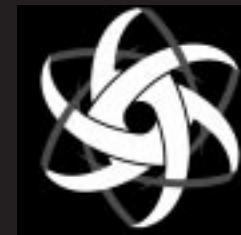


Final Report of the  
External Review  
Committee on

Canadian Policy  
Research  
Networks Inc.

December 1998



December 23, 1998

The Board of Directors  
Canadian Policy Research Networks Inc.  
Suite 600 - 250 Albert Street  
Ottawa, ON K1P 6M1

Attention: Mrs. Judith Maxwell

It is my pleasure to present this final report of the External Review Committee on Canadian Policy Research Networks Inc.

We have made every effort to ensure that this review is comprehensive and assesses all key elements of CPRN's work and influence.

On behalf of the Committee, I would like to thank you and your staff for their assistance in compiling the statistics and other information that were essential to our task.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert D. Brown". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

Robert D. Brown, FCA  
Chairman, External Review Committee  
on Canadian Policy Research Networks Inc.

And on behalf of Committee Members,

Susan A. McDaniel  
George Thomson

Attach.

*Aussi disponible en français.*

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# Executive Summary

CPRN's extensive documentation of its activities, which the External Review Committee reviewed, and, more importantly, the views of its stakeholders confirmed to the Committee that CPRN has succeeded in its core mission of influencing and helping a diverse array of people and organizations within the public policy community.

- Its multidisciplinary approach to shared learning and collaboration and the creation of a neutral space have meant that CPRN has advanced policy thinking in Canada in a consensual and credible manner.
- The use of broadly based networks has provided a highly effective structure to draw in research expertise and a wide spectrum of organizations and individuals concerned about public policy issues.

Overall, CPRN has made a significant, positive contribution to the examination of social and economic issues in Canada.

## Sources of Success

*CPRN's value added is in the production of practical knowledge that is not urgent but that transforms priorities and thinking through the creation of an enlarged perspective for policy debates and decisions.*

*Senior federal official*

Please note that text boxes in the report do not contain direct quotes, but are paraphrases of comments made by stakeholders.

In CPRN's four-year existence, it has become recognized as an important player in the public policy community because of its ability to anticipate important policy issues and facilitate broad discussions that enlarge the scope of the debate and

move policy thinking forward. CPRN accomplishes this by playing a critical facilitation role among stakeholders and via an original research contribution. There is a synergy between these roles that is an essential component of the organization's success.

The widely shared view of the 42 stakeholders who were interviewed in the course of this evaluation is that CPRN's work does add value within the public policy community in Canada. The organization's ability to draw on a broad array

of research expertise, its focus on processes of inquiry that are inclusive and consensual and that move policy discussion into new spaces and dimensions, its willingness to let the processes of inquiry dictate research outcomes, and its ability to bridge methodological gaps and perspectives within the policy community are critical in the organization's ability to contribute to policy discussions. All of those interviewed believe that CPRN does add value through its work and activities. This speaks well to the organization's ability to relate in a meaningful way to its diverse stakeholder groups.

## Recommendations

CPRN is, however, a young organization and is still very much a work-in-progress. It is continuing to evolve in response to the needs of society and its stakeholders, and must continue to recognize the need for change. Our main recommendations are as follows:

1. The testimony of existing provincial, corporate and foundation funders highlights the value added that CPRN can offer these sectors. CPRN should work over the long term to encourage these sectors to support the organization on a continuous basis. The Committee also recommends that CPRN develop and pursue a long-term strategy that will lead to greater balance among its sources of funding, while fully recognizing that the current climate of funding places limits on such a strategy. Elements of the strategy might include:
  - greater dialogue with the provinces, recognizing that provincial funding will change slowly;
  - involvement of more provincial people;
  - improved contacts with the private sector and foundations; and
  - some focus on mini-projects that might encourage greater support from the private sector and foundations.
2. The Committee recommends that CPRN consider carefully its future funding options in relation to its long-term mission and strategy. There are two ways to create risk capital that provides security, ensures organizational growth and permits long-term planning:
  - CPRN could seek a one-time capital commitment as an equivalent replacement for adequate annual core funding; or
  - CPRN could seek long-term annual commitments for risk capital, to ultimately replace current core funding commitments.In any case, CPRN needs to build, in cooperation with certain funders, a capital fund to enable it to manage risks and make strategic investments.
3. The Committee recommends that CPRN invest more resources in sustaining its connections to stakeholders. For example, it should regularly review its mailing lists to ensure that important stakeholders are aware of and receive relevant publications in a consistent and timely manner. Where projects are delayed, interim progress reports might be issued to address the concerns of funders and others for whom timeliness is a critical issue, and every effort should be made to speed

the delivery of the final report. We also recommend that CPRN consider a variety of short pieces and brief publications that would help to make the work more accessible to senior executives, senior government officials, academics and leaders of community organizations.

4. The Committee recommends that CPRN, and Judith Maxwell in particular, attempt to broaden CPRN's reach into the informed public. This could be achieved in part through a greater "op-ed" presence in the national and local media. It is essential that this greater presence reflect CPRN's relatively neutral and consensual approach to inquiry, based upon the shared learning that has occurred, and not take the form of advocacy. We also suggest greater efforts to build a "corporate identity" for CPRN so that the organization is more clearly identified to users.
5. The Committee recommends that CPRN develop greater depth in key senior positions to ensure the continuity of its work when the inevitable transitions arise, and to bring more senior staff time to the broader issues of review and supervision. The first and most important action is to hire a Vice-President with broad organization-wide responsibilities to support the current President.
6. The Committee recommends that an independent Chair should be appointed to head the Board, to improve the Board's oversight role and input capacities and to ensure its independence. We also recommend that representation on the Board be broadened to take full advantage of the interests, experiences and skills of those with an interest in CPRN and its activities. In addition, the Board should explicitly address Board governance issues in its work, based on current guidelines for nonprofit organizations, and should consider an increased role in CPRN's fundraising activities.
7. For an organization such as CPRN, it is important to take risks in research to stay on the cutting edge. While it is inevitable that such a strategy occasionally will produce some delays in research deliverables and some failures, the Committee believes that taking risks to move policy debates forward is a defining characteristic of CPRN. We recommend that CPRN continue to diversify its portfolio of research projects and continue to include research projects that are defined by potentially high risks and high returns. At the same time, the organization should develop a strategy to ensure that funders and partners are educated to this reality.

8. The Committee recommends that CPRN develop a long-run strategy of education and outreach, including more regional events, to assure stakeholders of its independence from the federal government and its neutrality in matters that concern both levels of government. It is also essential to continue the efforts being made to increase Quebec participation.

*What would happen if there were no CPRN in Canada? We would have to invent it. It performs well a necessary function that is not well performed by many.*

*Academic researcher*

Achieving excellence will require the right organizational structure, the right people, superior management and leadership skills, and an uncanny ability to anticipate important policy issues and stay on the leading edge of policy thinking. CPRN's capacity to become an even stronger, more influential and ever-

relevant contributor to policy thinking and debates is in place. Its ability to reach its potential is dependent on stable support and funding.

# Preface

This evaluation report is presented to the Board of Directors of Canadian Policy Research Networks Inc. in support of the Board's obligation to submit to the federal government a review of CPRN. This review is required with respect to the renewal of CPRN's core funding agreement. The report may also be useful to the Board in setting CPRN's strategic direction, and to other funders and stakeholders.

The terms of reference for the review included assessment of the following dimensions of CPRN's activities and positions:

- ✓ performance in relation to stated goals
- ✓ contribution to shared learning
- ✓ breadth and effectiveness of external funding sources
- ✓ financial management and viability of the organization
- ✓ quality and quantity of collaborative relationships within the policy community
- ✓ quality and quantity of research, judged by technical merit, relevance and contribution to public debate
- ✓ likely future direction and staffing of the organization
- ✓ potential development of CPRN in light of Canada's needs for policy research, change agents and knowledge creation in the next five years.

The members of the External Review Committee wish to thank all of those within CPRN who agreed to be interviewed and who shared their knowledge of the organization's workings. We also extend our special thanks and gratitude to the more than 40 stakeholders who gave generously of their time, out of busy schedules, and offered invaluable insights into CPRN's reach and influence within the policy community. We acknowledge with gratitude the strong contribution of Art Stewart, who conducted the interviews and worked with the Committee in the preparation of this report. His contribution has been invaluable. We also appreciate Joanne Godin's assistance in editing the final version of this report.

## External Review

### Committee Members

**Robert D. Brown, FCA (Chair)** Robert Brown is currently the Clifford Clark Visiting Economist in the Department of Finance in the Government of Canada. He is Past Chair and Chief Executive Officer of Price Waterhouse where, during his 40-year career with the firm, he was involved not only in management, tax consulting and public accounting, but in corporate governance and the interrelationship of business and government. Mr. Brown has had a special interest in taxation throughout his career and has been an advisor to many of Canada's largest corporations, as well as working with federal and provincial governments on taxation policy issues. He has been a member of many business organizations and has served on a number of government boards and task forces dealing with a diverse array of issues. Mr. Brown is currently serving as a member of a task force established by the Voluntary Sector Roundtable to review governance and accountability in nonprofit organizations. His special interest in corporate governance issues is reflected in his membership on the TSE Committee on Corporate Governance (the Dey Committee), and as a writer and speaker on governance matters. He is a past Chairman of the C. D. Howe Institute and the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants, and is also a director of the Institute of Corporate Directors.

**Susan A. McDaniel, FRSC** Susan McDaniel is currently Professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Alberta. She is the author or co-author of over 150 book chapters, research reports, and articles on such topics as gender and family, social policy, demography, aging, and the sociology of health and illness. In 1994, she was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada – the highest honour Canada bestows for lifetime achievement in scholarly work. Dr. McDaniel has served as Chair or member of several national and international committees, including the Canada Committee for the International Year of the Family. She is presently Chair of the Advisory Committee on Science and Technology and is a member of the National Statistics Council. Her current research is on demographic aging and social policy, intergenerational transfers and linkages, and on women's citizenship in Western democracies and globalization. Dr. McDaniel is a member of a number of professional associations, in addition to the Royal Society of Canada.

**George Thomson** George Thomson is currently Special Advisor to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada. At the federal government level, he has also served as Deputy Minister of Justice and Deputy Attorney General of Canada. Mr. Thomson began his career in the Faculty of Law at the University of Western Ontario, where he was Assistant Dean of the Law School. He has served as Judge in the Provincial Court, Province of Ontario, and as Director of Education for the Law Society of Upper Canada. During this period, Mr. Thomson chaired the provincial committee that produced the Ontario report entitled *Transitions*, dealing with social welfare reform. Mr. Thomson has also served the Province of Ontario as Associate Deputy Minister of Community and Social Services, Deputy Minister of Citizenship, Deputy Minister of Labour, and Ontario Deputy Attorney General.

**Arthur Stewart, Secretary to the Committee** Arthur Stewart is the Principal of Arthur E. Stewart Research, a consulting practice specializing in economic, social and health policy, public policy research and analysis, report preparation and the planning and management of research projects and conferences. He is also Adjunct Instructor at the Department of Economics and the School of Policy Studies at Queen's University. Mr. Stewart has planned, organized and executed, for Queen's University, major research conferences on issues such as labour market polarization and transportation policy. He helped create the Operations and Research unit in the School of Policy Studies, which has become a nationally recognized centre of excellence in the study of public policy. In addition to research undertaken as a consultant and with the University of Western Ontario, Mr. Stewart has served as a member of an Expert Panel for the Ministries of Health of the provinces and territories. The Panel evaluated a proposal to construct a blood fractionation plant in Canada. He has edited conference proceedings and is the author of numerous book chapters, reports and studies.

The External Review Committee also wishes to acknowledge the contribution of **John Tait**, Senior Advisor to the Privy Council Office and Coordinator of Security and Intelligence. John participated in the early stages of the evaluation, but was unable to continue for health reasons. He was replaced by George Thomson.

# 1. Summary Profile of CPRN and Conclusion of the Review Committee

The profile of CPRN begins with the organization's mission statement, general philosophical approach to research inquiry, and key stakeholders, as reported in the documentation provided to the Review Committee. We then provide an initial look at CPRN's accomplishments since its creation in 1994, and examine the reasons for the organization's success.

## Mission and Philosophy

CPRN creates knowledge and leads public debate on social and economic issues important to Canadians. Its goal is to help make Canada a more just, prosperous and caring society. To make a difference, CPRN must have an impact on policy, and demonstrate an ability to influence the way citizens think about themselves and their country.

CPRN is a research organization with a mission to provide the analytical foundations for good public policy. It is committed to a high standard of inquiry, and open-minded about where the analysis will lead. To provide the analytical foundations for good public policy, CPRN must develop and consider evidence from many kinds of inquiry and from many different perspectives in society. Thus the research is both qualitative and quantitative, and the findings are distilled through an open and inclusive dialogue with diverse stakeholder groups. To link all these perspectives together, CPRN must play an intermediary role and create the synthesis that makes research accessible to policymakers; it also provides the neutral space where experts from many perspectives can speak frankly to each other. To sustain this openness, CPRN must nurture collaborative relationships with an extraordinary number of individuals and organizations. Thus the research involves a sustained commitment to shared learning that permeates a project from its conception to its completion.

## Stakeholders

CPRN's three main client groups are:

- public policymakers and policy advisors,
- researchers, and
- affected stakeholders in the private and nonprofit sectors.

## Conclusion of the Committee

Indicators of success will be:

- a) for policymakers and their advisors: participation in CPRN activities, use of CPRN work in policy making, and the inclusion of CPRN people in key activities associated with policy making;
- b) for researchers: readiness to participate in CPRN activities, and the quality of journal articles, books, and working papers flowing from CPRN work; participation of CPRN members in academic activities; and
- c) for engaged communities in the nonprofit and private sectors: sustained interaction with people in the community, advocacy groups, industry, unions, and health care providers, whose lives will be affected by CPRN's work.

If CPRN is successful in percolating new ideas and challenging the status quo, its research will be relevant to the needs of society and CPRN's stakeholders, will generate informed debate, and will expand useful knowledge. Success is not judged by popularity, but by innovation and the ability to be on the cutting edge.

CPRN's extensive documentation of its activities, which we reviewed, and more importantly, the views of its stakeholders confirm to the External Review Committee that CPRN has succeeded in its core mission of influencing and helping a diverse array of people and organizations within the public policy community. Its multidisciplinary approach to shared learning and collaboration and the creation of a neutral space have meant that CPRN has advanced policy thinking in Canada in a consensual and credible manner. The use of broadly based networks has provided a highly effective structure to draw in research expertise and a wide spectrum of organizations and individuals concerned about public policy issues. Overall, CPRN has made a significant, positive contribution to the examination of social and economic issues in Canada.

## Sources of Success

Goals achievement is a work-in-progress, and organizational improvement and adaptability is a continuous process. In CPRN's four-year existence, it has become recognized as an important player in the public policy community because of its ability to anticipate important policy issues and facilitate broad discussions that enlarge the scope of the debate and move policy thinking forward. A key element of this success is the organization's ability to move discussions away from traditional

foundations and create new spaces and frameworks for dialogue and debate. CPRN accomplishes this by playing a critical facilitation role among stakeholders and via an original research contribution. There is a synergy between these roles that is an essential component of the organization's success. Among the stakeholders interviewed, the Health Network's innovative conceptual approach to population health, the Family Network's dialogues on social cohesion and the society that Canadians want, the Work Network's examination of the future of work, and the project on the social union, among many others, were cited as evidence of CPRN's ability to create new frameworks for discussion that added value and moved thinking forward.

In addition, CPRN's original research in all three networks was cited frequently by those interviewed as timely, relevant and important in providing evidence-based insights into important issues. Examples include the research conducted into the economic costs of HIV/AIDS, which is regarded as an important piece of evidence in the formulation of government thinking and strategies to deal with a disease that is costly in both human and economic terms. The Family Network's project on the values of Canadians and the Work Network's research into Human Resources in Government were also cited by respondents as important pieces of original work.

It is clear from the interviews conducted that CPRN is considered to be unique within the public policy research community. Many of those interviewed observed that CPRN's processes of inquiry are as important as the outcomes of its activities, and are what makes the organization a unique observer and facilitator of important public policy issues. The quality of the organization's leadership, as embodied in Judith Maxwell, is beyond question, and those leadership qualities are shared, in general, by the network directors and research fellows.

*CPRN's value added is in the production of practical knowledge that is not urgent but that transforms priorities and thinking through the creation of an enlarged perspective for policy debates and decisions.*

*Senior federal official*

The widely shared view of the stakeholders who were interviewed in the course of this evaluation is that CPRN's work does add value within the public policy community in Canada. The organization's ability to draw on a broad array of research expertise, its focus on processes of inquiry that are inclusive and consensual and that move policy discussion into new spaces and dimensions, its willingness to let the processes of inquiry dictate research outcomes, and its ability to bridge methodological gaps and perspectives within the policy community are

critical in the organization's ability to add value in policy discussions. All of those interviewed believe that CPRN does add value through its work and activities. This speaks well to the organization's ability to relate in a meaningful way to its diverse stakeholder groups.

CPRN is, however, a young organization and is still very much a work-in-progress. It is continuing to evolve in response to the needs of society and its stakeholders, and must continue to recognize the need for change.

## 2. Evaluation

### Processes and Methodology

One basis for the External Review Committee's evaluation is a series of 42 telephone interviews conducted with stakeholders from the federal government, provincial governments, the academic community, the business community, foundations, community organizations, and other policy think tanks. Respondents were chosen to provide balanced coverage of all three core networks, in addition to the major corporate projects. A matrix of research areas and stakeholder types ensured that balance was achieved in all dimensions of the interview process. The sample included pure funders, funders who worked in partnership with CPRN, researchers hired on contract to deliver specific research products, and those in the policy community with expertise in particular policy areas. Those chosen to be interviewed were very senior people within their organizations. In order to avoid conflicts, the sample did not include anyone with the direct authority to make recommendations about CPRN's core funding. The Committee felt that, to capture the extent of CPRN's influence and the routes that influence takes, it was especially important to hear the views of senior people within organizations.

On behalf of the External Review Committee, Art Stewart, a consultant hired on a competitive basis, developed the initial interview lists and interview protocol with the input of Judith Maxwell. Mr. Stewart also interviewed Gordon Betcherman, Suzanne Peters and Sholom Glouberman prior to the development of the interview protocol. The initial interview list and protocol were discussed and modified by the Committee. The interviews were approximately 35-45 minutes in length and were conducted over a five-week period in September and early October 1998.

The Committee interviewed Judith Maxwell, Sholom Glouberman, and other key officers of the organization and a sampling of stakeholders. Mr. Stewart interviewed Gordon Betcherman a second time following his departure from CPRN to accept another position. The Committee reviewed the extensive documentation of activities provided by CPRN, including financial records and publications. The Committee discussed all of these materials at length during three meetings.

A brief summary of the findings from our interviews with stakeholders is included as an appendix to this report.

## 3. Findings and Recommendations

This section of the report is divided into two subsections. First, we address a series of four stewardship issues that focus on CPRN's funding and finances, communications strategies, management and staffing, and governance. We then examine the key outcomes produced by CPRN in its first four years. These include CPRN's role and positioning within the policy community, the value added by its activities, the reasons for its success, the challenges that arise out of CPRN's structures and processes, and the organization's influence on various stakeholders. Given CPRN's structure and mandate, it is inevitable that all of these issues are integrally linked and must be viewed as a whole in any examination of CPRN's performance. The division presented here is not meant to suggest that the issues are mutually exclusive: it is merely a convenient way to present our findings.

As previously indicated, our overall assessment of CPRN is very positive. In what follows, we naturally focus to a considerable extent on areas of concern, to facilitate the organization's ongoing growth and continued success. This focus on areas of concern should not be interpreted as a negative assessment of CPRN.

We begin with an examination of funding issues, to provide context for the discussion and recommendations in the report. Some of the recommendations that follow will require an increase in resources for the organization. Our evaluation leads us to conclude that CPRN has demonstrated its ability to make wise and effective use of its resources.

### Stewardship Issues

#### Funding and Finances

In its first full fiscal year, 1995-96, CPRN's operating budget was less than \$2 million. During the intervening two years, the organization's income has grown by over \$1 million, entirely in the area of research project funding. In the fiscal year 1997-98, CPRN's income totalled \$2.94 million. The great majority of this funding comes from the federal government: core contribution agreements account for 31.4 percent of the total, while research project contributions account for a further 40.5 percent of the total. Thus more than two-thirds of the organization's income is derived from the federal government. Foundation support represents 13.4 percent of organizational income, with private sector contributions adding a further 10.5 percent of the total. In combination, provincial governments provided support in the amount of \$64,000, or just 2.2 percent of the total. Other sources of income provide 1.6 percent of the total.

These observations together with the comments received from many of the interview participants raise a number of challenges for the organization. CPRN is seen by many stakeholders as overly reliant on federal government funding. Although only a few of those interviewed felt that CPRN was in fact too close to the federal government, there was concern that CPRN is perceived by some others in the policy community as lacking independence from the federal government and, in particular, from its social departments. At the same time, all were agreed that the federal government is the only organization or institution that seems willing to provide significant levels of support to policy research. The provincial governments believe that they do not have the resources to commit much support to longer term policy thinking or are not willing to make such an investment. Outside government there is fierce competition for a small pot of corporate dollars, largely devoted to non-research philanthropy. Foundations are primarily interested in supporting service projects and, when research is funded, only direct costs are covered. Accordingly, there were no practical suggestions advanced as to how, in the short term, CPRN could significantly reduce its funding reliance on the federal government. While the Committee shares the concern that such a large proportion of funding must come from the federal government, we found no evidence that CPRN is overly influenced by the federal government.

### *RECOMMENDATION ONE*

The testimony of existing provincial, corporate and foundation funders highlights the value added that CPRN can offer these sectors. CPRN should work over the long term to encourage these sectors to support the organization on a continuous basis. The Committee also recommends that CPRN develop and pursue a long-term strategy that will lead to greater balance among its sources of funding, while fully recognizing that the current climate of funding places limits on such a strategy. Elements of the strategy might include:

- greater dialogue with the provinces, recognizing that provincial funding will change slowly;
- involvement of more provincial people;
- improved contacts with the private sector and foundations; and
- some focus on mini-projects that might encourage greater support from the private sector and foundations.

## The Need for Risk Capital and Secure Funding

While it is desirable to have a diverse funding base, we have two more basic concerns about the nature of CPRN funding to date:

- the difficulty of securing "risk" capital to undertake new initiatives, and
- the future security of funding levels and therefore the organization.

It should be noted that many of those interviewed responded to the question "What would you like to change about CPRN?" by saying that the organization should get higher levels of funding so that it can do more. We believe that total funding in the range of \$3 million permits the organization to pursue a balanced portfolio of topics within its chosen field of interest, and puts it among the larger policy research think tanks in Canada. However, the current level of core funding is not sufficient to support the management and outreach activities needed to get the maximum payoff from the research and shared learning programs. Accordingly, attaining both adequate and sustained funding remains an issue for CPRN.

Under the contribution agreement put in place on April 1, 1995, core funding of \$900,000 per year was used to pay indirect costs, while project funding paid direct research costs. On average, indirect costs are 40 percent of total research costs, a ratio that seems reasonable to the Committee. After indirect costs were paid, there was no room for cost overruns. In addition, project start times were seriously constrained by the need to ensure funding would be committed and it was difficult to hire staff because funding was acquired in discrete packages, with no continuity from one project to another.

Two devices were used to offset these constraints. A modest administrative charge on projects was used to build up a small contingency fund, and unconditional contributions by corporations were allocated to a Research Development Fund, which has served as risk capital to start new projects and to complete funding for projects with only a partial financial commitment. On average, these contributions amount to just over \$200,000 per year; most are up for renewal in 1999.

As the organization expanded, indirect costs surpassed the \$900,000 core amount. The organization was establishing a reputation in specific topics, such as the social union, but had no ongoing expertise on staff to sustain the demand for follow-up communications and information. As in any risk-taking enterprise, some projects went over budget, which has overtaxed the small contingency fund. Core funding currently covers only 70 percent of indirect costs, meaning that project funding has

to cover direct research costs plus 30 percent of indirect costs. Core funding would have to increase from \$900,000 per year to \$1.4 million per year to fully cover existing indirect costs. It would have to rise even further to permit growth.

Because the original funding model has become unsustainable, CPRN has made a commitment to create a sounder financial base through cost recovery, based on charging "full cost" for research. Cost recovery is being introduced for new projects being commissioned in 1998 and will be phased in fully over about three years, as existing contracts are completed and new ones begin. It is designed to cover 100 percent of total direct and indirect research costs allocated according to time sheet records. With CPRN's growing reputation, and given that its fees will still be below those charged by traditional for-profit consulting firms, it should be possible in this manner to fund the full cost of many projects.

While full cost recovery will help CPRN to cover its day-to-day operating costs, it will not help the organization to withstand shocks on either the revenue or expenditure side. We believe that what is now called core funding should, over time, become the major source of CPRN's risk capital in the future. The new risk capital would then be the financial base that permits the organization to take risks, absorb shocks, and get on with the business of research and shared learning while focussing on the medium-term needs of policymakers and the public. It will also enable CPRN to meet contingencies, launch new projects in a timely fashion, and build intellectual capital by hiring staff for longer terms. Accountability for such funding cannot be tied to specific project deliverables, but can be based on audited financial statements and periodic evaluations of the quality, relevance and cost-effectiveness of the total program.

The fundamental challenge in rethinking the funding arrangements is to strike a balance between the sustainability of the organization and its responsiveness to the medium-term needs of the policy community. The commitment to project funding ensures responsiveness, while the appropriate amount of core funding – or risk capital – provides for sustainability. Shifting to the notion of core funding as risk capital would add a third dimension – the chance to become financially independent.

## *RECOMMENDATION TWO*

The Committee recommends that CPRN consider carefully its future funding options in relation to its long-term mission and strategy. There are two ways to create risk capital that provides security, ensures organizational growth and permits long-term planning:

- CPRN could first seek a one-time capital commitment as an equivalent replacement for adequate annual core funding; or
- CPRN could seek long-term annual commitments for risk capital, to replace current core funding commitments.

In any case, CPRN needs to build, in cooperation with certain funders, a capital fund to enable it to manage risks and make strategic investments.

## Communications Strategies

CPRN communicates the nature of its work and activities in a variety of ways. The organization publishes newsletters, annual reports, working papers and a variety of other special communications. It also maintains a website. Relationships with others in the public policy community are established and maintained through funding relationships, research relationships, roundtables, workshops, speaking engagements and personal contacts.

CPRN's publications are widely regarded as accessible, readable and useful in providing relevant knowledge about important policy issues. A number of government departments circulate the publications widely and a number of academics use the synthesis reports and the papers in their teaching, especially those that develop new conceptual frameworks for thinking about an issue or area. There was a concern expressed by some senior government and business leaders that CPRN's current forms of publication are too long to be easily digestible in the time available. For these individuals and for secondary audiences for CPRN work, a variety of shorter summaries and abstracts would be very useful. Among those interviewed, there is considerable variation in the regularity with which publications are received. Several researchers and funders expressed concern that publications from some projects were fewer than expected and not being delivered in a timely manner. This reflected a concern about the progress of some projects.

Few of those interviewed have visited the CPRN website. This reflects the fact that very few senior people within an organization have the time or inclination to look

at any websites. Among those who do use the website, the most frequent reason for visiting is to keep abreast of CPRN activities and new publications. Use of the website has generally been rising, especially since a significant technical upgrade during the summer of 1998. Informal feedback suggests that the site is used by a diverse array of people, often to download reports. CPRN should continue to be proactive about the use of its website and electronic mail as a means of communication. CPRN has taken steps to ensure that the website allows a visitor to add his or her name to a list of people who will receive automatic e-mail notices of new publications, projects and activities. This may help to keep people in stakeholder organizations abreast of developments at CPRN.

*On emerging issues, we often meet with CPRN to get quick advice and information. We trust their advice. They are a key influence on the positions that we take on issues.*

*Community organization leader*

Roundtables, speaking engagements and personal contacts are widely regarded as an essential means of communication from CPRN to its key stakeholders. During the interviews, many respondents placed a very high value on their personal contacts with Judith Maxwell, and on speaking engage-

ments to their organizations by Mrs. Maxwell and the network directors. These are seen as very effective ways to maintain contacts among the policy elites. However, a significant number of those interviewed from a diverse array of stakeholder groups felt that more could be done to get CPRN's work out to a broader public. The general feeling is that CPRN is a non-ideological organization, willing to go where its inclusive and consensual processes of research inquiry lead it. This makes CPRN an important counterpoint to the advocacy and special interest messages that are the more common fare of media reporting and policy debate.

CPRN has recently moved from network specific newsletters to a corporate newsletter that reports on activities in all network areas. This is a positive development that should increase the flow of information from CPRN to its stakeholders and increase awareness across networks. The corporate newsletter will be distributed four times per year, rather than twice per year as is currently the case with the network newsletters.

The final communications issue that was discussed at length concerns relationships with the networks of people who participate in the activities of the three core research areas. In general, the network approach works well and provides a cost-effective means to establish and maintain valuable contacts for many of the stakeholders. A large number of those interviewed observed that being a member of a

project or broader network, combined with attendance at roundtables, provides an excellent way of testing ideas and being exposed to new perspectives. However, a few respondents observed that CPRN networks are not as dynamic and permanent as they could be. Networks tend to get created in a somewhat ad hoc manner on a project-by-project basis. Some have suggested that, in the few cases where network building has not gone well, the sequence of events is something as follows. Connections and communications are strong as the project is being planned, especially if there is an initial roundtable to discuss potential research agendas. However, once planning is complete and a research agenda is set, it seems that the core research team goes off to do its work, with little continuing contact among the network members until another roundtable is held. When the project has been completed, the network effectively dissolves. In these few cases, there seems to be little contact across these ad hoc project networks or across the three core research areas.

Several respondents suggested that CPRN use information and communications technologies more effectively to provide a greater sense of contact and permanence to the networks that are created. Others suggest more project involvement and feedback from network members on an ongoing basis. Still others suggest that there be greater interaction and involvement across projects. All have the potential to increase the permanence and frequency of contact among the members of the networks. The Committee recognizes that, while networks generally function effectively, there is a need to instill a greater sense of permanence and interaction within and across the networks. We believe that CPRN should investigate ways of achieving this objective, to maintain and increase the commitment and involvement of its key stakeholders.

In a companion background study to this evaluation, CPRN suggests that advisory committees play an essential role in shaping network research agendas, monitoring progress of projects and assisting in interpreting findings. The results of the stakeholder interviews suggest that advisory committees are important but are utilized to different degrees by the various networks and in the various projects.

Overall, the advisory committees are thought to work well and make a valuable contribution to CPRN's work. However, a few project advisory committee members in each network did not feel fully engaged in the networks or research projects outside of their initial planning stages. Several observed that they seldom know much about what is going on until a final report is submitted for review and are seldom asked to provide feedback on work in progress. There was agreement

among those who have served on advisory committees that, having agreed to serve, they would like to be more involved and to contribute on an ongoing basis.

In view of the valuable contributions made by members of advisory committees and the importance of maintaining the goodwill of those who agree to serve, the Committee believes that CPRN should take steps to ensure that advisory committees are utilized according to the vision outlined above. A positive step in this direction is the action taken by the Human Resources in Government project, which has instituted quarterly progress reporting to the advisory committee. We believe that such interim reports will enable greater oversight by the advisory committees and will allow them the opportunity for greater input into the project. The recent commitment to a corporate newsletter that reports on the activities of all networks and projects and that appears more frequently is also a positive step towards greater involvement of stakeholders and advisory committee members.

### *RECOMMENDATION THREE*

The Committee recommends that CPRN invest more resources in sustaining its connections to stakeholders. For example, it should regularly review its mailing lists to ensure that important stakeholders are aware of and receive relevant publications in a consistent and timely manner. Where projects are delayed, interim progress reports might be issued to address the concerns of funders and others for whom timeliness is a critical issue, and every effort should be made to speed the delivery of the final report. We also recommend that CPRN consider a variety of short pieces and brief publications that would help to make the work more accessible to senior executives, senior government officials, academics and leaders of community organizations.

### *RECOMMENDATION FOUR*

The Committee recommends that CPRN, and Judith Maxwell in particular, attempt to broaden CPRN's reach into the informed public. This could be achieved through a greater "op-ed" presence in the national and local media. It is essential that this greater presence reflect CPRN's relatively neutral and consensual approach to inquiry, based upon the shared learning that has occurred, and not take the form of advocacy. We also suggest greater efforts to build a "corporate identity" for CPRN so that the organization is more clearly identified to users.

## Management and Staffing

Perhaps CPRN's greatest asset is the high quality of its people. The interviews resoundingly confirm this view, especially with respect to the leadership of Judith Maxwell and the network directors. It is unquestionable that strong intellectual leadership, with credibility in its primary constituencies, is a valuable asset to any organization. There is also an inevitable challenge for a modest-sized organization like CPRN that relies exclusively on a few key players to provide intellectual leadership in their area of expertise. The questions asked repeatedly by those interviewed are: "What happens to a network when its director leaves?" "Are projects held in abeyance until a replacement is found?" "How can such a 'thin' organization ensure that things continue to move smoothly, without placing an undue burden on Judith Maxwell?" Or, more significantly: "What happens to CPRN if Judith Maxwell decides to leave?"

It is clear that there are significant concerns about the future and sustainability of CPRN that arise out of its heavy reliance on a few key people. How are these inevitable transitions to be handled? The most commonly heard suggestion was that the organization needs to add more depth in these key senior positions: a strong number two, perhaps a Vice-President, to support Judith Maxwell, and stronger senior support for the network directors.

### *RECOMMENDATION FIVE*

The Committee recommends that CPRN develop greater depth in key senior positions to ensure the continuity of its work when the inevitable transitions arise, and to bring more senior staff time to the broader issues of review and supervision. The first and most important action is to hire a Vice-President with broad organization-wide responsibilities to support the current President.

Transitions in network leadership are an important issue for a think tank that relies heavily on a few people to champion projects and provide intellectual leadership. The biggest threat to the organization's sustainability is the loss of key people. In recent years, CPRN has effected a number of such transitions smoothly and successfully, including the transitions to the new Director of the Health Network and the current transition in the leadership of the Work Network. In total, we view the organization's ability to manage these transitions positively as a demonstration of its capacity for success and growth.

## Governance

The Board of Directors of CPRN is responsible for the organization's strategic direction, including long-range planning, stewardship of funds, the cost-effectiveness of the networks, and the performance of the President. The Board is currently chaired by the President.

The Committee did not interview members of the Board in the course of its evaluation. However, during the course of its deliberations, it became apparent that CPRN has grown large enough over the past four years to consider several changes in the role played by the Board and in its structure. These recommendations will help to ensure that the Board remains an independent guardian of CPRN's interests and that it plays a more proactive role in providing a stable funding base for the organization.

### *RECOMMENDATION SIX*

The Committee recommends that an independent Chair should be appointed to head the Board, to improve the Board's oversight role and input capacities and to ensure its independence. We also recommend that representation on the Board be broadened to take full advantage of the interests, experiences and skills of those with an interest in CPRN and its activities. In addition, the Board should explicitly address Board governance issues in its work, based on current guidelines for nonprofit organizations, and should consider an increased role in CPRN's fundraising activities.

## Key Outcome Issues

### CPRN's Role and Position

CPRN is regarded by most of those interviewed as non-ideological, with a neutral, open and inclusive approach to evidence-based inquiry. Nonetheless, its work is inevitably values based. For some this means the organization pursues democratic, inclusive and open inquiries, while for others it means that Canadians' shared values inform the work. Judith Maxwell is widely seen as the embodiment of both views and as the essential ingredient in CPRN's success. A small minority of observers, who tend to believe that no organization is objective, believe that CPRN is ideological and does advocate for particular positions within the progressive discourse. Whether this is desirable or not rests in the eyes of the beholder. For some, advocacy is important. They believe that CPRN is a powerful voice that should actively campaign for particular policies and positions. For others, CPRN's

*CPRN's ability to balance concerns and its non-ideological stance are key elements of its value for government. The element of the struggle for balance is what governments want. We might well lose interest in CPRN if they become another advocacy group.*

*Senior federal official*

credibility and influence are derived from its neutrality and willingness to let the processes of inquiry dictate the results of its work. In this view, which we share, strong advocacy would rob the organization of the characteristics and positioning that make it unique and worthy of being heard.

Governments and academics share a common view of CPRN's role. The organization bridges the gap between academic research and government policy by synthesizing

and translating academic research into a form that is useful and useable by governments. Several of those interviewed noted that CPRN also plays an important mentoring role for academics, educating them as to the real policy needs of governments and helping them to translate their academic work into a form that provides context and understanding for government choices. Business views the Work and Family Networks as sensitizing them to important issues of civil society, family and work. Community organizations see participation in CPRN activities as giving them a voice and lending them a modicum of influence.

Several people who were interviewed with respect to the Family Network observed that CPRN has been very successful in capturing resources for social initiatives and is a formidable competitor for resources. This leads to concerns that the only way for many small voluntary organizations to participate in research is to partner with CPRN. In part, this is the inevitable result of CPRN's success in anticipating important social issues and producing credible and important work. Nonetheless, it may prove to be difficult to establish a mutually beneficial relationship with those who have been competing for resources. As the dominant partner, CPRN must continue to manage such relationships with the care and concern demonstrated to date.

A number of interview respondents expressed concern that it is difficult to play a role in original research and a role as a synthesizer and facilitator. Despite the production of several important pieces of original research, most of those interviewed see CPRN's primary role as providing syntheses that bridge the gap between academic research and government needs. The general feeling is that few, if any, other organizations play this role, while the original research done at CPRN could be conducted in many locations, particularly universities. On the other hand, it would be difficult for CPRN to hire a network director of the requisite calibre if he or she did not have the scope to do some original work. In addition, it must be noted

that, while some of the original research could be done by others, it has not been done, particularly the work on Canadian values, the project on Human Resources in Government, and the examination of social policy issues from a family perspective. Finally, in the Committee's view, it is frequently difficult to separate the two types of work in light of the synergies created across them, much like the synergies cited by academics between teaching and research. The future balance between research and facilitation at CPRN is an important issue. At a minimum, it is important that CPRN maintain strength in the synthesis and facilitation role that makes it unique within the public policy community. It is also clear to us that CPRN must continue to engage directly and indirectly in some research activities for the reasons outlined above. We also note our agreement with many of those interviewed, who argue that Canada needs more organizations that can play the kind of intermediary role discussed here.

### Value Added

CPRN is widely viewed as performing valuable work within the policy community, with the primary value deriving from the organization's role as a synthesizer and facilitator of policy research. CPRN's take on any issue is relatively unique because of its neutral, open and inclusive approach to inquiry. For the individual networks, stakeholders see value in the exploration of new issues, the creation of new conceptual frameworks for thinking about issues, and CPRN's ability to move policy discussions into new spaces where constructive dialogue is possible. Examples include synthesis papers on population health, the approach to many important social issues from a family perspective, new conceptions of the future of work, and studies on the social union. A number of people also commented favourably on the willingness of the Family Network and the Work Network to take risks in exploring new ground. In the case of the Family Network, it is a willingness to bring community partners more fully into the definition of and debate about social policy issues, the explicit focus on family as the centrepiece of social policy and the inclusion of a values base to inform the debate about family issues. For the Work Network, the value lies in a willingness to explicitly bring together disciplines and groups that do not normally communicate across their isolated research cells and to incorporate economic, social and other analyses in the examination of the future of work and other projects.

While CPRN is widely regarded as delivering excellent value added, breaking new ground and being on the leading edge is always a risky proposition. A few stakeholders expressed concerns that several projects in the Work and Family Networks were not delivering results in a timely manner. The reasons for such delays may be internal or external to CPRN. The latter are especially common in projects that attempt to gather original data, requiring the full cooperation of external agencies. In large part, this explains the delays in the delivery of results from one project in the Work Network. However, delays may also occur for reasons internal to the organization and it is necessary for network and project leaders to remain vigilant and correct these problems as they arise. As noted earlier, we take the actions of the Human Resources in Government project as an encouraging sign that CPRN is seriously addressing these issues, since delays are a threat to CPRN's ability to deliver value for money. It must be noted that the stakeholders who expressed this view also felt that CPRN should focus less on medium- to long-term strategic thinking and focus more on dealing with the day-to-day operational and policy design problems faced by governments. In our view, this latter focus is a significant misrepresentation of CPRN's stated mission. CPRN should not be in the same game as government officials, whose responsibility it is to address the day-to-day operation problems of governance. In any event, the kinds of problems cited are to be expected with an organization that takes research risks to generate cutting-edge ideas.

#### *RECOMMENDATION SEVEN*

For an organization such as CPRN, it is important to take risks in research to stay on the cutting edge. While it is inevitable that such a strategy occasionally will produce some delays in research deliverables and some failures, the Committee believes that taking risks to move policy debates forward is a defining characteristic of CPRN. We recommend that CPRN continue to diversify its portfolio of research projects and continue to include research projects that are defined by potentially high risks and high returns. At the same time, the organization should develop a strategy to ensure that funders and partners are educated to this reality.

## Influence

CPRN is widely seen as influencing policy making and research by governments. The influence is indirect and contextual for the most part, although a number of specific, more direct influences are cited for particular projects. Governments see CPRN's work as helping them to think about important policy issues and frame

*CPRN's work on family policy is an important backdrop to policy thinking that validates existing approaches to policy and suggests new directions.*

*Senior provincial official*

their understanding of policy actions. Academics cite little influence because they view themselves as leaders in the relevant fields who already understand the issues. Some community organizations find CPRN's neutral approach to framing issues of little use for advocacy purposes. This is a direct result of CPRN's willingness to let its research results follow from the processes of research inquiry, and not be guided by a predetermined ideological viewpoint on a particular issue.

However, it does not mean that CPRN's work has no relevance for advocacy groups. There is an opportunity for CPRN to help community organizations understand the implications of its work and how the work relates to particular positions within a policy debate. Community organizations do believe that CPRN lends them a voice in arenas where they are seldom heard. Business cites an increase in understanding and sensitivity to important issues of civil society, family and work, but notes that it is difficult to get business actively engaged in policy discussions.

The stakeholder interviews identified two areas of concern with regard to CPRN's reach and influence. The first is CPRN's ability to lead public debate and influence the way citizens think about their country. There is widespread agreement among those interviewed that CPRN is less visible among members of the public than it could and should be. Several stakeholders feel that CPRN's focus in the Family Network is too focussed on "policy elites." This also relates to concerns about the nature of CPRN's relationships with the community and voluntary sectors. Even in its "grassroots" work, respondents note that there is a tendency to focus on national voluntary organizations rather than local community groups. CPRN seems to enjoy a mixed relationship with community organizations. On the one hand, there is agreement that CPRN may give a voice to community groups that often have difficulty being heard by senior policymakers. CPRN is also respectful of the different approach to research within community organizations. On the other hand, CPRN is a formidable competitor for limited resources, and several of those interviewed noted that the only way to get access to those resources is to partner with CPRN.

Within the Family Network, there is a strong feeling among a few that more input from community groups would be helpful. In the future, CPRN's involvement with community and voluntary organizations might also be revisited with a view to generating more opportunity for community organization input and leadership in projects. And, as previously noted, with a more broadly based and extensive communications strategy, CPRN can ensure that the results of its work are disseminated more widely among members of the interested public who are not directly engaged in those research issues.

The second area of concern cited by stakeholders respecting CPRN's reach and influence is the view held by many that CPRN is too close to the federal government. It is not clear whether this is due to CPRN's reliance on the federal government for funding, a natural affinity brought about by a coincidence of objectives and thought within the broad liberal-democratic perspective, or a combination of these and other factors. There is clearly an effective demand for CPRN work by the federal government. In contrast, few provincial government departments have a research budget or mechanisms to review research proposals and shape the terms of reference of research projects. Despite this, the Committee notes that CPRN has made strong approaches to provincial governments and has attempted to involve them in a wide variety of research activities. All of CPRN's larger research efforts do involve provincial funding and participation, as well as the participation of a wide variety of other stakeholders. It is only a few smaller projects that rely solely on federal government funding. In any event, the perception of a relationship that is too cozy is as important as the reality for some stakeholders. It means that CPRN must put considerable effort into cultivating a broader range of funding support and greater participation from the provincial governments and from stakeholders in regions outside of central Canada.

In general, CPRN's activities and roundtables are regionally balanced and quite diverse in their accommodation of different stakeholders – the inclusiveness is there. There are perhaps only two exceptions: in some projects and activities of the Family Network, end-users may be somewhat under-represented, and in many of CPRN's activities, Quebec is under-represented. This latter point was made by a large number of stakeholders and spans the networks and corporate projects. While there are difficulties in achieving close collaboration, it is clear that CPRN has made a serious effort to engage the Quebec government, and some Quebec agencies use CPRN publications intensively. The organization is also actively building

relationships with academics in Quebec, especially at the Université de Montréal and the Institut national de la recherche scientifique (INRS).

### *RECOMMENDATION EIGHT*

The Committee recommends that CPRN develop a long-run strategy of education and outreach, including more regional events, to assure stakeholders of its independence from the federal government and its neutrality in matters that concern both levels of government. It is also essential to continue the efforts being made to increase Quebec participation.

### Reasons for Success

There is widespread agreement among stakeholders that CPRN has achieved its objectives to a significant extent. A number of people caution that goals achievement is a work-in-progress that is seldom fully attained. Others note that the establishment of a successful and influential research agenda and research program is a time-consuming process, and that CPRN is a very young organization. The single most commonly cited reason for the organization's success is the leadership of Judith Maxwell. She is seen as essential to the organization – for many, it is difficult to separate the two. Other key ingredients of CPRN's success are a philosophical approach that is multidisciplinary, collaborative and focussed on shared learning, skills at synthesis and facilitation, and the lack of ideological stance in its work.

### Issues and Challenges

Despite its success, the organization faces a number of issues and challenges arising out of its structure, leadership and activities. Several of these challenges have already been observed in the report.

The network approach is important in allowing the organization to draw on a wide array of expertise in a cost-effective manner, but does raise questions about the burden placed on the small core of key staff responsible for guiding and managing the networks and projects. The small core staff must drive the research agenda and manage the disparate relationships with those outside of CPRN because it is this staff that is most committed to the organization and its success. At the same time,

it is very difficult to find people with the breadth of knowledge required to keep the research agenda fresh and moving forward in new directions. Again, this emphasizes the importance of advisory committees and the need to bring them fully into the ongoing review of networks and projects, and the importance of a strong management team at the top, with effective transition plans in place. Another concern that was raised by stakeholders is that the network structure means projects are created on an ad hoc basis as opportunities arise. The need for a stable funding base and greater depth in the management team are underscored by the challenges inherent in the network approach.

As noted earlier, the philosophical approach is a critical element of success, but it too poses potential problems. Several observers are concerned that the diversity and inclusiveness inherent in CPRN's work and the search for consensus leads to uneven results. While it often points to a common road forward, the approach can be time-consuming and, in the end, lead to a "porridge of mix and match advice." To date, CPRN has been successful in avoiding this problem. In the view of a few stakeholders, this is because the organization tends to bring together diverse views, but views that do not stray far outside the mainstream – the extremes may not be well represented. For the majority, it reflects the facilitation skills of CPRN's staff and leadership.

CPRN is a very young organization. The Committee believes that CPRN should maintain its commitment to shared learning based on a multidisciplinary and inclusive approach. These features of the organization are a critical part of the ongoing experiment in policy research that is CPRN, and an essential component of its willingness to take risks. The tensions that do arise out of this unique philosophy underscore the need for an adequate and stable funding base to support risk taking and to expand outreach. In the Committee's view, there is ample evidence that CPRN has managed these inherent tensions very well, and is actively working to address the minor concerns that remain.

## 4. Looking Ahead

This section of the report discusses the policy research environment and the concerns expressed by stakeholders about the future evolution of the Canadian economic and social policy environment.

The policy research environment has changed dramatically in the last decade or so. Fiscal restraint has resulted in a reduction of budgets for internal research at the same time as it has led to the closure of many federal and provincial arm's-length research organizations, and reductions in funding to many other independent think

tanks. Many interview respondents echoed comments by Judith Maxwell in a background report to this evaluation: "The policy community in Canada is not robust. Most of the institutions are financially fragile and highly dependent on the energy, ideas, and organizational skills of one or a few individuals." While there are many university research centres and institutes in existence, they perform a particular function with respect to basic research and the advancement

of knowledge and, in any event, live by different rules and standards than the think tanks that attempt more directly to influence policy. As has been noted, CPRN is seen as playing an essential role in the translation of academic research into a form that is useful to governments. The federal government's Policy Research Initiative, which has made use of CPRN's research and shared learning, is seen as an important step in linking communities of policy researchers and developing a greater policy research capacity for the federal government to draw upon. The Policy Research Initiative will increase the effective demand for good policy

research, but it does not promise to resolve the fundamental dilemma of underfunding that most policy think tanks are facing.

Many of those interviewed also addressed the significant shortage of think tanks in Canada with a primary focus on social policy. Currently, only CPRN, the Caledon Institute of Social Policy and the Canadian Council on Social Development focus primarily on social issues. Others also comment on social policy, but from the perspective of service and user organizations or from a primary concern about

economic policy. This is especially significant in light of the concerns expressed by stakeholders during the interviews about the uncertain future facing Canadian society. Globalization, economic restructuring, demographic change, rising inequality,

*In many respects, we see CPRN as an extension of our research capacity. Many federal departments see CPRN as an integral part of their research tool kits.*

*Senior federal official*

*The policy research community in Canada consists of too few underfunded organizations, especially since governments have gutted their own in-house research capacities and cut off dollars to organizations like the Economic Council of Canada. If anything, we need more and better funded policy research organizations to advance our understanding and the public debates.*

*Academic researcher*

and a number of other forces have combined to put pressure on governments to reform existing social programs and to create new ones. It is essential that good evidence-based policy research be brought to bear on reforms that alter the design and structure of Canada's social programs. The vast majority of respondents argued that CPRN's relatively unique approach to policy inquiry makes it an important voice and source of information among the many that must contribute to public policy debates in the future.

*CPRN is important to our future because there are disturbing signs of fragmentation centred on social injustice and material disparity. Its work is neutral and evidence based, with a mandate for equity and the well-being of all Canadians. This stance can help CPRN to win the middle ground and advance our understanding of important social policy issues.*

*Academic researcher*

In light of these trends in the policy research community and in the likely evolution of Canada's economic and social climate, there is an important role for CPRN to play over the next five to ten years. In the view of the stakeholders, it is essential that CPRN continue with its general philosophical approach to inquiry. But the question remains: How can CPRN position itself over the medium to longer term so as to ensure that its voice continues to be heard and that it influences policy debates among its primary stakeholders?

### *Long-term Strategic Challenge One*

The Committee believes that, despite the challenges inherent in the network approach and in the multidisciplinary, inclusive approach to shared learning, CPRN has developed an approach to policy inquiry that is unique in Canada. The challenges that do arise can be effectively managed with a greater focus on the creation of stable networks that span the country.

### *Long-term Strategic Challenge Two*

CPRN is clearly an organization that is dependent on the high quality of people it is able to attract to its core team and to its research activities and dialogue groups. It needs to add depth at the senior management level. Only then will the organization have the security and stability that will allow it to combine its original research and facilitation roles, and to draw on the diverse perspectives, skills and experiences of its stakeholders to remain at the forefront of policy thinking. The organization must also ensure that its focus remains squarely on its people and its stakeholders.

*Long-term Strategic Challenge Three*

To contribute to the policy challenges that face the nation, the organization needs to ensure that it remains on the leading edge of policy research. The Committee believes that the development of an adequate long-term funding base is a necessary precondition for the organization to remain on the cutting edge in policy research.

## 5. Conclusion

We believe that the recommendations advanced in this evaluation report, based as they are on the views of stakeholders, as well as our own assessment as an independent review committee, will help provide CPRN with the organizational strength and stability to maintain and extend its capacity for relevant and meaningful policy comment and thinking. It is clear to members of the Committee that CPRN has achieved considerable organizational growth in the four years since its inception. Many challenges have been successfully met, while others constitute an ongoing struggle. Overall, the organization makes effective use of its resources and makes important and strategic contributions to social policy thinking in Canada: in a

word, after four years of operations, the organization is a success. It is essential that the organization continue to address the internal and external challenges that it faces, and to do so on an ongoing basis. As was noted by many interview respondents, goals achievement is a work-in-progress, and organizational improvement and adaptability is a continuous process. The working environment described

above means that this will not be an easy process for CPRN or for any other policy research organization.

The ongoing pursuit of excellence in policy research will be difficult for the organization given the uncertainties and complexities of the work ahead. Achieving excellence will require the right organizational structure, the right people, superior management and leadership skills, and an uncanny ability to anticipate important policy issues and stay on the leading edge of policy thinking. CPRN's capacity to become an even stronger, more influential and ever-relevant contributor to policy thinking and debates is in place. Its ability to reach its potential is dependent on stable support and funding.

*What would happen if there were no CPRN in Canada? We would have to invent it. It performs well a necessary function that is not well performed by many.*

*Academic researcher*

## Appendix – Summary of Stakeholder Interviews

### Mission and Philosophy

CPRN's mission and philosophical approach are widely regarded as appropriate. A small number of people felt that the mission statement may be too ambitious with regard to leading the public debate and affecting citizens' lives. Each of these aims is very difficult to accomplish. Perhaps these aspects of the mission should be more modestly stated.

There is also widespread agreement that CPRN embodies the spirit of shared learning, collaboration and a multidisciplinary approach to a greater extent than other policy research organizations. The approach is seen as essential to CPRN's performance and to its role in the policy community. CPRN's activities are generally inclusive and include a diverse array of people, although some groups are under-represented. The most common concern is that stakeholders outside of central Canada, including provincial governments, need to be more involved. Many also expressed concern that representation from Quebec is low, but note the special circumstances of Quebec's place in Canada. In terms of the Family Network, the biggest concern is that CPRN is much too oriented towards professionals and policy elites, to the relative exclusion of user groups.

The virtual network approach is now commonplace in the policy community, but there is agreement that it is an essential contributor to performance, providing flexibility to draw on a wide variety of resources in a cost-effective manner. Some also observe that the network approach places an inordinate burden on the small core staff of the organization. This small core must drive the agenda and manage the disparate relationships with those outside of CPRN. A few observers believe that CPRN has not created meaningful networks. Rather, they see a series of temporary alliances on a project-by-project basis that do little to promote permanent, meaningful networks. A number also suggest that there is little that is virtual in CPRN's approach. There is little use of information and communications technology to create ongoing discussion spaces.

### Role and Value

CPRN is regarded by most of those interviewed as non-ideological, with a neutral, open and inclusive approach to evidence-based inquiry. Nonetheless, its work is values based. For some this means the organization pursues democratic, inclusive and open inquiries, while for others it means that Canadians' shared values inform the work. Judith Maxwell is widely seen as the embodiment of both views and as

the essential ingredient in CPRN's success. A small minority of observers believe that CPRN is ideological and does advocate for particular positions within the progressive discourse. Whether this is desirable or not rests in the eyes of the beholder.

Governments and academics share a common view of CPRN's role. The organization bridges the gap between academic research and government policy by synthesizing and translating academic research into a form that is useful and useable by governments. Business views the Work and Family Networks as sensitizing them to important issues of civil society, family and work. Community organizations see participation in CPRN activities as giving them a voice and lending them a modicum of influence. A number of people observed that CPRN has been very successful in capturing resources for social initiatives and is a formidable competitor for resources. This leads to concerns that CPRN is like a giant vacuum cleaner sucking up the available resources and leaving nothing for others unless they partner with CPRN. It is sometimes difficult to establish a mutually beneficial relationship with competitors.

CPRN is widely regarded as delivering value for money. The organization's structure keeps costs low (although roundtables are expensive) and the value added is high. For many, the value comes from sharing in the costs of projects but being able to enjoy the full benefits of the research products. A small number of project-specific concerns about the timeliness of delivery were identified. These delays may on occasion threaten the positive assessment of value for money.

Research experiences and research partnerships with CPRN are rated as good to excellent. A number of individuals felt that remuneration was low relative to the time commitment involved. All cite excellent non-financial support and useful supportive feedback as characteristic of the organization. All would work with CPRN again.

## Influence

The organization is widely seen as influencing policy making and research by governments. The influence is indirect and contextual for the most part, although a number of specific, more direct influences are cited for particular projects.

Governments see CPRN's work as helping them to think about important policy issues and frame their understanding of policy actions. Academics cite little influence because they view themselves as leaders in the relevant fields who already understand the issues. Community organizations find CPRN's neutral approach to

framing issues of little use for advocacy purposes, but do feel that relationships with CPRN lend them a voice in arenas where they are seldom heard. Business cites an increase in understanding and sensitivity to important issues of civil society, family and work, but notes that it is difficult to get business actively engaged in policy discussions.

Publications are widely regarded as accessible, readable and useful in providing general knowledge. A number of government departments circulate CPRN publications regularly and a number of academics use selected publications in teaching. There seems to be considerable variation in the regularity and frequency of receipt of publications.

### Achievement of Goals

All of those interviewed believe that CPRN has achieved its goals to some extent. A number caution that goals achievement is an ongoing process that is seldom fully achieved. Others note that the establishment of a successful research agenda and research program that influences stakeholders is a time-consuming process, and that CPRN is a very young organization. A few felt that goals have not been achieved with respect to particular projects. The most frequently cited reason for success in achieving the organization's goals is the leadership of Judith Maxwell. She is seen as essential to the organization - for many, it is difficult to separate the two. Other commonly cited reasons for success are the philosophical approach (multidisciplinary, collaborative, shared learning) and skills at synthesis and integration.

### The Future

Canada will need an organization like CPRN in the next five to ten years. The reasons are diverse, but the most important ones are:

- CPRN's ability to bring diverse views together and find common ground among them is essential to good policy making.
- CPRN's ability to translate and synthesize academic research in a way that is useful and useable by governments.
- CPRN is an important voice that offers a unique perspective on the important policy challenges that lie ahead.

- CPRN's choice of research areas and its ability to anticipate issues are important.

What about the organization should be kept the same? The resounding response is the credibility and leadership of Judith Maxwell, which embodies the organization's philosophical approach.

What should be changed? The diversity of answers is enormous. The most common responses were as follows:

- greater outreach to those outside of central Canada, including provincial governments;
- greater participation from Francophones and Quebec;
- provide Judith Maxwell with a strong number two – there are fears that the organization's sustainability would be put at risk if Mrs. Maxwell chooses to leave – there is a need to ensure an orderly transition and ease the burden of her work;
- greater visibility in the media, perhaps through op-ed pieces in relevant newspapers and magazines;
- greater use of information and communications technology to improve the permanence of the networks;
- less reliance on federal funding to ensure the organization's independence; and
- more resources for CPRN.