

PARTNER PERSPECTIVE

Championing Government's Role as First Customer of Innovation



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As OCE has grown and evolved over the last thirty years, so has our understanding of what it takes to drive innovation.

We've learned that it requires identifying and employing a number of different levers. This includes everything from business advice, seed financing and support for industry-academic collaboration to support for companies to scale up and pursue global ambitions, knowledge transfer through industry-based internships and fellowships, and investment in infrastructure.

OCE is now also employing another extremely important lever -- procurement of innovation by the provincial government.

There is a growing awareness within the innovation system of the important role that governments can play as consumers and first adopters of innovation. This is good for business and for the citizens who use the services and products of the

public service. The massive purchasing power of governments represents immense potential to drive fundamental improvements in areas such as health care, education and transportation while also supporting the growth of an economy fueled by innovation.

The benefits of government procurement flow to both businesses and the general public. Ontario businesses acquire valuable customers on their home turf, a chance to validate their products and grow their businesses, and the credibility needed to compete in a global market. Government gains the opportunity to offer improved products and services to those they serve while creating an innovation-driven economy that supports early stage companies and entrepreneurs in Ontario.

With the Province of Ontario, OCE has taken a leadership role in designing and implementing programs supporting public sector innovation adoption and procurement, most notably in the areas of education and health care. In 2014, OCE launched its AdvancingHealth program bringing together health care and industry partners to develop and demonstrate new technologies within the health care system in Ontario. AdvancingHealth has so far funded 10 innovative collaborations between public health care and Ontario industry partners, each demonstrating a new Ontario-made technology in a public health care setting in order to build a case for its adoption across the system. Each of two rounds of the program was given a theme based on significant challenges in the health care system, namely community-based

virtual care, mental health, and patient engagement.

Under a similar program model, OCE subsequently introduced its AdvancingEducation program, which has recently issued a second call for proposals. Projects from the first funding round include a game-based approach to motivating children, a multisensory chair for children with autism and a new approach to distance education. Our focus on innovation procurement has intensified with the recent addition of two new health related programs aimed at making it easier for our health-care institutions to identify, evaluate, and procure innovative solutions that meet their biggest challenges.

Fostering government procurement helps complete the cycle in the innovation system. As in Ontario, governments invest substantially in the academic institutions that are home to the groundbreaking research that spurs innovation, the campus entrepreneurship programs that support student entrepreneurs and the startups that are getting their footing as they seek private investment. By also adopting technologies as first customers and helping companies grow, the provincial government is helping create a demand for innovation that further fuels an innovation-driven economy.

Dr. Tom Corr is the President and CEO of Ontario Centres of Excellence, which drives the growth of a globally competitive-based economy. Funded primarily by the Ontario government, OCE is a proud member of the Ontario Network of Entrepreneurs (ONE).