August 1, 2012

Thank you for the opportunity to review and respond to the RTI Grants Program Consultation document, and reiterate our strong support for NSERC’s continued success as you seek to shape the future direction of investments in support of the Research Tools and Instruments (RTI) Grants Program.

NSERC’s investments support leading-edge projects in science and engineering research areas at York University. Faculty members, post-doctoral researchers, and graduate students and our research partners have all benefited from the investments from NSERC. These investments have contributed to an increased capacity for sciences and engineering innovation and discovery, promoted inter-institutional collaborative and multidisciplinary research, and have generated Canada’s scientific and technological capabilities for the benefit of all Canadians.

York University recognizes the need for a new, sustainable model in light of reductions in available program funding, enabling researchers to continue to utilize the RTI grant to foster and enhance discovery and training capabilities. We have asked our Faculties and various administrative units on campus to review the consultation documents and provide feedback on the two alternate delivery mechanisms for the support of tools and instruments. There was a strong voice from both our faculty and administration in favour of option 1 as their preference to enable the future support of RTI investments.

We feel that option 1 – providing an institutional grant for the support of RTI – would allow York University to better assess the infrastructure needs of our researchers, allowing for longer-range planning, the opportunity to better align the acquisition of infrastructure with our institutional priorities, as well as responding to urgent needs cases in a nimble manner. Under this option York would encourage NSERC to consider a funding model that would be distributed among institutions proportional to the Discovery Grant funding or number of Discovery Grants received from NSERC. York feels that this metric represents a fair and objective measure of an institution’s research activities in the natural sciences and engineering. We would further recommend that the funding assessment be done on a yearly basis, rather than a longer-term cycle, to allow for fluctuations in institutional growth.

Given the program funding reduction and necessity to limit applications for this upcoming 2013 competition we would further recommend that NSERC consider restricting the competition to applicant teams only. We feel this would ensure the research equipment request would be fully utilized and will benefit the largest possible number of researchers. Allowing faculty to be an applicant/ co-applicant on just one proposal would also prevent “inflation” of the user group, and will assist with the reduction of applications.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our thoughts on the proposed changes to the RTI grants program. We feel this consultation is a positive step forward towards ensuring the future support and vitality of this key research program. I would be pleased to speak with you further about our comments. Again thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback.