

# NSERC: Laying the Groundwork for Recovery



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The unprecedented crisis in the global financial system has given the world a strident wake up call and a new understanding of the interdependency of our economies and future prosperity. Added to the need of improving Canada's record in innovation, the crisis has called attention to the urgency of laying the groundwork for an R&D-driven economic renewal.

As in many developed countries, Canada enjoys a complex, rich and dynamic system of Science and Innovation. Our challenge is to fully exploit this system so as to realize the objective of "Mobilizing Science and Technology to Canada's Advantage", Canada's S&T Strategy. First and foremost, this starts with an unfettered commitment to the Strategy's fundamental principles. Striving for excellence, working as partners, making the tough choices and being accountable for them is the foundation on which we need to lay the groundwork for Canada's economic recovery. Second, we all need to understand our place in this system, playing our distinct roles to the best of our abilities and interacting optimally with other parts of the system. Working as a system and sharing a common vision and goals are critical to ensuring that we can all reap

the benefits of the tremendous investments that have been made and will continue to be made in S&T. Finally, we need to turn this wake up call into a call for action. To use the words of the Council of Science, Technology and Innovation State of the Nation 2008 report: "Now is the time to up our game".

At NSERC, we have heard the call for action and have been engaged in initiatives to transform ourselves, focusing our efforts on our distinct roles and working in partnership with other key S&T players.

Empowering people to unleash their creative potential is an essential component of an innovative society and economy. As validated by two major independent reviews, NSERC's Discovery Grants program is one of the most effective and productive tools in the world for promoting creativity, making Canadian researchers the envy of their peers. Implementing the recommendations of these reviews has increased the competitive edge of the program, making it a more dynamic instrument to raise the bar for excellence in R&D. Not only are the program resources invested in the most productive researchers but additional funds are specifically targeted to accelerate research breakthroughs. The implementation of these changes has also demonstrated that Canadian researchers are ready to up their game.

Since its inception thirty years ago, NSERC has had a strategy for bringing academic researchers and companies together. In today's highly competitive global marketplace, however, this strategy needs to be constantly renewed and kept alive. Over the last few months, NSERC has mobilized an advisory committee of leaders from industry, government and academia and has held consultations across the country with over 400 representatives from these sectors to help us develop a

Strategy for Partnerships and Innovation (SPI) that responds to today's needs and positions NSERC to do its part to lay the groundwork for Canada's economic recovery.

The Strategy, which will be launched in the coming weeks, aims to increase innovation by connecting industry to the world-class academic research network in a more flexible and agile way. We at NSERC are determined to extend the reach and impact of our programs so that a greater number and range of companies and researchers can benefit from them. The recently announced Automotive Research Initiative is a good example of a new model of dynamic and responsive partnerships that can work to move Canada's economic recovery forward.

In all our work, NSERC is committed to act as a good steward and use the resources entrusted to us wisely to build a strong and broad base of research capacity and advance the priorities of Canadians. We have recently developed a tracking system to identify existing and emerging clusters of research excellence as well as areas where more investments are needed. This tracking system is proving invaluable in making R&D investments more strategic and transparent and in ensuring that NSERC's work is contributing fully to implementing Canada's S&T strategy. It will also help us to better showcase the returns on Canada's S&T's investments.

Over the last decade, Canada has built an excellent and powerful research engine. Whether in sports or R&D, however, excellence alone is not sufficient to be and remain competitive. Agility in seizing strategic exceptional opportunities is also needed. At NSERC we are taking action to ensure that excellence and agility are a part of all we do so that we can fully contribute to laying the groundwork for a robust, R&D-driven renewed economy.