

SSHRC Insight Development Grants: a view from the committee room

Pam McKenzie

5 January 2012

The University of Western Ontario



SSHRC IDG: view from the committee room

Objectives of the Insight program

- build knowledge and understanding from **disciplinary, interdisciplinary and/or cross-sector perspectives** through support for the best researchers;
- support **new approaches** to research on **complex and important topics**, including those that **transcend the capacity of any one scholar, institution or discipline**;
- provide a **high-quality research training** experience for students;
- fund research expertise that relates to **societal challenges and opportunities**; and
- mobilize research knowledge, to and from **academic and non-academic audiences**, with the potential to lead to intellectual, cultural, social and economic influence, benefit and impact.
- http://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/funding-financement/programmes-programmes/insight_development_grants-subsventions_de_developpement_savoir-eng.aspx

Objectives of the IDG

- Insight Development Grants support research **in its initial stages**. The grants enable the development of **new research questions**, as well as experimentation with **new methods, theoretical approaches and/or ideas....**
- Insight Development Grants foster **research in its early stages**, but are not intended to support large-scale initiatives... Proposed projects may involve, but are not limited to, the following types of research activities:
 - case studies;
 - **pilot initiatives**; and
 - **critical analyses of existing research.**
- Projects may also involve national and international research collaboration, and the **exploration of new ways of producing, structuring and mobilizing knowledge within and across disciplines and sectors**
- http://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/funding-financement/programs-programmes/insight_development_grants-subventions_de_developpement_savoir-eng.aspx

Priority areas

- Aboriginal Research
- Canadian Environmental Issues
- Digital Media (2011)/ Digital Economy (2012)
- Innovation, Leadership and Prosperity
- Northern Communities: Towards Social and Economic Prosperity

Research groups

- **Group 1:** History; medieval studies; classics; literature; fine arts; philosophy; religious studies; and related fields.
- **Group 2:** Anthropology; archaeology; linguistics; translation; political science; public administration; law; criminology; geography; urban planning and environmental studies; and related fields.
- **Group 3:** Business and management; economics; and related fields.
- **Group 4:** Sociology; demography; communication studies; journalism; media studies; gender studies; cultural studies; library and information science; and related fields.
- **Group 5:** Education, psychology; social work; career guidance; and related fields.

Committee structure 2011

- Aboriginal Research
- History; medieval studies; classics; literature; fine arts; philosophy; religious studies; and related fields 1 & 2
- Political science; public administration; law; criminology
- Anthropology; archaeology; linguistics; translation; geography; urban planning and environmental studies; and related fields
- Business and management; economics; and related fields
- Sociology; demography; communication studies; journalism; media studies; gender studies; cultural studies; library and information science; and related fields
- Education, psychology; social work; career guidance; and related fields 1 & 2

Review process: February-April

- Each file is assigned to 3 members of the committee (Readers A,B,C) or to Readers A and B and interdisciplinary reader M
- There is no external expert reviewer
- Benchmark teleconference to go over process, criteria with 2 files, calibrate independent evaluations
- Each reader evaluates files independently, submits evaluation and comments to program officer
- Program officer sends spreadsheet with grades/spreads to committee members

Committee review process

- Reader A reports, Readers B and C comment
- Discussion among readers until consensus reached
- Readers always referred back to the criteria
- Very little time for each file, same as SRG but needed more
- Top and bottom received little discussion unless there were discrepancies
- Budgets scrutinized for all exceeding minimum fundable score in all criteria

Evaluation criteria

- What: Three criteria
 - Challenge—The aim and importance of the endeavour (50%)
 - Feasibility—The plan to achieve excellence (20%)
 - Capability—The expertise to succeed (30%)
- How: Scores (out of 6): 5-6 excellent, 4-5.9 very good, 3-3.9 good, under 3 not recommended for funding.
- Pam's take-away: If there's a bullet point on the SSHRC web page, chances are there will be a corresponding tick-box on the committee's evaluation forms

Challenge: 2011 Evaluation form

Sub-criteria (No specific weighting assigned to each sub-criterion)	N/A	Modest	Good	Very Good	Excellent
Originality, significance and expected contribution to knowledge					
Appropriateness of the theoretical approach or framework					
Appropriateness of the methodologies or approaches					
Quality of training and mentoring to be provided to students, emerging scholars and other highly qualified personnel, where appropriate					
Likelihood of influence and impact within and/or beyond the social sciences and humanities research community					
Briefly explain the rationale for your response:					

Challenge (50%)

2012 SSHRC website	2011 evaluation form
Originality, significance and expected contribution to knowledge	Originality, significance and expected contribution to knowledge
Appropriateness of the literature review	
Appropriateness of the theoretical approach or framework	Appropriateness of the theoretical approach or framework
Appropriateness of the methods/approach	Appropriateness of the methodologies or approaches
Quality of training and mentoring to be provided to students, emerging scholars and other highly qualified personnel, and opportunities for them to contribute	Quality of training and mentoring to be provided to students, emerging scholars and other highly qualified personnel, where appropriate
Potential influence and impact within and/or beyond the social sciences and humanities research community	Likelihood of influence and impact within and/or beyond the social sciences and humanities research community

Scoring “Challenge”

Excellent (5-6)	Highly original , at the forefront of the field. Theoretical/conceptual approach or framework is focused, fully explained, well developed. Literature review is reasonably complete, up-to-date, and linked to the proposed research. Methodology is well described and will lead to meaningful results. Training and likelihood of influence/impact within/beyond research community are excellent
Very good (4-4.9)	Original , meets quality standards, will contribute to the development of the field. One or more of the following elements should have been better developed : literature review, theoretical/conceptual framework, methodology. Training and likelihood of influence/impact are very good .
Good (3-3.9)	A good research proposal, but lacks at least one compelling element. Committee has concerns regarding one or more of : originality/novelty, literature review, theoretical/conceptual framework, methodology. Training, likelihood of influence/impact are good .
Not recommended for funding: Below 3	Low probability of significant contribution to the field. Serious shortcomings in one or more of : originality/novelty, literature review, theoretical/conceptual framework, methodology. Training, likelihood of influence/impact are modest .

“Originality” for new and regular scholars

- **New scholars:** This funding supports high-quality research projects by new scholars to develop new research questions and/or approaches. **Such projects may build on and further the applicant’s (or team’s) graduate work and/or represent a continuation of their overall research trajectory.**
- **Regular scholars:** Funding for regular scholars provides support to **explore new research questions and/or approaches that are distinct from the applicant’s previous/ongoing research**. Research projects should be clearly delimited and in the early stages of the research process. Insight Development Grant funding is **not intended to support ongoing research** for regular scholars.
- http://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/funding-financement/programs-programmes/insight_development_grants-subventions_de_developpement_savoir-eng.aspx

Feasibility: evaluation form

Sub-criteria (No specific weighting assigned to each sub-criterion)	N/A	Modest	Good	Very Good	Excellent
Probability of meeting the objectives of the Insight program, the Insight Development Grants funding opportunity and, where appropriate, expected outcomes of a priority area					
Strategies and timelines for the design and conduct of the research and/or related activities					
Appropriateness of the requested budget, justification of proposed costs, and indications of other planned resources (time, human and financial)					
Quality of the knowledge mobilization plans, including for effective dissemination, exchange, and engagement within and/or, where appropriate, beyond, the research community					
Briefly explain the rationale for your responses:					

Feasibility (20%)

2012 SSHRC website	2011 evaluation form
Probability of effective and timely attainment of the research objectives	Probability of meeting the objectives of the Insight program, the Insight Development Grants funding opportunity and, where appropriate, expected outcomes of a priority area
Strategies and timelines for the design and conduct of the activity/activities proposed	Strategies and timelines for the design and conduct of the research and/or related activities
Appropriateness of the requested budget, and justification of proposed costs Indications of financial and in-kind contributions from other sources, where appropriate	Appropriateness of the requested budget, justification of proposed costs, and indications of other planned resources (time, human and financial)
Quality of knowledge mobilization plans, including for effective knowledge dissemination, knowledge exchange and engagement within and/or beyond the research community	Quality of the knowledge mobilization plans, including for effective dissemination, exchange, and engagement within and/or, where appropriate, beyond, the research community

Scoring “Feasibility”

Excellent (5-6)	Objectives are explicit and clearly defined and there is a very high probability of meeting them. The strategies/timelines for the proposed research are coherent, realistic, appropriate . All budget components are well justified , and the budget’s overall link to the proposed research is evident . The knowledge mobilization/dissemination plan is effective and very likely to achieve success .
Very good (4-4.9)	Objectives are defined and it is likely that they will be met . One or more of the following elements should have been better developed : strategies/timelines for the proposed research, justification of the budget, knowledge mobilization/dissemination plans.
Good (3-3.9)	Objectives are identified but the committee has doubts that they will be met . Concerns regarding one or more of : strategies/timelines for the proposed research, justification of the budget, knowledge mobilization/dissemination plans.
Not recommended for funding: Below 3	Objectives are ill-defined and there is low probability of achieving success . Serious shortcomings in one or more of : strategies/timelines for the proposed research, justification of the budget, knowledge mobilization/dissemination plans.

Capability: evaluation form

Sub-criteria (No specific weight assigned to each sub-criterion)	N/A	Modest	Good	Very Good	Excellent
Quality, quantity and significance of past research activity and published outputs relative to the stage of the applicant's career					
Evidence of contributions through, for example, publications (such as commissioned reports, etc.); professional practice; contributions to public discourses, public policies, products and services, and the development of talent					
Potential to make future contributions					
Briefly explain the rationale for your responses:					

Capability: 30%

2012 website	2011 evaluation form
Quality, quantity and significance of past experience and published outputs of the applicant and any team members relative to their roles in the project and their respective stages of career	Quality, quantity and significance of past research activity and published outputs relative to the stage of the applicant's career
Evidence of contributions such as commissioned reports, professional practice, public discourse, public policies, products and services, development of talent, experience in collaboration, etc.	Evidence of contributions through, for example, publications (such as commissioned reports, etc.); professional practice; contributions to public discourses, public policies, products and services, and the development of talent
Potential to make future contributions	Potential to make future contributions

Scoring “Capability” 1

	Regular scholar	New scholar
Excellent (5-6)	Recognized nationally and perhaps internationally for the excellent quality and substantial impact of publications within or beyond the field. Distinguished publication record, has published both consistently and recently. Where applicable, significant publications from previous funding; significant contributions to training future researchers; where appropriate, has disseminated results beyond academia.	Recognized for originality and quality of research and publications within or beyond the field. Significant research productivity. Where applicable, has made good contributions to training future researchers; where appropriate has disseminated results beyond academia.
Very good (4-4.9)	Recognized for quality and impact of publications within or beyond the field. Has published both consistently and recently. One or more of the following elements could have been better demonstrated: where applicable, publications from previous funding; contributions to training future researchers; where appropriate, dissemination of results beyond academia.	Research and publications considered fairly original and of very good quality. Has demonstrated good recent productivity. One or more of the following elements could have been better demonstrated: Where applicable, some contributions to training future researchers; where appropriate, dissemination of results beyond academia.

Scoring “Capability” 2

	Regular scholar	New scholar
Good (3-3.9)	Has made some impact within or beyond the field. Has published fairly regularly and recently . Committee has concerns regarding one or more of: where applicable, publications from previous funding; contributions to training future researchers; where appropriate, dissemination of results beyond academia.	Has demonstrated competence to conduct research . Has made some progress toward establishing a track record . Committee has concerns regarding one or both of: where applicable, contributions to training future researchers; where appropriate, dissemination of results beyond academia.
Not recommended for funding: Below 3	Does not appear to have made an impact within or beyond the field. Does not appear to have published regularly or recently . Fails to demonstrate experience in one or more of: where applicable, publications from previous funding; contributions to training future researchers; where appropriate, dissemination of results beyond academia.	Not yet demonstrated capacity to successfully carry out the research proposed. Has yet to make demonstrable progress toward establishing a track record. Fails to demonstrate experience in one or both of: where applicable, contributions to training future researchers; where appropriate, dissemination of results beyond academia.

So what got funded?

- Rates similar for regular, new scholar
- Some “very good” proposals weren’t funded
- Unlike SRG each committee didn’t have an envelope
- Regular and new scholar applications split
- In each pool all applications from all committees ranked together and funded top down
- No extra envelope for priority areas
- Except...
- In July the new Digital Economy priority area was announced

The University of Western Ontario

Table / Tableau 6

Insight Development Grant 2011-12 / Subventions de développement Savoir 2011-2012

BY COMMITTEE / SELON LE COMITÉ

Applications / Demandes				Awarded / Subventions					
Research Projects / Chercheurs / Projets				Research Projects / Chercheurs / Projets			Funding Success Rate / Taux de financement réussite		
#	#	Total \$	#	#	Total \$	%	%		
Aborig	58	161	3,506,134	18	47	1,046,089	31.0	29.8	
Hist et al 1	57	119	3,150,579	28	55	1,554,644	49.1	49.3	
Hist et al 2	58	95	3,138,305	24	43	1,176,706	41.4	37.5	
Pol et al	43	86	2,540,110	13	20	802,706	30.2	31.6	
Anthro et al	69	142	4,126,050	23	45	1,460,119	33.3	35.4	
Admin et al	100	184	5,519,010	33	61	1,582,313	33.0	28.7	
Sociol et al	98	181	5,833,381	50	98	2,336,092	51.0	40.0	
Educ/Éduc et al 1	75	170	4,629,351	30	68	1,791,348	40.0	38.7	
Educ/Éduc et al 2	72	165	4,344,146	27	59	1,362,609	37.5	31.4	
TOTAL	630	1,303	36,787,066	246	496	13,112,626	39.0	35.6	

<http://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/results-resultats/stats-statistiques/index-eng.aspx>

SSHRC IDG: view from the committee room



Funding by priority area 2011

Priority area / Domaine prioritaires	Apps			Funded			Success rate %	Funding rate %
	#	% total	Total \$	#	% total	Total \$		
Aboriginal Research / Recherche autochtone	57	9.0	3,436,134	17	6.9	984,089	29.8	28.6
Canadian Environmental Issues / Enjeux environnementaux canadiens	44	7.0	2,799,162	17	6.9	1,031,558	38.6	36.9
Digital Media / Médias numériques	135	21.4	8,023,484	89	36.2	4,678,873	65.9	58.3
Innovation, Leadership and Prosperity / Innovation, leadership et prospérité	135	21.4	8,047,683	35	14.2	1,825,157	25.9	22.7
No priority area / Aucun domaine de recherche prioritaire	247	39.2	13,832,070	84	34.1	4,383,512	34.0	31.7
Northern Communities / Les communautés du Nord	12	1.9	648,533	4	1.6	209,437	33.3	32.3
TOTAL	630	100.00	36,787,066	246	39.0	13,112,626	39.0	35.6

<http://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/results-resultats/stats-statistiques/index-eng.aspx>

Themes to pay attention to

- disciplinary, **interdisciplinary and/or cross-sector** perspectives;
- development of **new research questions, experimentation with new methods, theoretical approaches and/or ideas.**
- Projects may also involve national and international research **collaboration**
- high-quality research **training** experience
- **mobilize research knowledge**, to and from academic and non-academic audiences, with the potential to lead to intellectual, cultural, social and economic influence, benefit and impact.
- new ways of producing, structuring and mobilizing knowledge within and across disciplines and sectors

Great applications are:

- Excellent throughout: remember “one or more of”
- Creative
- “So what?” is clear to an interdisciplinary audience, including “so what” beyond academia if appropriate
- Seamless:
 - Lit review supports methods
 - Methods provide justification for student training
 - Student training is supported by cv
 - Student training is consistent with method, justifies budget
 - Budget justification, budget form, plan of work and student training plan are all consistent
 - KM plan and outcomes appropriate for type of research

Good investments of time

- Student training section: should show that training contributes to students and to project, is appropriate for project and for PI/team's level of experience
- Research contributions: pay attention to the categories
- Provide context for readers throughout
 - specific disciplinary context (e.g., explain venues in cv/KM plan: “the highest-ranked journal in...”)
 - university context (e.g. “no graduate students in...”)
- Summary: this may be all the chair reads.
- Budget: New admin rules mean justify **everything**

- Questions?

SSHRC IDG: view from the committee room

Responsibilities

- **Committee chair:** ensures committee does work fairly, thoroughly, efficiently, with integrity, ensures that SSHRC policies and procedures met; guides discussion, ensures that committee recommendation represents consensus, summarizes members' arguments for applicant
- **Program officer:** manages process, ensures SSHRC policies, evaluation criteria, regulations applied fully and consistently, keeps records
- **Committee members:** evaluate proposals and budgets except for conflict of interest, prepare comments, suggest amount that allows the work to be done