

Summary of the Evaluation of ISED Funding to Mitacs

Audit and Evaluation Branch
Senior Management Committee – May 2022



About the Program

Mitacs is a national, not-for-profit organization that provides paid work-integrated learning (WIL) opportunities, and professional skills training, to students and postdoctoral fellows through multi-sectoral partnerships with academia (domestic and international) across all disciplines.

Mitacs was created as a Network of Centres of Excellence in 1999 to support applied and industrial research in mathematics and related academic disciplines. Mitacs launched its first research internship program in 2003 that was designed to increase the deployment of post-secondary graduates into the private sector.

It broadened the eligibility criteria of its research internship program in 2007 to include all academic disciplines. In 2018-19, Mitacs broadened its internship eligibility criteria to include college and polytechnic students and in 2020-21 further expanded its partnering organization eligibility to include municipalities and hospitals.

Mitacs established its first partnership with ISED in the form of a funding agreement of \$35 million over five years, beginning in 2012-13 to 2016-17. ISED funding to Mitacs was renewed and expanded to \$220.5 million over five years in 2017-18 to increase internships for Canadian students at post-secondary institutions and deliver professional skills training.



What did the Evaluation examine?

An evaluation of Mitacs was required under the *Financial Administration Act* and covered the period from 2016-17 to 2020-21.

The evaluation examined the relevance, performance and efficiency of ISED funding to Mitacs in accordance with the Treasury Board Secretariat Policy on Results. The evaluation was conducted in-house by the Audit and Evaluation Branch at ISED and used a results-based approach which examined the achievement of expected outcomes.

The following evaluation questions were addressed:

Relevance

1. To what extent is there a continued need to support work-integrated learning (WIL) in Canada and how does Mitacs uniquely address this need?

Performance

2. To what extent have Mitacs WIL opportunities contributed to improving the employability of post-secondary students and postdoctoral fellows?

3. To what extent have Mitacs WIL opportunities contributed to attracting post-secondary students and postdoctoral fellows, as well as retaining them within Canada's workforce?

4. To what extent have Mitacs WIL opportunities contributed to:
a) increasing the nature and extent of research linkages with Canadian and international partners?
b) increasing partnering companies' investments in industrial research, development and innovation?

Efficiency

5. To what extent is the Mitacs delivery model an efficient approach for providing WIL opportunities to post-secondary students and postdoctoral fellows?

The evaluation was based on four data collection methods, including qualitative and quantitative sources.



Literature and
Document Review



Performance, Administrative
and Financial Data Review



Virtual Interviews



Online Surveys

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What did the Evaluation find?

The assessment of **relevance** led to two evaluation findings that concluded there is a continued need to support WIL opportunities and Mitacs addresses a unique need in the WIL landscape in Canada.

Finding 1: There is a continued need to support work-integrated learning (WIL) in order to develop work-ready talent in Canada. The demand for WIL has evolved over the years but barriers to access exist for certain post-secondary student populations. The COVID-19 pandemic has also heightened the need for virtual WIL opportunities.

Finding 2: Mitacs delivers flexible internship programs that align with federal government priorities and address the continued need for in-person and virtual WIL, across Canada's economic sectors and diverse student population. Its focus on building partnerships between post-secondary institutions and industry to facilitate knowledge transfer is unique relative to other entities that deliver WIL opportunities in Canada. Mitacs internships are uniquely focused on solving business and societal challenges in an effort to increase innovation in Canada.

The evaluation led to three findings in the assessment of **performance** which demonstrated that Mitacs continues to make progress in achieving its expected outcomes related to skills development, talent retention, and supporting R&D and innovation in Canada.

Finding 3: Mitacs helps improve the employment potential of post-secondary students and postdoctoral fellows through its match-making business approach, which is based on a national and global talent pool. Its WIL programs enable post-secondary talent to develop industry-relevant skills that help increase their employment prospects. Virtual learning, in response to COVID-19, has enabled Mitacs to expand participant reach and capacity in regards to its professional skills training that are complementary to its WIL programs.

Finding 4: Mitacs has attracted a growing number of post-secondary talent to WIL opportunities in Canadian organizations. It expanded its business development team to help respond to the increased demand for its WIL programs, including in priority areas such as artificial intelligence and quantum computing. Post-secondary talent have leveraged their Mitacs WIL experiences to secure employment in Canadian organizations or remain in Canada to pursue further education. Mitacs helped develop talent during the COVID-19 pandemic by pivoting to virtual WIL but it is too early to assess the impact of this pivot on talent attraction and retention in Canada.

Finding 5: Expanding the Accelerate program's eligibility criteria has helped Mitacs increase the nature of its research linkages with partnering organizations, including with start-up companies. Mitacs WIL opportunities have demonstrated results in broader innovation, government priority R&D areas, and addressing industry challenges that impact underrepresented communities. Mitacs WIL programs have also helped increase industry R&D investments in Canada.

In assessing the **efficiency** of program delivery, the evaluation led to two findings which highlighted the efficient approach of strategic partnerships and the co-funding model to support the delivery of WIL opportunities in Canada.

Finding 6: The current delivery model enables Mitacs to establish strategic partnerships with other players to improve efficiency of its WIL programs, reach diverse student populations, and support priority R&D and innovation areas. Mitacs' partnership with ISED helps the organization leverage funding from industry and provincial governments, and is an efficient approach to delivering WIL opportunities across Canada.

Finding 7: Mitacs has demonstrated efforts to improve efficiency by leveraging strategic partnerships to minimize administrative burden, and adopting digital technology to modernize its operational processes, which can help optimize program delivery and facilitate data collection as Mitacs continues to expand.

The evaluation identified one **lesson learned** related to demographic data considerations during the planning of new programming.

Lesson learned: Plans for how demographic data will be collected and disaggregated should be established early in the development of any new programming. This will help ensure that data is readily disaggregated and accessible, particularly as Mitacs continues to expand its programming.