

Strategic Partnership Grants for Projects (SPG-P) – Frequently Asked Questions

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Strategic Partnership Grants

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Q: Why should I apply for a Strategic Partnership Grant for Projects?

A: Your research combines fundamental and applied aspects, and you're interested in seeing the results from your research reach an application outside of the university.

Q: What is the goal of Strategic Partnership Grants?

A: The goal is to increase research and training in targeted areas that could enhance Canada's economy, society, and/or environment within the next 10 years. Strategic Partnership Grants are expected to foster the increased participation of Canadian-based companies and government organizations in academic research and enable the transfer of knowledge/technology and expertise to these organizations.

Q: Is a Letter of Intent required before applying?

A: Yes. NSERC has introduced a mandatory letter of intent for SPG-P proposals.

Q: What is the duration of a Strategic Partnership Grant for Projects?

A: Grants are awarded for projects one to three years in length.

Q: My project overlaps two target areas, how does it get reviewed?

A: Researchers are strongly encouraged to select one target area. Be sure to read the entire description to select the most appropriate one. NSERC reserves the right to assign an application to a target area that is different from the one selected by the applicant.

Q: What if my project topic falls outside of the research topic?

A: Applications outside the context of the target areas will not be accepted. Applications that fit the context of the target area (but are outside its research topics) are termed "exceptional opportunities". A maximum of 20 percent of the target area budget is allocated for this purpose. Please note that the onus is on the applicant to make a convincing case for consideration as an "Exceptional Opportunity".

Q: How often are the target areas revised?

A: Periodically. NSERC completed a revision of the SPG target areas in 2015. The current four target areas are in effect for 2016 through 2020.

Health and related life sciences and technologies are covered under the [Collaborative Health Research Projects \(CHRP\)](#).

Q: Is it possible to talk to someone about my proposed research, fit to target area, eligibility and program requirements?

A: Yes. NSERC staff and your university research grant officer(s) are available to guide you through the process. NSERC staff do not review draft applications, but they can provide advice on how to write a good proposal.

Statistics

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Q: What is the success rate for the SPG-P competition?

A: The number of letters of intent that will be invited to submit a full application is approximately twice the number of anticipated awards. It is therefore anticipated that the success rate at the full application stage will be between 40% and 50% each year.

Q: Do success rates vary by target area?

A: Success rates by target area are similar to the overall success rate.

Q: What is the range of funding per year for Strategic Partnership Grants for Projects?

A: There is no maximum or minimum grant amount. Depending on the complexity of the project, the range is typically between \$80,000 and \$325,000 per year. The average grant is typically \$180,000/year for three years.

The amount requested in the full application is usually what is awarded. However, the principal investigator must provide justification for the need for funds, and a project may be awarded with a reduced budget. Purchase of major equipment items or systems is limited to a maximum of \$150,000 total.

Eligibility- Applicants

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Q: Who should be the principal investigator/applicant?

A: The principal investigator is generally the person who leads the project and devotes the most time to it. The applicant must meet NSERC's eligibility requirements and be from an eligible institution. Refer to the following: [Eligibility Criteria for Faculty](#) and [List of Eligible Institutions](#).

Q: Is there an optimal number of researchers to include in an application?

A: An application can be from a single applicant or include co-applicants. The research team must have the necessary expertise to carry out the proposed project. Participants must have a demonstrated role in the project. The average number of investigators on a project is three.

Q: Should more than one institution be represented?

A: Co-applicants can be from different institutions but it is not required.

Q: How much collaboration is expected between researchers at different universities who are working on separate aspects of a project?

A: The success of a strategic project depends on the appropriateness of skill sets and expertise among researchers on the team. Therefore, the roles and time commitment of each research co-applicant and collaborator should be clearly described in the proposal. In addition, clear collaboration and communication plans should be in place.

Q: Are multiple applications allowed by an applicant or co-applicant?

A: Yes. However, projects must be distinct and stand alone. You must be realistic in the estimated time commitment in the event that more than one grant is awarded.

Q: Will being a young researcher affect my chances of success?

A: Being a young researcher should not affect your chances of success. The applicant should clearly describe his/her achievements and contributions in terms of human resources management, administration of funds and research on their Form 100. Young researchers, and researchers new to the university and NSERC systems, are encouraged to bring their innovative ideas forward. The important point is that the team must have the expertise to conduct the project.

Q: What is the difference between a collaborator and a co-applicant?

A: A co-applicant is a member of a research team applying for a group grant (i.e., university or college faculty). You must meet the [Eligibility Criteria](#).

A collaborator does not have access to grant funds. A government scientist, academic researcher, company staff member or research scientist can be a member of a research team that is applying for a group grant. You must be qualified to undertake research independently and will be expected to contribute to the overall intellectual direction of the research project or program of research and bring your own resources to the collaboration.

Q: When should I identify someone as a collaborator?

A: When their involvement or role in the project is similar to that of a co-applicant. It is strongly recommended that they submit their Form 100 or CV (six pages maximum).

Other researchers providing specialized expertise can be briefly described in the proposal section without being identified as “collaborators”.

Q: Can I have collaborators or co-applicants outside the fields of natural sciences and engineering?

A: Yes. Applicants are encouraged to collaborate with experts who work in fields other than the natural sciences and engineering, where appropriate. Academic researchers outside of the natural sciences and engineering may participate in SPG-P proposals as co-applicants if they meet NSERC’s eligibility requirements with respect to type, duration and nature of appointment. Research costs for these collaborations may comprise up to 30 percent of the project costs and must be clearly identified in the project budget. All project expenditures will be subject to NSERC’s Use of Grant Funds guidelines.

Q: Can researchers working in foreign agencies, universities, national labs or other institutions be included in the proposal?

A: Yes, they can participate as collaborators. As collaborators, they are expected to bring their own resources to the project and will not have access to NSERC funds. The principal investigator may invite visiting scientists to participate in a project, subject to NSERC guidelines: [Use of Grant Funds](#).

Q: Is it a conflict of interest when a researcher is a principal of a personal start-up company?

A: Yes. A researcher’s own consulting company or sole proprietorship is not eligible to collaborate on a project in which the researcher is the applicant or co-applicant.

Q: If a researcher has a term appointment, does it have to cover the period of the grant?

A: To be eligible, your contract must be at least three years, no matter what time you have left in your contract at the time of the application. For example, you would be considered eligible if you had only two months left in your three-year contract at the time of the application. Therefore, it is not necessary for your current appointment to cover the period of the grant proposed. However, you must maintain your eligibility for the duration of the grant.

Q: Are adjunct professors eligible to apply for Strategic Partnership Grants for Projects?

A: Yes, but only under certain conditions.

If the adjunct position is for *more* than three years, and the primary place of employment *is* academia, then adjunct professors *are* eligible to apply as applicants or co-applicants.

If the adjunct position is for *more* than three years and the primary place of employment *is not* academia, adjunct professors *are not* eligible as applicants. They can be eligible as co-applicants if the primary place of employment is not a supporting organization.

Adjunct professors outside of academia are normally only awarded funds for student support.

If the adjunct position is for *less* than three years (regardless of whether the primary place of employment is academia or not), adjunct professors *are not* eligible to apply as applicants or co-applicants. They can be collaborators, but will not have access to funds.

Eligibility- Supporting Organizations

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Q: What are the requirements for supporting organizations participating in Strategic Partnership Grants for Projects?

A: The supporting organization must have the ability to exploit the results for the benefit of Canada, must collaborate in all stages of the research project and must validate the results of the research or provide guidance concerning the exploitation of the results. Although cash contributions are not required, in-kind contributions to the direct cost of research is a requirement of supporting organizations participating in the project. Each project must have at least one supporting organization that is either:

- 1) a Canadian-based company (or multi-national organization with manufacturing or research facilities in Canada) that can apply the research results in a way that generates wealth or employment;
- 2) a government organization that can apply the results in a way that strengthens public policy. Please note that it is important that their regulatory role or similar mandate makes them the primary end user of the research (i.e., if it is simply a bench-to-bench collaboration between government and university researchers which is not expected to result in policy changes/improvements, then this would not be an acceptable partnership).

The partner must be appropriate for the project. For example, for research aimed at informing policy debate in Government, appropriate Government departments are eligible partners. For research aimed at Benefit to Canada delivered by the marketplace, an industrial (e.g., for profit) organization is typically required.

Q: What is the difference between a supporting organization and a participating organization?

A: A supporting organization must meet the eligibility requirements and complete a Form 183A ([Guidelines for Organizations Participating in Research Partnerships](#)). A supporting organization is actively involved in all stages of the research project, including the development of the proposal, ongoing interaction with the academic researchers on the results and direction of the project, and guidance relating to the exploitation and/or commercialization of the results.

A participating organization is any other organization participating in the research.

Q: Are hospitals eligible as supporting organizations? What about crown corporations?

A: Hospitals and clinics are not eligible as supporting organizations. They may participate in a project, but there must be an additional eligible supporting organization participating in the project.

Crown corporations are eligible if they derive their income from sales of goods and services, and they have the capability to exploit the research results.

Q: Are key staff from the supporting organization considered as collaborators?

A: A key staff member from the supporting organization can be listed as a company contact. If there are several staff members, they can be mentioned in the body of the proposal in reference to the specific tasks for which they will be responsible. Alternatively, if there are company personnel that will be as closely linked to the project as your co-applicants, then you may want to add them as collaborators and include their CVs at the full application stage.

Q: In a project involving several partners, their level of involvement may be different. Is this acceptable?

A: Yes. Their involvement in the project should be well described in the proposal and in the letter of support.

Q: Must all supporting organizations contributing cash and/or in-kind support submit a Form 183A?

A: Yes. Any supporting organization involved with your project and providing cash and/or in-kind support to the [direct cost of research](#) should submit a Form 183A. Details of their contributions should also be outlined

in the letter of support at the full application stage. Their comments on the progress report and final reports will be required.

Q: Can I purchase equipment/supplies from a supporting organization?

A: No. NSERC funds cannot flow to a supporting organization in any way, including the purchase of equipment and/or supplies, even at a discounted price. These items should be in-kind contributions (donation or loan).

Q: Does NSERC require the original copy of the letter of support?

A: As long as the copy of the letter provided to NSERC is signed and on company letterhead, NSERC does not need to receive the original copy. NSERC will accept a signed copy of the letter in any of the following formats: fax, pdf (Acrobat), or hard copy. Should you wish to send the original letter to NSERC under a separate cover, you may certainly do so. Otherwise, please retain it on file.

Q: Does the university need to get a copy of the Form 183A? Is a handwritten form acceptable? Do I have to reveal profit figures?

A: The university does not need a copy of the form, it can be sent directly to NSERC. A handwritten form is acceptable. Please note that, for a successful on-line submission, a Form 183A must be submitted with the on-line application. If there is information you do not want to reveal, please contact a program officer (strgr@nserc-crsng.gc.ca) before submitting your form.

Q: Can I submit letters of support from other organizations?

A: Only the eligible organizations that have provided a Form 183A will be considered as supporting organizations. Participating organizations may submit letters of support and a Form 183A if they are providing direct support to the project. Letters of interest or general support are not meaningful in the evaluation.

Q: For government organizations, who should sign the letter of support?

A: The letter of support must be signed by the Director General (or equivalent level) and accompanied by the Form 183A. The inclusion of an organizational chart may assist in determining equivalent level for organizations without a Director General.

Q: For private sector organizations, who should sign the letter of support?

A: The letter of support (accompanied by Form 183A) should be signed by a representative of the organization able to authorize the commitment of resources and able to provide feedback on the usefulness of the research and the results. Please note that this person must be at arm's length from the applicants (i.e. independent of each other).

Letter of Intent (LOI)

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Q: Do all applicants need to submit an LOI?

A: Yes. A letter of intent (LOI) is mandatory for each proposed application.

Q: I am submitting a proposal under the concurrent call for joint international research projects. Are there any special considerations?

A: Two separate (but linked) proposals are submitted under the concurrent call for joint international research projects – one proposal is submitted to NSERC and the other is submitted to the designated program at its counterpart agency. Each of these two proposals must follow the respective application guidelines and eligibility rules. In the case of NSERC's SPG-P, researchers should follow the process for a "normal" SPG-P application with the following differences:

- The letter of intent must clearly indicate that the proposed research will be conducted in collaboration with international researchers applying under the concurrent call.
- The appropriate prefix (ANR or MOST) must be added to the title of the application.
- In a cover letter, the name and institution of the collaborating principal investigator must be provided.

- Assuming that the Canadian application meets all the requirements for SPG-P including that the proposed research falls within one of the target areas defined in the SPG description and that at least one academic researcher eligible to receive NSERC funds is collaborating with at least one eligible Canadian supporting organization, then applicants who submit letters of intent for a project under one of the concurrent calls for joint international research projects will be automatically invited to submit full applications.
- At the full application stage, NSERC allows up to 3 additional pages above the 11-page limit to allow space to address the plans for collaboration (please see the information that must be included under [Information Common to Both Full Proposals](#)).

Q: Can I submit a cover letter with my LOI?

A: A cover letter should be used if you wish to provide NSERC with additional information, such as a request that an individual or group of individuals not be involved in the review of your proposal. The cover letter will **not** be shared with reviewers. As such, if the application is a re-submission, details on how the concerns of the selection panel and reviewers were addressed should **NOT** be included in the cover letter. They can be addressed in the Proposal section.

A cover letter must also be used for LOIs submitted under the concurrent call for joint international research projects in order to provide the name and institution of the collaborating principal investigator.

Q: Who reviews the LOI?

A: Letters of intent are evaluated by current and former members of the selection panel for the target area.

Q: How are the LOIs evaluated?

A: Letters of intent are evaluated by the selection panel for the target area using the established selection criteria. The letter of intent will be evaluated on a scale of outstanding, excellent, very strong, strong, acceptable or inadequate. Panel members evaluate their assigned letters of intent independently without consulting or discussing with each other.

Q: Is any particular selection criterion more important than another?

A: All selection criteria are equally important.

Q: Will I receive feedback on my LOI?

A: Yes. Brief comments will be provided to all applicants. A priority will be placed on sending comments to applicants being invited to submit a full application as quickly as possible so that they can use the feedback in preparing their full application. However, all applicants will receive comments as soon as they are available.

Q: How many LOIs will be invited to submit a full application?

A: The number of invitations will be approximately twice the number of anticipated awards.

Q: When are the LOI decisions communicated?

A: Results of the LOI process are communicated to universities Research Grant Officers (RGO) on April 1st. Applicants will receive their notice of decision by mail shortly after.

Q: Is budget information requested at the LOI stage?

A: Budget information is not requested at the LOI stage.

Q: What is required from the supporting organizations at the LOI stage?

A: Any supporting organization involved in the project and planning to provide support to the direct cost of research must submit a Form 183A (STPLI) for SPG-P LOI and a dated, signed letter of support on letterhead. The letter must provide the following information:

- a concise statement describing the nature of their Canadian operations
- support for and agreement with the proposal
- the potential benefit arising from the research and the relevant timeframe
- potential interactions between the organization's personnel and the research team

Q: Are supporting organizations required to provide a value for their planned contributions at the LOI stage?

A: Supporting organizations are not required to provide a value for their planned contributions at the LOI stage. However, the LOI must demonstrate active involvement of the supporting organizations in all stages of the project and must indicate the planned interactions between the research team and the supporting organizations.

Full Application

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Q: Do I have to follow the page breakdown indicated in the Form 101 instructions?

A: These are suggested lengths. However, the proposal must *not* exceed 11 pages, including figures and tables. A maximum of two (2) additional pages are allowed for literature references. Please read the instructions, and be sure to include the requested information in each section.

For submissions to the International Concurrent Call for Joint Research Projects, the proposal section may be 14 pages.

Q: Do I need to describe the fit of my project to the target area and research topic?

A: Yes, this should be done in the Introduction section of the proposal. It is important to identify the target area and research topic that your proposal addresses. Explain why the research you propose is strategic and how it fits the target area. The explanation must address all parts of the target area description: the Context and the description of the research topic. If the research you propose falls within the Context section of a target area but outside the priority research topic descriptions, you must provide justification for it to be considered as an exceptional opportunity. Insufficient information on this aspect can result in the rejection of a proposal.

Q: Can I submit a cover letter with my application?

A: A cover letter should only be used if you wish to provide NSERC with additional information, such as a request that an individual or group of individuals not be involved in the review of your proposal. The cover letter will **not** be shared with external referees or the selection panel. As such, if the application is a re-submission, details on how the concerns of the selection panel and reviewers were addressed should **NOT** be included in the cover letter. They can be addressed in the Proposal section.

Q: How do we organize the salary of one student working on different sub-projects?

A: You need to split the salary into separate budget pages according to the time spent on each project.

Q: Do I need to include separate budget pages for different sub-projects?

A: Only if it is a large project with distinct themes.

Q: How many pages are allowed for budget justification?

A: There is no limit. The important thing is to provide as much detail as possible, and show how you arrived at the totals presented (i.e., show your calculations). A Gantt chart (or similar) may also be included in this section. This page should only contain information pertinent to the budget.

Q: Do we need signatures for on-line submissions?

A: No, our on-line system takes this into account with user ID/password based signatures. However, we expect one copy of the grant application, bearing the original signatures of the applicant and co-applicant(s), as well as of the department head and president of the institution (or their representatives), to be kept at the institution and made available to NSERC upon request. [Refer to Instructions for Completing an Application – Form 101.](#)

Q: What type of experts should I include in Appendix C?

A: Experts in your field of research (also include government/industry-based experts). These experts can be Canadian or international. These suggestions should take into consideration equity, diversity and inclusion, for example the list should include some women. Please ensure you do not include individuals with whom

you collaborate or have collaborated with in the past six years or individuals who collaborate with any of your supporting organizations. Refer to the instructions for what constitutes a [Conflict of Interest](#).

Evaluation of Full Application

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Q: How are external reviewers selected?

A: The external reviewers are respected scientists or engineers knowledgeable in the area of the proposal. Reviewers can come from government, industry or academia, and can be international. The program officer has several sources for identifying appropriate reviewers including: 1) suggestions by the applicant (Appendix C); 2) suggestions by the selection panel members; 3) NSERC database; 4) other resources. External reviewers use the same evaluation criteria as panel members.

Q: Can I request that NSERC not select an individual or group to review my application?

A: Yes. This request should be made in a cover letter to your application. NSERC will take such requests into consideration.

Q: Do reviewers really look at the amount of time I commit to a project?

A: Yes. Make sure the number is realistic.

Q: What is the relative weight of the selection criteria?

A: Each of the seven evaluation criteria is weighted equally.

Q: How are the “Benefits to Canada” evaluated?

A: The selection panel and reviewers will look for: a) socio/economic/health benefits to Canada (quantitative data can be convincing); b) potential benefit in creating significant public policy as a result of the research; c) the potential to increase the number and/or quality of personnel working in an area of strategic importance. Where possible, describe the potential benefits in terms of an existing or future value chain.

Q: When are the results of the competition announced?

A: The results of the competition are announced in September, and funds are released shortly afterwards. Regardless of the outcome, each applicant will receive a “Message to Applicant” which contains the consensus comments of the selection panel, and any external referee reports.

General

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Q: Are project management costs eligible expenses or in-kind contributions?

A: The maximum level of support for all expenditures related to project management is up to 10 percent of the total cash contributions to the project from all sources (NSERC, partners, etc.). Project management expenses provided by partners will be recognized as an eligible in-kind contribution to the project to a maximum amount of 10 percent of the total cash contributions from all sources. Supportable expenditures and activities include: 1) project manager salary; 2) project management software; 3) project management training for scientific and technical staff working on a project for which project management expenses are requested. Administrative and secretarial expenses are not eligible. Refer to [Guidelines for Research Partnership Programs Project Management Expenses](#).

Q: Is a Research Agreement required?

A: NSERC’s Policy on Intellectual Property supports the premise that every effort should be made to exploit the results of NSERC-funded research in Canada for the benefit of Canadians. The research of most Strategic Partnership Grants for Projects is at the early stage of the innovation spectrum where there are few issues related to intellectual property. Consequently, a signed research agreement is not usually required. However, if it is anticipated that the proposed research will lead to disclosure of intellectual property, or if a research agreement already exists, then a copy of the research agreement between the

supporting organization(s) and the university must be submitted to NSERC and reviewed for conformance to NSERC's [Policy on Intellectual Property](#) prior to the release of funds.

Q: Are research agreements between individual researchers and supporting organizations accepted?

A: No. The agreement should be between the university and the partner, and include the signature of the principal applicant.

Q: How do you document Ship Time?

A: The need for Ship Time must be documented and the costs entered on the budget pages under "Other."

Q: How long can a PDF be supported?

A: Salaries/stipends to postdoctoral fellows are limited to two years' support from NSERC. Three years' support is acceptable, when justified, to attract exceptional foreign candidates from outside Canada. The three-year appointment *must* be offered up front and reported to NSERC with a written justification within one month of an offer being accepted.

Q: What is the minimum/maximum stipend for students?

A: Stipends paid to students should be in accordance with institutional policies. Specific minima or maxima pertaining to stipends paid from grants are no longer in effect. The restriction on providing supplements from grants to award holders has been removed.

Q: Who should I contact if I have questions?

A: General inquiries can be directed to strgr@nserc-crsng.gc.ca or by phone 613-995-1111.

Post-Award

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Q: Do I have to start my project on September 30?

A: For NSERC purposes, the start date of your SPG-P award will be September 30. You may choose to start the project's activities later, but a progress report will still be required at the prescribed time.

Q: What are the reporting requirements for Strategic Partnership Grants for Projects?

A: A progress report must be submitted 18 months after the project start date. The grantee will have to describe progress to date and update the plans for the future conduct of the research and the resources required to complete the approved work. A final report is also required at the end of the grant. Feedback from the supporting organization(s) must also be provided with each report.

Q: I've received a Strategic Partnership Grant for Projects. Can I deviate from my approved budget and training plan?

A: As per the Terms and Conditions of the award, you are expected to adhere to the activities and budget specified in the approved proposal. In particular, you are expected to follow the approved training plan. Prior written authorization from NSERC is required for deviations from the original activities of the research project, deviations from the initial total budget, or any re-allocation of resources of more than 20 percent of an approved budget line item.

Q: Can projects be extended?

A: Strategic Partnership Grants for Projects allow for extensions in time only and must be made in writing to the program officer. Extensions are not automatic. Requests must be well justified (i.e., to complete project objectives or milestones) and must be supported by the supporting organization(s). Extension requests normally occur in the final year of a project.

Myths and Misconceptions about the Strategic Partnership Grants for Projects

Issue	Question	Answer
Partnerships	Does the supporting organization have to be from industry?	The supporting organization can be any eligible non-academic organization that can use the research results.
Partnerships	Are larger companies considered better partners than smaller companies?	The supporting organization must be appropriate for the proposal and must have the ability to exploit the research results to generate wealth or employment.
Cash	Is a partner required to contribute cash? Will a proposal be viewed more favourably if cash is contributed?	A cash contribution is not required, but some form of partner involvement is required (direct in-kind). The key point is that the partner is involved in all aspects of the project.
Project vs. Program	What differentiates a research project from a research program?	Strategic Projects are project-based and require a project objective, plan, milestones and deliverables.
Research Focus	Should the proposed research focus on the immediate needs of industry?	Strategic Projects focus on emerging research areas and early-stage research. This is not contract research.
Budget	Is there a minimum or maximum amount of funding that can be requested?	There is no maximum or minimum grant amount. Depending on the complexity of the project the range is typically between \$80,000 and \$325,000 per year. The average grant is typically \$180,000/year for three years.
Student Training	Should I involve a large number of students in the project?	Training of students is an important criterion, but it's the value added by the opportunities for students to interact with the group (in particular, the partner) and gain skills that counts most.
Discipline Thrusts	Should researchers be only from NSERC disciplines?	Many of the research thrusts identified in the strategic target areas require a multidisciplinary approach; proposals may even cross the mandates of the other granting agencies.
Benefit to Canada	If the proposal fits the target area, is a description of the "Benefit to Canada" still required?	Projects must fit within one of the target areas to be eligible for the program, and applicants must address how the specific project provides the "Benefit to Canada".
Evaluation	What is the most important evaluation criterion?	All selection criteria are equally important.