

Trans-tech
CCTT NETWORK
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Experts in finding solutions: technological and social innovation
46 centres 1,000 experts Throughout Quebec

TO THE ATTENTION OF:
Standing Committee on Finance – 2015 Federal Budget

THE CCTTs

The College Centres for the Transfer of Technology and Innovative Social Practices (CCTTs) are recognized under Quebec's *General and Vocational Colleges Act*. The 46 centres—40 technology centres and six innovative social practices centres—are located throughout Quebec in both urban centres and the regions. Each CCTT is involved in applied research, technical assistance, training and information, and specializes in a particular field, from advanced manufacturing technology and the integration of immigrants to agriculture, biotechnologies, eco-citizenship, composites and more! The network comprises over 1,100 experts in technological and social innovation serving clients of all sizes: private and public companies, social economy enterprises, government and para-public organizations (government departments, municipalities, agencies, health and educational institutions), and not-for-profit associations. In 2012–2013, the CCTTs completed 8,678 innovation contracts, including 1,450 applied research projects, for over 3,800 organizations, 66 percent of which were small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

The CCTTs are rooted in and are a product of the needs of their respective communities. They have therefore developed unique approaches to carrying out collaborative research projects that generate direct spinoffs for their communities. They excel in applied research and are major drivers of the knowledge economy and the transfer of knowledge and expertise.

THE RÉSEAU TRANS-TECH

The Réseau Trans-tech [trans-tech network] represents all CCTTs. Its purpose is to coordinate the actions of the CCTTs, facilitate access to their services for businesses and organizations, and support collaboration between the centres and other contributors to innovation, such as regional development agencies, public or private research centres, universities, government departments, etc.

1. Increasing the competitiveness of Canadian businesses through research, development, innovation and commercialization

Better supporting an economy comprised mostly of SMEs

Small businesses (fewer than 99 employees) make up 98% of Canada's industrial fabric. They contribute approximately 30% to GDP (compared to 9% for medium-sized businesses and 36% for large businesses).¹ They have very different needs from large businesses particularly with regard to support for innovation: urgency of the demands, need for coaching in innovation for personnel, limited financial resources, need for training in new practices, etc. Colleges are in the perfect position to accelerate innovation among SMEs by virtue of their mission to train highly skilled personnel, their active involvement in the development of their communities and regions, and their flexible structure, which allows them to respond quickly to the needs of their sector.

Toward that end, SMEs, colleges and the CCTTs need financial assistance programs that are tailored to their reality, i.e. programs that accomplish the following:

- Recognize and support applied research to improve processes and develop new products, often over the fairly short term (six to 18 months), but also enable longer-term projects to prepare for the future (three to five years);
- Understand that businesses cannot support a high level of risk and that the riskier the research, the higher the level of funding required;
- Support businesses in developing research programs designed to instil a culture of innovation that will give them an edge and differentiate them in local and particularly international markets.

¹ Key Small Business Statistics – August 2013, SME Research and Statistics, <http://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/061.nsf/eng/02812.html>

- Provide funding for innovation in a broader sense than just technological innovation by offering a range of financial assistance programs to support all stages from design to marketing and to improve management and communication practices, human resources management, integration of immigrant labour, etc.

The Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC) currently has programs that provide funding for technological business innovation, such as the College and Community Innovation Program (CCI). However, although the benefits are extremely important to businesses, including SMEs, the program is seriously under-funded. The CCI Program needs at least \$25 million more annually to support colleges working with SMEs.

The National Research Council Canada (NRC) also provides critical services to businesses through its Industrial Research Assistance Program (IRAP). However, as with NSERC, funding is too low. Often, funds are fully committed for the fiscal year by mid-year and businesses must wait another year to file an application. For SMEs, these are lost opportunities to position themselves strategically because they are unable to carry out such projects on their own.

NRC-IRAP obtained funding for three years for the Digital Technology Adoption Pilot Program (DTAPP). The program was very important for Canadian businesses looking to upgrade to digital technologies. The program was not renewed. It should be reinstated and provided with the appropriate funds.

NRC-IRAP recently obtained funding for the Business Innovation Access Program (BIAP), designed to offset part of the cost of activities associated with technological innovation and essential to commercialization, activities necessary to position Canadian businesses internationally. Unfortunately, the funds were very limited and were quickly exhausted.

Working in partnership in Canada and abroad

The research funding currently available to colleges and the CCTTs does little to foster collaboration among provinces and internationally, collaboration that is necessary to give Canadian businesses quicker access to the latest knowledge and technologies. With the ever-quicker race for strategic positioning in volatile markets today, this is an absolute must.

For this reason, the budget should include measures to:

- Enable colleges and CCTTs to work in networks both within Canada and internationally. It should be a priority to financially support the establishment of strategic networks for collaborative applied research in which Canadian colleges are the key players, but that allow the active participation and involvement of international and/or university and college researchers, whether they are in applied or basic research. Financial support should therefore be available for all the stages necessary for national and international collaboration, from the participation of researchers at conferences to the involvement of foreign researchers in Canadian research and Canadian researchers in work being done abroad.

2. Supporting families and helping vulnerable Canadians by focusing on health, education and training AND maximizing the number and types of jobs for Canadians

Because they are present throughout the province, in the regions and in urban centres, and also because they are a gateway to higher education that is more easily accessed than universities, colleges and their CCTTs (and Technology Access Centres, or TACs, in other provinces) provide Canadians with training and high-level knowledge that lead to high-quality, well-paid jobs that enable them to contribute actively to Canada's economic vitality.

Furthermore, colleges and their CCTTs that specialize in innovative social practices also work with local organizations (not-for-profits, associations, regions and community organizations) to provide assistance, find answers and develop intervention tools in the fields of health, education and training. Too little funding is currently available to support them in this facet of their work.

For this reason, the budget should include measures to:

- Fund college internships to provide a link between businesses and knowledge and research institutions, i.e. colleges and CCTTs.
- Develop financial assistance programs to allow researchers at colleges and CCTTs (and TACs elsewhere in Canada) working in the area of innovative social practices to work with communities that have limited financial resources but significant needs that have an impact on all of Canadian society. A program like this is currently being developed at the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), but is not yet in effect.

3. Ensuring prosperous and secure communities, including through support for infrastructure

Colleges and CCTTs possess high-end, state-of-the-art research infrastructure, which is necessary both for training and for providing innovative services to businesses.

For this reason, the budget should include measures to:

- Maintain the level of this infrastructure with the appropriate funding to allow access to new and continually updated equipment.
- Provide funding to colleges and CCTTs for indirect research costs so that they have the financial resources for optimal operation and maintenance of their infrastructure.

Lastly, it is important to stress how critical it is to include the salaries of professors and research professionals in the eligible expenditures for all financial assistance programs developed for colleges and their CCTTs. Because they do not receive the same level of remuneration as their university counterparts, it becomes impossible for these individuals to conduct research if their salaries are not partially subsidized.

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