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Isabelle Blain, VP
NSERC
350 Albert St.
Ottawa, Ont K1A 1H5

Dear Isabelle,

The Canadian Association of Physicists (CAP) considers the Research Tools and Instrumentation (RTI) to be a critical program that must be maintained in order to preserve the integrity of the Discovery Grant (DG) program. The DG program has a long history of providing strong and essential support for innovative basic research. Reasons for this success include the relatively long term stability and flexibility of the DG, the broad base of support that it provides for researchers and the support provided by the RTI. This has been a key contributing factor in Canada's well known ability to "punch above its weight" internationally in basic research. The RTI is a unique program that allows DG holders to respond quickly to equipment breakdowns as well as to capitalize quickly on emergent opportunities. There is strong consensus among the physics research community that RTI is the only program in Canada that has the flexibility and versatility to address these needs and that proper funding of the program is required.

I will now turn briefly to the two options that NSERC has proposed in its recent survey concerning the future of the RTI program. One of the key strengths of the NSERC programs is their reliance on expert peers to make funding decisions. Both proposed options rely on universities to make decisions about the distribution of funds. The universities, working under their own constraints, are not the correct conduit for RTI funding decisions since they lack the expertise and breadth of vision of the entire Canadian research community that are necessary conditions for optimal use of these scarce resources. Indeed, one of the options removes peers from the process completely and is therefore unacceptable.

We therefore feel that it is imperative for NSERC to investigate how the RTI can be preserved without decreasing vital DG funds. We understand the fiscal constraints under which NSERC is working, so some redistribution of priorities and funds will likely be required and we would be happy to act as consultants in such a process. One possible source of funds is the Discovery Accelerator Program (DAS): with the new DG evaluation procedures now in place, our community sees the RTI as having a much greater scientific impact than the DAS program.

As this letter is intended to provide support for a crucial NSERC program and basic research in general, please feel free to share this letter with Industry Canada or distribute it in any way that you feel would be useful to the re-establishment of an RTI program.

Best regards,

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