



ABOUT THE COUNCIL: QUESTION & ANSWERS

1) What is the Council of Canadian Academies and what does it do?

The Council of Canadian Academies is an independent, not-for-profit corporation that began operation in 2005. The Council supports independent, authoritative, and evidence-based expert assessments that inform public policy development in Canada. Assessments are conducted by multidisciplinary panels of experts from across Canada and abroad.

The Council seeks to provide the best available scientific knowledge with the objective of informing debate and decision-making. The Council works with the federal government, provincial governments and other organizations or institutions interested in receiving evidence-based reports on issues of public interest.

2) What is an assessment?

Council assessments are conducted by multidisciplinary panels of experts from across Canada and abroad. They are evidence-based and the resulting reports provide analysis of the current state of an issue. Expert Panel's rely on the use of existing research to inform their assessment. Final reports are also descriptive and diagnostic, rather than policy prescriptive and where possible include expert judgment on matters of science, supported by the appropriate evidence. An assessment is initiated in response to a question submitted by a sponsor (the official requester).

The Council does not conduct peer reviewed research to complete its assessments.

3) What is the purpose or value of an assessment?

Through its assessments the Council seeks to provide the best available scientific knowledge with the objective of informing debate and decision-making. Council expert panels collect and assess existing evidence to identify emerging issues; gaps in knowledge; Canadian strengths and weaknesses; and international trends and practices. Upon completion, assessments provide government decision-makers, academia, and stakeholders with the evidence required to develop informed and innovative public policy.

It is important to note that the Council is an independent organization. To ensure the independence of the assessment process, the sponsor does not participate in the assessment process and does not review reports before their public release. In addition, all assessment reports undergo a rigorous formal report review process by expert peers to assure quality and objectivity. Lastly, as assessments address

issues of interest to public policy, sufficient time and scope are provided to allow to the panel to delve deeply into available evidence relevant to the topic and question. A typical assessment will be conducted by a panel of 10 to 15 experts and take up to 24 months to complete.

A Council assessment report will provide a sponsor with a robust, independent, authoritative assessment of the evidence on a particular topic.

4) How are Council assessments funded?

The Council received an endowment of \$30 million from the Government of Canada in 2005. Conditions on the use of these funds are set out in a formal funding agreement between the Council and the Government of Canada as represented by the Minister of Industry. In return for this funding, the Council conducts up to five assessments each year for the Government of Canada on topics proposed to the ADM Science and Technology Committee by various government departments and agencies.

The Council is also able to conduct assessments which are funded privately – outside the Council’s funding agreement with the Government of Canada.

5) How does the assessment process work?

An assessment is initiated in response to a question submitted by a sponsor (the official requester for the study) and is carried out by an independent, multidisciplinary panel of expert volunteers. The findings of an expert panel — i.e., the answers to the assessment question — are developed into a report which undergoes formal report review by expert peers to assure quality and objectivity. All assessment questions and the resulting reports, regardless of source, must be approved by the Council’s Board of Governors.

To protect the independence of the assessment process, sponsors do not participate in the assessment process, review drafts of the report, or propose any changes to the report before its publication. All final assessments are made available to the public free of charge via the Council’s website.

6) How much time is required to generate an assessment?

Timelines can fluctuate depending on the complexity of the question and the needs of the sponsor. However, a full assessment can be developed in approximately 18 to 24 months.

7) How does my department/agency sponsor a question?

Some assessment questions – up to five per year – are suggested by the Government of Canada, in accordance with the terms set out in its funding agreement with the Council. To participate in that competitive process government departments and agencies can compete in the bi-annual Call for Proposals process initiated by Industry Canada.

The Council may also conduct assessments outside this funding agreement. These assessments could be referred to the Council by provincial governments, foundations, universities, non-governmental organizations or the private sector.

All assessment questions and the resulting reports, regardless of source, must be approved by the Council's Board of Governors.

8) Do the expert panels consult with the sponsors?

In order to ensure the independence of the assessment process, the sponsor does not participate in the assessment process and does not review reports before their public release. However, to ensure a shared understanding of the questions, the expert panel may choose to meet with the sponsor at the start of the assessment process to clarify the scope of the question. The sponsor then receives the completed report and a briefing approximately one week before the report is publically released.

9) What other types of products and services does the Council offer?

The Council's main business is the completion of expert assessments - independent, authoritative, and evidence-based assessment reports that inform public policy development in Canada.

In the past the Council has also completed a reference report (a report, requested by a sponsor, that gathers evidence to assess a particular set of documents or a program – e.g., Arctic Research), expert reports (timely reports, initiated by the Council, that build on a past assessment report completed by the Council or by a Canadian or international academy – e.g., Digital Economy), and a workshop report (reports developed as a result of an evidence-gathering or a brainstorming workshop –e.g., report on IAP-Council workshop in Trieste).

10) How does the Council ensure its advice is timely?

The Council's role is to provide in-depth, evidence-based information. For many topics and issues it takes time to effectively sort through the mounds of information to produce a comprehensive, evidence-based, independent report. This is the key role the Council plays in the public policy sphere, and we will continue to play it for many years to come.

This said, the Council recognizes the increasing demand for instant information. As outlined in our strategic plan, and in consultation with its Board of Governors, the Council will look to supplement its core assessment work through the development of a select group of services that meet the more pressing needs of our sponsors.

11) How does the Council appoint its expert panels?

The Council, under the guidance of its Scientific Advisory Committee assembles each expert panel. The experts are selected for their diverse perspectives, areas of expertise, and broad representation of different disciplines, organizations, and geographical locations.

The Council's Member Academies are also involved in this process as Academy Presidents are invited to propose fellows to be considered for membership on a panel.

The Council's Board of Governors officially approves each expert panel. Members of Canada's academic and expert communities are welcome to submit their CVs to the Council's President for consideration for future panels.

12) What is the Council's policy regarding Conflict of Interest?

The Council requires that all panel members declare conflicts of interest at the time they sign on to participate as a panel member. The Council's Conflict of Interest Policy, which is shared with all panel members at the start of the assessment process, states:

The Council and its expert panels must meet the highest standards of independence to merit the trust of the scientific community, the government, and the public. To this end, the Council selects members for its expert panels who meet high standards of professional competence in their fields, and who collectively contribute to an expert panel that reasonably represents the spectrum of credible views on the question. However, panel members are likely to be affiliated with many organizations, businesses, and research activities, so it is not unusual for actual, foreseeable, or perceived conflicts of interest to exist or arise. Panel member disclosures allow the Council President and/or Chair of the expert panel to manage potential issues.

All panel members are required to submit a confidential disclosure of any possible conflicts to the Council of Canadian Academies. Note that the conflicts, if any, that are disclosed would not necessarily disqualify a member from serving on a panel. The purpose of disclosure is to enable steps to be taken, if possible and if necessary, to eliminate the impact of the conflict on the performance and credibility of the assessment. Actions that may be required include, for example, declaring a conflict situation to the other members of the Panel, or withdrawing from discussion and decision-making on a particular aspect of the expert panel's mandate. Panel members are requested to disclose to the Council President and/or Panel Chair any further conflicts of interest (actual, foreseeable, or perceived) that become apparent as the expert panel's work progresses.

The Council expects panel members to be responsible for their confidential disclosures. Panel members also have an opportunity at their first meeting to discuss any conflicts they may have. This helps to ensure transparency and accountability around the panel table.

13) Do expert panels get paid for their work?

All expert panel members serve pro bono (i.e. without fee or honoraria). Panel members are, however, reimbursed by the Council for their expenses.

14) Does the Council collaborate with other organizations, either internationally or in Canada?

The Council has important relationships with other organizations (internationally and domestically) who have an interest in science and policy. The Council is in regular contact with its founding Member Academies and other like-minded organizations. The Council also connects with international organizations such as the National Academies of Science (U.S.) and the Royal Society in the U.K. to share best practices.

ABOUT THE COUNCIL: QUESTION & ANSWERS *Cont.*

15) What kind of impact have Council assessments had?

To date, Council assessments have been well received. An external evaluation of the Council was conducted in 2009. The Evaluation Panel agreed without hesitation that the Council is providing value by informing public debate and decision-making in Canada. It was also noted that the Council's assessments, although only recently produced, have already had significant impact and will continue to be relevant well into the future. Council assessments have been used in the development of federal strategies, research programs, and as expert resource material for the scientific community.

16) Can I receive advance copies of Council reports?

The Council follows a strict process and therefore does not provide advance copies of its reports. When Council reports are officially launched, they are available for download, free of charge from the Council's website and can be found under the completed assessments tab.

17) Is the Council part of the Government of Canada?

No. The Council is an independent organization. Through a funding agreement with the Government of Canada the Council conducts independent, authoritative, and evidence-based expert assessments that are based on questions that have come from federal departments and/or agencies.

18) What is the difference between the Council and the Science, Technology, and Innovation Council (STIC)?

The Council of Canadian Academies is an independent, not-for-profit corporation that began operation in 2005. It supports independent, authoritative, and evidence-based expert assessments that inform public policy development in Canada.

The Council is not a part of the federal government. However, the Council does work with the federal government, provincial governments and other organizations or institutions interested in receiving evidence-based reports on issues of public interest.

Council assessments are studies conducted by multidisciplinary panels of experts from across Canada and abroad. The Council's expert panels collect and assess existing evidence to identify emerging issues; gaps in knowledge; Canadian strengths and weaknesses; and international trends and practices.

An assessment is initiated in response to a question submitted by a sponsor (the official requester for the study). The Council is able to take on questions that encompass the natural, social and health sciences, engineering and the humanities.

Upon completion, assessments are made public and provide government decision-makers, academia, and stakeholders with the evidence required to develop informed and innovative public policy.

ABOUT THE COUNCIL: QUESTION & ANSWERS *Cont.*

The Council's evidence-based studies and the resulting reports are descriptive and diagnostic, rather than prescriptive and do not contain policy recommendations. Finally, all assessment reports undergo a rigorous report review process by expert peers to assure quality and objectivity.

The Science, Technology and Innovation Council (STIC)

The Science, Technology and Innovation Council is an advisory body that provides the Government of Canada with external policy advice on science and technology issues, and produces regular national reports that measure Canada's science and technology performance against international standards of excellence. It consists of a Chair and 17 members whose work is supported by a secretariat housed within Industry Canada. STIC reports directly to the Minister of Industry and appointments to STIC are made by government.

Its mandate is to provide the Government of Canada with evidence-based science and technology advice (not simply evidence or the facts) on issues critical to Canada's economic development and Canadians' social well-being. On a regular basis, STIC produces national reports that measure Canada's science and technology performance against international standards of excellence.