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ResearchImpact network aligns with Innovation Agenda, invites others to join

By Dr Robert Haché and Dr Robert Greenwood

In last spring's call to action, *Positioning Canada to Lead: An Inclusive Innovation Agenda*, Canada's minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Navdeep Bains, challenged all sectors of society, including academia, to help build Canada as a global centre for innovation.

Research plays an important part in Bains' agenda. "Canada has strong research capabilities, yet needs to improve in transforming ideas into marketable products, services and business models," the document states.

We support the minister's vision for an innovation plan that will drive growth across all industries, develop a more prosperous Canada, and improve the lives of all Canadians. And we agree that universities have a key role to play in that vision.

But the role of universities needs to go beyond fulfilling the critical need for global scientific excellence and building world-leading technology clusters. We need to mobilize innovation through a renewed focus and investment in people-centred knowledge mobilization initiatives that put new knowledge into action for the benefit of communities, industry and government.

For a decade now, the ResearchImpact (RIR) network — a group of 12 universities across the country — has been engaged in knowledge mobilization with measureable impacts. Since 2006, RIR has been committed to maximizing the impact of academic research for social, economic, environmental and health benefits. We believe that new knowledge, often developed through community-based partnerships, makes a real difference in society and leads to more informed decision-making for public policy, professional practice and social programs.

MEASURING IMPACT

Let's back up a little and consider the context in which our universities operate. Our research is largely supported by the federal tri-council agencies, which are increasingly looking to support university research that has a high social, economic and/or environmental utility. This necessitates a new way of measuring the impact of research.

Tried-and-true efforts to measure impact are based around citation metrics — e.g., the number of peer-reviewed scholarly journal articles. This calculation is limited because it cannot measure the social and economic value of collaborative, cross-disciplinary research.

KNOWLEDGE MOBILIZATION

What's unique about RIR and makes it highly applicable in this environment is that, when measuring research impact, we consider traditional citation metrics and also take into account collaboration, mentoring

and dialogue. Knowledge mobilization blends both quantitative and qualitative methods of assessing impact to create a more fulsome picture of the true impacts of research.

We invite other universities to join us. Why should they, when there are other groups that also endorse the idea of ensuring that university research has impact for communities, industry and government? What RIR is building is a pan-Canadian academic infrastructure for knowledge mobilization that will support scaling innovation from local solutions to national strategies. This will maximize the economic, social and environmental impacts of federal investments in university research and training, and help brand Canada as a global leader in creating and demonstrating impacts of post-secondary education research. In short, we all benefit.

RIR's ideas are gaining support. National thought leaders are taking note, acknowledging how RIR aligns with the federal Innovation Agenda, and supporting this network.

For example, in September 2016, the Federation of Humanities and Social Sciences made recommendations via their key document, *Making inclusive innovation a reality*:

"Significant federal funding should be devoted to the creation and expansion of university-based innovation and cross-disciplinary hubs. For example, the government should enhance support for multi-disciplinary knowledge-mobilization networks, such as the ResearchImpact network."

In October 2016, the Conference Board of Canada also advocated for RIR in *Beyond Citations*, which recommended the following:

- Universities need to invest in institutional supports for knowledge mobilization.
- The ResearchImpact network supports and facilitates knowledge mobilization and collaboration among faculty and student researchers, as well as community, industry and government partners.
- A network approach reduces the barriers between disciplines and enhances collaboration supporting research impacts in communities across Canada.

Once again, we urge other universities to join us. We will all benefit from a bold, coordinated strategy on innovation that is inclusive of all academic disciplines and partners from the public, private and non-profit sectors.

Dr Robert Haché is VP Research & Innovation at York University. Dr Robert Greenwood is Executive Director, Public Engagement at Memorial University

This column is co-signed on behalf of 10 other ResearchImpact members and their universities:

Rob Baker, VP Research, McMaster Univ

David Burns, VP Research, Univ of New Brunswick

Malcolm Campbell, VP Research, Univ of Guelph

David Castle, VP Research, Univ of Victoria

Karen Chad, VP Research, Univ of Saskatchewan

Stephanie Chu, Vice Provost, Teaching & Learning and Interim Associate VP Research, Kwantlen Polytechnic Univ

Robert Gordon, VP Research, Wilfrid Laurier Univ

Rafik Goubran, Acting VP Research & International, Carleton Univ

Marie-Josée Hébert, Vice-Rector Research, Discovery, Creation and Innovation, Univ of Montréal

Catherine Mounier, Vice-Rector of Research and Creation, Univ of Québec at Montréal