



Dr. Marc Fortin
Vice-President, Research Partnerships
NSERC

9 October 2018

Dear Dr Fortin,

RE: NSERC's New Research Partnerships Programs

The Canadian Society for Ecology and Evolution (CSEE) comprises 800+ research scientists in ecological and environmental fields from across Canada. As the Council Executive of the CSEE, we are writing to provide comments and express our concerns regarding the draft of NSERC's new Research Partnership Programs (RPP).

We understand and support the intent of the changes proposed by NSERC to its research partnership programs, and see the benefits in some of the proposals outlined in the draft document. For example, we applaud the streamlining of applications, the potentially shorter evaluation times for some types of grant, the removal of submission deadlines, the explicit consideration of equality, diversity and inclusivity, and the opportunity provided to first-time applicants, benefitting early-career researchers in particular. These all promise real improvement.

However, we are very concerned by other proposed changes, which we expect will have a large and detrimental impact on ecological and environmental research in Canada. Our concerns with the proposed changes are threefold.

First, it is proposed that in-kind contributions will no longer be considered when determining NSERC's contribution to project funding. The only recognised contribution for matching funding will be cash, with a minimum level of \$10,000 per year from research partners. We believe that this change will disproportionately affect environmental research relative to other disciplines, because our research partners, while typically generous in in-kind contributions of time, expertise and equipment, are unable to provide large amounts of cash. Those in-kind contributions are real and essential to ecological and environmental research, and need to be recognized just as cash contributions are. Furthermore, the shift to cash is likely to make multi-year funding commitments by our potential partners much more difficult. Even provincial and federal departments will have a hard time committing substantial sums of money several years in a row, potentially limiting the length of research projects. If fiscal schedules mean that funding can only be committed on a yearly basis, this will have disastrous consequences for the training and retention of HQP in the ecological and environmental sciences. **We therefore disagree strongly with the proposal to remove all in-kind contributions from the cost-sharing calculations.**

Second, while we are happy to see the role of non-profit organisations in R&D increasingly recognised, we are shocked to see that non-profit organisations that are registered as charities cannot act as partners, only as collaborators. This means that any contribution they make would not be recognised in cost-sharing calculations. Most of the large environmental NGOs in Canada have



substantial research capacity and access to data, and have frequently entered into meaningful partnerships with academic ecologists. But most are also registered charities. It is incomprehensible to us why museums, Indigenous and community groups can act as research partners, but environmental NGOs holding charitable status cannot. **We therefore recommend that registered charities and unincorporated non-profit organisations be recognised as research partners.**

Third, it is with dismay that we read of a proposed 40-50% cut to the level of NSERC funding to large-scale projects (formerly Strategic Grants). Strategic grants, the direct costs of which are currently fully funded by NSERC, have enabled world-class, collaborative research on pressing environmental problems in Canada. We believe that the requirement for a 40-50% cash contribution by research partners on large, multi-year projects will effectively limit the environmental research capacity of our country because few environmental (i.e., non-industrial) partners will be able to commit to such sums. Considering in-kind contributions (our first request, above) in the cost-sharing calculations without increasing the proportion of total project costs shouldered by NSERC would not solve the problem. **We therefore recommend that NSERC reconsiders the proposed reduction in cost-sharing for multi-year, multi-partner projects.**

We would be happy to discuss our concerns with you. Our Society has been grateful for NSERC support for its members, and for the good lines of communication that have helped us work together with NSERC to maintain Canada's world-class reputation for research in ecology, evolution, and the environmental sciences. We hope that with some adjustments, the proposed reconfiguration of the RPP can strengthen rather than weaken Canada's research enterprise.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Isabelle Côté, President
Dr Stephen Heard, Vice-President
Dr Albrecht Schulte-Hostedde, Secretary
Dr Yolanda Morbey, Treasurer

On behalf of the CSEE Council and Membership