

Report to Senate
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Report to Senate of the Vice President, Research

1. Understanding the research system: What is the General Research Fund (GRF)?

As mandated by the federal Tri-Agencies, a GRF is “a special account opened as a trust account under the authority of the president of the post-secondary institution (or his/her authorized delegate), into which the unspent funds of expired or terminated grants are transferred with the authorization of the granting agencies.”

The purpose or objective of the GRF is “to reinvest unspent funds from previous years in order to support research in the fields of natural sciences and engineering or social sciences and humanities, as applicable. Funds from the GRF may be used to provide small start-up grants to new professors, bridge funding to professors who are between applications, or additional funds for professors to support their research.” (Guidelines for the General Research Fund).

In short: SSHRC and NSERC grant funds that are not spent out by the end of the project timeline go into the University’s GRF, whence they are used to support research activities at the institution. Various research support programs and internal allocations at Brock are funded through GRF.

When grant funds are moved into the GRF, researchers will often make a request to the VPR to continue having personal access to an equivalent amount, to continue the activities encompassed by the original project. These requests are typically accommodated, with the understanding that the extended access is for a limited time and for specific stated purposes. It is rare that an additional extension is granted.

The GRF is only available to an institution if it has spent at least 50% of the previous year’s balance. Otherwise, the federal agencies make the reasonable judgement that the institution doesn’t really need or have plans for the money carried on its GRF books, and will withhold further transfer or require reimbursement from the university. For this reason, extensions for personal access to funds in GRF have to be short-term limited, and are conducted under a well-defined plan to spend out the money. The institution can’t afford to have elements of the GRF locked up in multi-year commitments; it needs the flexibility to get the funds off the books and into research supporting programs.

Sometimes grant funds end up unspent because unforeseen circumstances arise. It is difficult but not entirely impossible to make plans for the unexpected. For example, if for some reason I cannot attend some of the research conferences that I’ve budgeted for, I

should be prepared to send a postdoc or grad student instead, rather than have that money accumulate with no specific subsequent use in mind. On the other hand, sometimes funds are unspent because researchers accustomed to scarcity are understandably reluctant to spend out resources. While this may be a prudential approach in personal finances, the domain of funded research is quite different: the money is for using, not for saving. Some realistic planning and forethought about contingencies can help ensure that research grants are used efficiently, and within the timelines for which they are approved.

2. Strategic Plan (Research) implementations in progress 2018-19

- Streamlining and rationalizing the administration of internal research processes: e.g., revised Match of Minds program, CFI-JELF competitions, CRC calls; Distinguished Researcher
- Taking a planned approach to increased research intensity:
 - identifying opportunities for gains and putting resources in place to support
 - promoting consistency in internal support across areas of research and external funding providers (e.g., CIHR '4A')
- External review to identify research IP with potential for commercialization
 - Funding specialists on contract to market promising IP
- Updating and upgrading programs and facilities related to animal-based research
- Improving research support processes and procedures: documenting process, purchasing enterprise system.
 - RFP for enterprise system currently out for tender
- Updating and rationalizing documents, agreements, and priorities statements for CRC and CFI
- Systematizing grant support: e.g., budgeting for matching commitments; reserving funds to support Indigenous research, Canada Summer Games
- Initiating a strategic, principled, and sustainable approach to institutional support for research centres and institutes.
- Institutional support for major grant applications, including CFI-JELF, SSHRC Partnership Grants, and FedDev
- Promoting both an internal conversation and external reputation-building around research: e.g., the Research Excellence Celebration, and new researcher profile video.
- Developing single point of contact/portal for industry and community approaches to Brock for research and innovation purposes
- Developing internal research support request web portal
- Increasing research capacity through infrastructure, including matching commitments for equipment purchases and Brock Research Farm

3. Brock LINC update

The LINC Operations Group has now been augmented with the addition of LINC Liaisons from each Faculty. The evolving model for LINC programming centres on two intertwined programs of creativity and entrepreneurship. One is Kickstart, inspired by the Kickstart

Entrepreneurship program developed in BioLinc, an admissions-based program of curricular and co-curricular study that provides immersive experience, expert mentorship, and business development support to entrepreneurial and innovation-minded students, building towards business incubator opportunities. The other, tentatively titled Passport, is an open program of co-curricular activities and sessions, some shared with Kickstart, many drawn from activities and events in all Faculties, the Library, Centres, and Institutes. Passport creates opportunities for students to tailor and receive credentialing for engaging academic events, advanced technological skills, and entrepreneurship education that links their creative and innovative ambitions with their academic interests and training. The Operations Group continues to work with cross-campus partners on integrated programming.

4. President of SSHRC, March 25 visit

On March 25, Brock University hosted Dr. Ted Hewitt, President of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. Dr. Hewitt met with the Dean of Graduate Studies and the VP and AVP Research to discuss institutional strategic priorities regarding SSHRC-based research. A range of SSHRC-funded and prize-winning graduate students, researchers, and Canada Research Chairs held a working lunch and roundtable discussion with Dr. Hewitt to share their experiences and recommendations.

Coinciding with this visit was an open celebration of Brock University's SSHRC-based research, with welcome presentations by local Members of Parliament Vance Badawey (Niagara Centre) and Chris Bittle (St. Catharines). In addition to descriptions of the work of a range of SSHRC-funded research and projects, attendees saw research presentations on two team projects undertaking community-engaged research: Dr. Kimberley Monk and her team's investigation of the Shickluna Shipyard site in St. Catharines, and Dr. Julia Baird (Canada Research Chair, Human Dimensions of Water Resources and Water Resilience, ESRC) and her team's partnership with the Niagara Parks Commission, investigating alternatives in measuring outcomes of environmental stewardship.