Dear colleagues,

The following message provides a short update on the Draft Call for Proposals for the 2015 competition of the Innovation Fund. "The CFI is not in a position at this time to issue a final Call for Proposals as we have yet to enter into a signed Funding Agreement with the Government of Canada. This may not occur until next January. So rather than waiting until then and jeopardizing our ability to complete this competition by March 2015, we felt that informing institutions of the planned changes to the Draft Call was a prudent course of action. We are hopeful that the final Call for Proposals will not change significantly.

We have received considerable constructive feedback from the community and for which we are most appreciative. This feedback has come from several institutions – large and small – particularly as it relates to three topics:

1. Multi-institutional proposals that sit outside the institutional envelope;
2. High performance computing; and
3. Data management plans.

Let me address these in turn.

1. Multi-institutional Projects:

Our goal was to foster and strengthen collaboration between institutions on key strategic initiatives. The comments and suggestions indicate that the proposed approach (where an institution and its affiliated research hospitals could lead or participate in only one (1) project) was found to be too restrictive and somewhat inequitable. Relaxing the constraints raised its own set of problems, i.e., the very real risk of reducing the funding rate of proposals that sit within the institutional envelopes to an unacceptably low level (<23%) – unless we significantly reduced the institutional allocations. During our consultation last summer, we heard clearly that, given the level of effort that goes into the preparation of a CFI proposal, that it was important to keep the success rate above 30%.

Given the difficulty of reconciling these competing considerations, we have decided to:

a) Eliminate multi-institutional proposals that sit outside the institutional envelopes;
b) Continue to foster multi-institutional proposals within the institutional envelope; and
c) Increase the institutional envelopes by approximately 8% thereby giving each institution more and increasing the funding rate to approximate 32%.

Multi-institutional projects with three or more partners will continue to have the opportunity to request up to an additional five percent of the CFI award to cover, among others, administrative costs associated with the management and governance of those projects.

2. Research Computing/High Performance Computing (HPC):

We received many comments about the treatment of research computing/HPC infrastructure in
this competition. Three questions were raised that need clarification in our view. These are:

· What is an appropriate definition of HPC?
· What distinguishes this Innovation Fund competition from the forthcoming initiative on cyber-infrastructure?; and
· What criteria will be used to determine whether HPC infrastructure elements will be housed and managed by Compute Canada?

On the question of the appropriate definition of HPC, several institutions deemed the definition used in the Call for Proposals to be overly broad. Clearly the use of the term HPC, for which there is no agreed upon definition, causes confusion. We will amend the relevant section to refer to research computing as this term better captures the scope and variety of computational resources we have in mind.

The 2015 IF competition offers institutions and their researchers an opportunity to request computing and related resources to carry out a research program in cases where these resources are not available at Compute Canada. As a matter of policy, the CFI continues to believe that investments in research computing infrastructure are maximized by promoting the sharing of resources. The CFI, therefore, expects that new or additional computing resources funded through this competition will normally be housed, managed and operated by Compute Canada, in which case Compute Canada assumes the associated O&M costs. Although this is the CFI’s preferred approach, it is not intended to be an iron-clad rule. The CFI recognizes that there are instances where, for compelling reasons, computing resources are best housed, managed and operated by individual institutions. In such instances however, it will be the institutions’ responsibility to assume the on-going operation and maintenance costs of the computing resource.

By comparison, the forthcoming cyber-infrastructure initiative will focus on collective resources -- for data acquisition, storage, management and integration, data mining and visualization, computational and information processing services, etc. -- to enable Canadian researchers to remain globally competitive.

The CFI is currently consulting with Compute Canada, to establish an iterative and collaborative process to assist institutions intending to submit proposals containing significant computational resources. This process will draw on the expertise of Compute Canada to help institutions to identify and define computational requirements for specific projects. The objective is to maximize the overall effectiveness and efficiency of CFI investments in research computing.

The CFI, therefore, strongly encourages institutions to consult with Compute Canada prior to submission of their proposals. Compute Canada will provide advice on the computational services it can provide. Once the results of the competition are known, the CFI and Compute Canada will work with institutions to determine how best to house, manage and operate the computing resources.
Compute Canada will soon publish on its website details on the process to be used to facilitate collaboration with institutions.

3. Data Management Plans:

The draft Call for Proposals indicated that proposals anticipating to generate significant data, typically supported by HPC infrastructure, would be required to include a data management plan. Based on the comments and suggestions received, we have concluded that this requirement is both premature and best dealt with by the granting agencies. It will not appear in the Call for proposals.

Other changes:
In addition to these changes, the CFI will also allow institutions to exceed their institutional envelopes at the NOI stage by as much as 20% in recognition of the fact that budgets at that stage are very preliminary. This approach is also more consistent with the purpose of the NOI which is to enable CFI staff to begin identifying potential experts and to gain an understanding of the magnitude and complexity of the projects.
The CFI will also endeavour to give institutions appropriate forewarning about whether institutions will be invited to meet with the expert committees in a face-to-face meeting. This will allow institutions to plan for the project leaders and senior administrators to be available for these meetings.

Resources:
A number of resources, as listed below, will be available to guide institutions and project leaders in preparing, managing and submitting NOIs and full proposals to the 2015 Innovation Fund competition. These documents will be posted on the CFI’s website shortly after the formal Call for Proposals has been announced.

- Getting started with the CFI Awards Management System (CAMS) – An overview document for researchers (currently available)
- Getting started with the CFI Awards Management System (CAMS) – An overview document for institutional research services personnel (currently available)
- Technical instructions (CAMS) for researchers and institutional research services personnel
- NOI and Proposal Forms (PDF format)
- Guidelines for completing a notice of intent and a proposal

Webinars:
In an effort to provide information and answer any questions regarding this competition, we will be holding webinars (English and French) for project leaders, research administrators and other interested parties as soon as the CFI has officially launched the Call for Proposals for the 2015 Innovation Fund competition. Provincial government representatives will be invited to participate in these sessions. The webinars will focus on the goals of the 2015 IF competition, changes from the previous competition, along with the application and the merit review
process``.

In the interim, if you have any questions relating to the 2015 Innovation Fund competition, do not hesitate to contact Mohamad Nasser-Eddine (Director, Strategic Project Management Group (SPMG) should you have any questions about the 2014 IF competition at mnassere@uottawa.ca