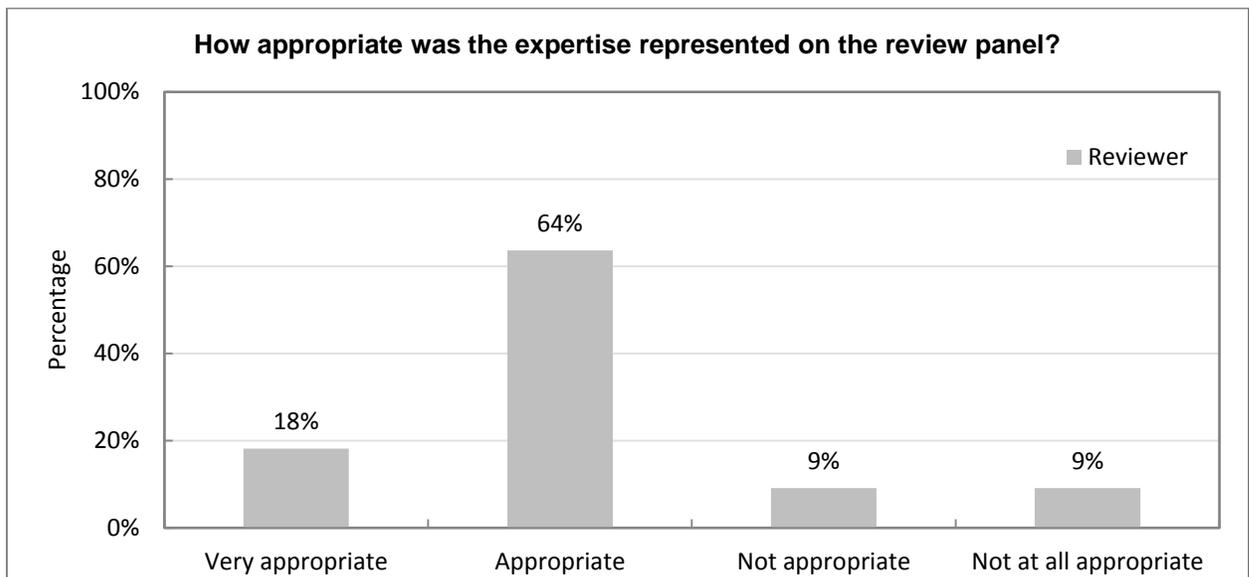


suggested that the application process be designed like a regular research grant as opposed to a program project grant.

- When specifically asked, reviewers, applicants and CCS partners thought that including a partner letter as part of the application process would be beneficial as it would help clarify and concretize partnerships. They did warn against creating further paperwork and suggested that the partner letter not overlap with content required in other areas of the application.

Review Process

- Most reviewer survey respondents thought the expertise represented on the review panel was appropriate. Reviewers interviewed also suggested that the review panel structure was appropriate with a good balance of scientific experts, community representatives, and CCS End Users.



- Reviewers interviewed suggested that there be distinct review criteria for the CCS partnership aspect. This would allow reviewers to not only review and score the scientific merit of applications, but also focus on how well CCS partners are integrated in the proposals.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, the evaluation findings suggest that program stakeholders are supportive of the program concept and find the initiative valuable. There are, however, some challenges related to how the program was implemented in the first round that should be addressed if the program is to be offered again.

Key conclusions and recommendations are as follows:

Program stakeholders found the program to be valuable and its purpose appropriate. They particularly liked the focus on integrating research, policy and practice and felt that the program represented a unique funding opportunity for Canadian researchers. More specifically, applicants felt that partnering with CCS could benefit their research and CCS partners felt that funding research that directly addresses CCS priorities could benefit their policy and/or practice activities.

There was uncertainty about the intended role of CCS partners amongst program stakeholders. Stakeholders seemed to understand the overall intent of the program, but both applicants and CCS partners expressed difficulties fully understanding and implementing a CCS partnership. To mitigate confusion around the role of CCS partners it is recommended that CCSRI provide concrete examples of how CCS partners can be integrated into research projects, engage potential CCS partners early in the process to ensure they clearly understand their potential role(s) and can plan accordingly, and request a partner letter as part of the application process which clearly outlines and describes roles. In addition, to help facilitate partnerships between researchers and potential CCS partners going forward, a list of specific CCS priorities and key contact staff should be made available.

Capacity challenges at the CCS Division level were acknowledged as possible barriers to effective program implementation. Some Divisions have little experience working with researchers and lack sufficient resources to actively solicit and nurture relationships with the research community. Offering the program on a biennial basis could help alleviate some of the capacity issues as it affords Divisions more time to plan, define research priorities, and proactively reach out to the research community. CCSRI considered expanding the program to include other organizations in order to help mitigate CCS Division capacity issues and help provide more options for researchers to establish partnerships, particularly for prevention topics where CCS is not the primary End User. However, it was suggested that the program partnership scope should not be expanded until effective partnerships that integrate research, policy and practice are established with CCS and the research community.

The content required at the LOI stage was appropriate, but the requirement of having an established partnership at the LOI stage could be removed. Program stakeholders did not feel that an established partnership at the LOI stage was necessary. The LOI stage could be modified to be the point where project ideas are submitted and relevancy reviews conducted. Project ideas could then be shared (with permission by the applicants) with potential CCS partners or even housed on a virtual forum, accessible

by researchers and potential CCS partners, to help facilitate partnerships for the full application. This would not preclude investigators from already having partnerships in place at the LOI stage.

The online application process was difficult and overly cumbersome. Program stakeholders highlighted many challenges associated with the online application process. As a result, CCSRI should consider streamlining the application process by removing the multiple component pieces and employ an application process similar to that of an expanded regular research grant.

The review process worked well and there was a sufficient balance between scientific experts, Community Representatives and CCS End Users on the review panel. Program stakeholders were satisfied with the expertise represented on the review panel. However, going forward, CCSRI should consider having specific review criteria for the program partnership aspect (i.e. how well CCS partners are integrated in the proposals).

In summary, to address program implementation challenges presented, CCSRI should consider the following programmatic changes:

- Offer the program on a biennial basis
- Engage potential CCS partners early in the process to ensure they clearly know their potential role(s) and can plan accordingly
- Provide list of specific CCS priorities and key contact staff
- Provide concrete examples of how CCS partners can be integrated into research projects
- Modify the LOI stage by removing the requirement of an established partnership and treat it as the stage in which project ideas are submitted and relevancy reviews conducted
- Streamline the online application process by removing the multiple component pieces and employ an application process similar to that of an expanded regular research grant
- Request a partner letter, which clearly outlines and describes roles, as part of the application process
- Develop specific review criteria for the program partnership aspect (i.e. how well CCS partners are integrated in the proposals)

APPENDIX A: KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

KEY INFORMANTS INTERVIEW GUIDE

Thank you for your participation in this interview for the evaluation of the Multisector team grants in prevention research.

As part of the evaluation we are conducting interviews with stakeholders to discuss the design and implementation of the program. It is expected that this interview will take approximately 45 minutes of your time, depending on your responses.

RESEARCHERS

Program Design

1. What are the program's major strengths? What are its major weaknesses or challenges?
2. Is this type of program filling a gap? Does it represent a unique opportunity for Canadian researchers?
3. Do you think it's appropriate for CCS to use the research it funds to inform its policy and practice activities and vice versa?
4. Should the scope of the program be expanded to include partnerships with other organizations beyond the CCS?
5. Does this program represent a unique approach to knowledge translation? Does it represent an effective approach?
6. Does this program provide a good opportunity to build capacity in the area of prevention and risk reduction research?
7. Do you see value in the team component? Should it be a requirement?
8. Is the funding level appropriate? Is the funding term appropriate?

Partnership

9. Was the intended role of the CCS partner clear in the program description?
10. Should the establishment of a partnership be required at the LOI stage?
11. Please describe how the CCS partnership originated and evolved? Any challenges?
12. Please describe how involved the CCS partner(s) were in planning/designing the project?
13. How are the CCS partner(s) currently involved in the project? Is the partnership working as intended? (only applicable to successful applicants)
14. Going forward, CCSRI is thinking of asking for a partner letter as part of the application process, is this a good way to ensure partners are actively engaged and know their roles?
15. Is there anything CCS or CCSRI can do to facilitate these partnerships?

Additional Information

16. Do you have any thoughts on the LOI and full application process? Were there any challenges?

17. Do you have any additional comments?

PANEL CHAIR

Program Design

1. What are the program's major strengths? What are its major weaknesses or challenges?
2. Is this type of program filling a gap? Does it represent a unique opportunity for Canadian researchers?
3. Do you think it's appropriate for CCS to use the research it funds to inform its policy and practice activities and vice versa?
4. Should the scope of the program be expanded to include partnerships with other organizations beyond the CCS?
5. Does this program represent a unique approach to knowledge translation? Does it represent an effective approach?
6. Does this program provide a good opportunity to build capacity in the area of prevention and risk reduction research?
7. Do you see value in the team component? Should it be a requirement?
8. Is the funding level appropriate? Is the funding term appropriate?

Partnership

9. Was the intended role of the CCS partner clear in the program description?
10. Should the establishment of a partnership be required at the LOI stage?
11. Should seed funding be provided for developing the CCS partnership after the LOI stage?
12. Going forward, CCSRI is thinking of asking for a partner letter as part of the application process, is this a good way to ensure partners are actively engaged and know their roles?
13. Is there anything CCS or CCSRI can do to facilitate these partnerships?

Review Criteria/Panel

14. Was there a sufficient balance between scientists, practice/policy people and KT experts on the review panel?
15. In general, what criteria do you feel review panelists focussed on most when adjudicating grants – the science, the KT elements, the strength of the partnership or were they all taken into consideration?
16. Would it be beneficial to have specific review criteria regarding the CCS partnership?
17. How useful a role did the End Users play on the review panel?

Additional Information

18. Do you have any additional comments?

CCS PARTNERS

Program Design

1. What are the program's major strengths? What are its major weaknesses or challenges?
2. Do you think it's appropriate for CCS to use the research it funds to inform its policy and practice activities and vice versa?
3. Should the scope of the program be expanded to include partnerships with other organizations (that is, beyond the CCS)?
4. What value will this type of program have on your work at CCS? Will it facilitate the work your Division engages in?

Partnership

5. Was the intended role of the CCS partner clear in the program description?
6. Please describe how the partnership originated and evolved? Any challenges?
7. Please describe how involved you were in the planning/design process of the project? Did the level of involvement meet your expectations? Did you want to be more or less involved than you were?
8. How is your Division currently involved in the project? Is the partnership working as intended? (only applicable to grant recipients)
9. In general, is there sufficient capacity at the Division level to engage in this kind of work going forward?
10. Going forward, CCSRI is thinking of asking for a partner letter as part of the application process, is this a good way to ensure partners are actively engaged and know their roles?
11. Is there anything that CCS or CCSRI can do to facilitate these partnerships?

Additional Information

12. Do you have any additional comments?

CCS END USER

Program Design

1. What are the program's major strengths? What are its major weaknesses or challenges?
2. Do you think it's appropriate for CCS to use the research it funds to inform its policy and practice activities and vice versa?
3. Should the scope of the program be expanded to include partnerships with other organizations (that is, beyond the CCS)?
4. What value will this type of program have on your work at CCS? Will it facilitate the work your Division engages in?

Partnership

5. Was the intended role of the CCS partner clear in the program description?



6. In general, is there sufficient capacity at the Division level to engage in this kind of work going forward?
7. Going forward, CCSRI is thinking of asking for a partner letter as part of the application process, is this a good way to ensure partners are actively engaged and know their roles?
8. Is there anything that CCS or CCSRI can do to facilitate these partnerships?

Review Panel

9. Do you feel that your input was taken into consideration by the panel? Do you feel your comments made a difference?
10. Was there a sufficient balance between scientists, practice/policy people and KT experts on the review panel?

Additional Information

11. Do you have any additional comments?