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SSHRC joins TAP to streamline participation in international research projects

Opportunities for Canadian social sciences and humanities researchers to collaborate with their international peers is about to get a lot easier with the formation of a new organization designed to streamline the application process and maximize the impact of multinational research projects .

The Trans-Atlantic Platform (TAP) was formed in late 2013 with €1.5 million Euros over three years from the European Commission to facilitate meetings and provide administrative support. Its 16 member organizations have already met three times to scope out research themes and develop interagency sharing of peer review, new types of programs and funding mechanisms.

The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) will be coordinating North American participation while the Dutch Netherland Organisation for Scientific Research will handle European participants (see chart).

"From a research point-of-view, there's increasing interest in international research and there aren't a lot of good structures for doing this," says Dr Ted Hewitt, SSHRC's executive VP and COO. "The platform will allow for joint calls, one peer review and one decision on funding."

Hewitt stresses that the various national components of joint research projects will be funded by research agencies in the respective participating countries. SSHRC participation in TAP won't take away from existing funding pools but will instead provide funding to researchers who happen to be participating in international research.

There are several pan-European research networks but they don't feature joint calls for proposals. In Canada, SSHRC's sister agencies — Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council and Canadian Institutes of Health Research — have programs with similar objectives but they are limited to one-to-one arrangements.

One of the models TAP has drawn upon is the international Dig into Data initiative which has held several "challenges" to marshal support for data and big data research initiatives.

TAP PARTNERS
Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC)
São Paulo Research Foundation (Brazil)
Deutsches Zentrum für Luft- und Raumfahrt (Germany)
Academy of Finland (AKA)
International Social Science Council (France)
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"TAP is like a trans-Atlantic version of Digging into Data, It's a great model," says Hewitt. "We're looking at its methodology as well as other projects."

If TAP launches joint calls for projects such as big data which involve non-SSHRC disciplines, Hewitt says other funding bodies such as NSERC could be invited to participate.

So far, TAP has received overwhelming support from Canadian researchers who are attracted to joint funding opportunities especially if they are linked to existing funding mechanisms.

"Most disciplines want to do this ... TAP is unique to Canada. (It's) more than a funding opportunity," says Hewitt. "The beauty of the model is that we don't allocate to the program. People will apply through existing programs to a (TAP) project with a single peer review ... There's lots of demand. Before this program, it was frustrating (to engage in international research projects)."

Hewitt says TAP holds considerable leverage potential to increase the research funding pool by bringing in more funding sources both in Canada and other countries. If successful, he says there will be more research calls.

At each of TAP's meetings, workshops are held with researchers and interested parties who then present to the steering committee — a grassroots approach that gives administrators quick access to emerging areas for cross-border collaboration.

The next TAP meeting will take place in Washington DC in January with a possible meeting in Canada in spring 2015 during the annual Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences organized by the Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences, which this year is taking place at the University of Ottawa.

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