

Funding for Post-Secondary Infrastructure across Canada

The Knowledge Infrastructure Program (KIP) is a \$2 billion economic stimulus measure to support facility enhancement at post-secondary institutions across Canada. The program is a major component of the total \$12 billion in new infrastructure investment under Canada's Economic Action Plan.

The university component of the program gives preference to projects that improve the quality of research and development at the applicant university. The college component supports proposals that enhance institutional capacity to deliver advanced knowledge and skills training.

New campus facilities are critical for meeting the emerging space, technological, and program needs of students. Old buildings need renovations for accommodating new approaches to student learning, technologies, and class size. Approximately 65 per cent of useable space at universities is over 30 years old and is under-utilized.

A total of 79 Canadian universities have undertaken 183 campus infrastructure projects with a value of \$3.2 billion from federal, provincial and other sources. The Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada noted that through federal and provincial cooperation, this program has been an outstanding success.

In late December of 2010, the deadline for the completion of projects under the program was extended from March 2011 to October 2011. The extension will allow institutions that are facing costly winter construction requirements or unexpected delays to finish before the new funding deadline.

In their 2011 Ontario Pre-Budget Submission, the Council of Ontario Universities notes that investing in academic infrastructure has significant benefits for the 29 communities across the province in which universities are located.

It is estimated that the joint federal - provincial infrastructure program of the past two years created over 11,000 jobs, increased local revenue and generated spinoff benefits for supplier companies that provide material and services to construction projects. The Association of Canadian Community Colleges noted that along with creating jobs, the KIP has assisted post-secondary institutions in upgrading their facilities for education in the advanced skills needed for Canada's future economic prosperity.

Academic infrastructure investments also advance the learning and research environments for students and faculty, enhance the national capacity to attract the best students, and provide venues for diverse community, cultural and social activities.

The Association of Canadian Community Colleges, in their August 2010 pre-budget submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance, also noted that the KIP was welcomed by colleges. Expanding access to advanced skills by increasing college capacity is a necessary step to a sustainable economic future.

Unfortunately, colleges continue to experience student enrollment limitations. Tens of thousands of qualified students are denied admissions or relegated to waiting lists. With expanded resources, many more students could acquire the skills required by employers.

Mike Lazaridis, President and Co-CEO of Research in Motion, has noted that Canada's future economic prosperity is directly linked to the ability of our universities to nurture highly skilled talent. Canadian students, according to Lazaridis, go on to build the industry, institutions and society of our country – that is real commercialization.

Based on the relative success of the KIP and importance of the skills development portfolio for the national business sector, the federal government, preferably in partnership with the provinces and territories, should ensure long-term infrastructure funding for post-secondary institutions.

Recommendation

To ensure post-secondary institutions across Canada have sufficient infrastructure, both new and renovated, to address the growing number of students entering the system over the next five years, the Knowledge Infrastructure Program (KIP) should be extended.

Submitted by the Greater Kitchener Waterloo Chamber of Commerce

The Special Issues Committee does not support this resolution because it calls for federal stimulus funding to be extended at a time when we are calling on the federal government to wind up its economic stimulus programs. The resolution also calls for continued federal support for infrastructure that also receives provincial/territorial support.

The Economic Policy Committee strongly concurs with the Special Issues Committee, particularly when the Canadian Chamber has called on the federal government to balance its books in the medium term. Additionally, the resolution does not provide any data on the size of the post-secondary institution infrastructure deficit, whether it has closed as a result of the recent fiscal stimulus spending, and how much additional money is required going forward. Finally, a case has not been made for why infrastructure projects should get a larger share of public spending compared to, for example, improving access to post-secondary education – particularly for under-representative groups – and enhancing the quality of programs and learning experience.

The Innovation Committee supports this resolution.