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**Item No. 1**  
**Halifax Regional Council**  
**June 6, 2023**

**TO:** Mayor Savage and Members of Halifax Regional Council

Original Signed

**SUBMITTED BY:**

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Cathie O'Toole, Chief Administrative Officer

**DATE:** May 23, 2023

**SUBJECT:** Update on partnership opportunities with Research NS

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### **INFORMATION REPORT**

#### **ORIGIN**

THAT Halifax Regional Council request a staff report identifying opportunities and funding sources for establishing a research partnership with Research Nova Scotia to develop a coordinated research approach to address municipal challenges.

#### **LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY**

*Halifax Regional Municipality Charter, S.N.S. 2008, c. 39*

7A The purposes of the Municipality are to

- (a) provide good government;
- (b) provide services, facilities and other things that, in the opinion of the Council, are necessary or desirable for all or part of the Municipality; ...

79A(1) Subject to subsections (2) to (4), the Municipality may only spend money for municipal purposes if

- (a) the expenditure is included in the Municipality's operating budget or capital budget or is otherwise authorized by the Municipality; ...

#### **BACKGROUND**

Research Nova Scotia (RNS) is an independent, not-for-profit corporation set up to support, organize and coordinate the funding of research for the benefit of Nova Scotians. Research Nova Scotia was established in 2019, following the wrap-up of the two predecessor organizations, the Nova Scotia Health Research Foundation and the Nova Scotia Research and Innovation Trust, to bring major provincial research funding programs together, making more focused and effective use of research budgets and building the province's strength and strategic priorities. Research Nova Scotia is a provincial agency that reports to the Minister of Labour and Advanced Education, however, the management and control of the corporation is vested in a Board of Directors. Research Nova Scotia's mandate, set by the government through the Research Nova Scotia Corporation Act (s.7) is to support, organize, and coordinate the funding of research in Nova Scotia.

Research Nova Scotia sits at the intersection of government, academia, and the not-for-profit sector with a mandate to develop and implement a strategy to enhance research capacity, align research funding with provincial priorities, and promote a research strategy to help solve Nova Scotia's challenges in the areas of economic development, healthy population, and health-care system to create four mission areas: sustainable bioeconomy, climate change adaptation and resilience, healthy people and health care systems, and improved quality of life for Nova Scotians. RNS amplifies its support by partnering with other stakeholders in the research ecosystem. Over the past few years, RNS has worked collaboratively with other organizations, businesses, communities, and government departments to support research that will be useful, salient, and relevant to the people who need it. Examples of RNS initiatives, activities, and collaborations undertaken in the past year include:

- Working with Engage Nova Scotia to identify the research priorities of the African Nova Scotia community.
- Co-launching a micro-grant program with Genome Atlantic to support local industry in learning more about genomic solutions to the impact of climate change on their operations.
- Working with the Offshore Energy Research Association to create the Atlantic Canada Energy System (ACES) model.
- Collaborating with the Canadian Institutes for Health Research (CIHR) for its COVID Rapid Response program.
- Leading the creation of the Centre of Excellence for Healthy Aging at Cape Breton University in partnership with the Department of Health and Wellness (DHW) and Nova Scotia Health.
- Leading the development of a research initiative using social innovation and Living Labs to address complex societal challenges such as poverty.
- Working with the OECD's Observatory for Public Sector Innovation on innovation practices.

The above examples illustrate that these sorts of partnership can be an effective approach to fostering and promoting excellence in research and maximizing economic and social benefits both in the municipality and across Nova Scotia.

## **DISCUSSION**

In reviewing the literature, staff identified a variety of partnership arrangements between government departments, postsecondary institutions, and research communities. A few are described below:

### **Research Manitoba**

<https://researchmanitoba.ca/about/about-us/>

Research Manitoba promotes, supports, and coordinates the funding of research excellence and innovation in health, natural and social sciences, engineering, and the humanities in Manitoba. Research Manitoba's strategic goals are to advance research in Manitoba, strengthen the economy, champion the Manitoba research community, and support local talent development.

By funding research in the Social Sciences and Humanities, Research Manitoba is supporting innovative and critical thinkers – research which impacts and strengthens essential areas such as policy, community, and the economy.

Research Manitoba has partnered with many organizations including the Bioscience Association of Manitoba, Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Canada Foundation for Innovation, Economic Development and Jobs | Province of Manitoba, Mitacs Canada, and more to promote excellence in research in the province of Manitoba.

### **Mitacs**

<https://discover.mitacs.ca/municipality-support/>

Mitacs is a national, not-for-profit organization that fosters growth and innovation. Mitacs connects municipalities with post-secondary researchers for innovative projects - from economic development to sustainability, smart cities, public health, infrastructure and more - ensuring municipalities develop the best public policies to create vibrant and healthy communities.

Mitacs understands the challenges Canadian municipalities face and find the right academic/research talent to provide municipalities with the specialized knowledge and skills they need to advance policy and execute projects. Mitacs provides up to 55% financial support for municipalities' innovation needs.

An example of building partnerships for the benefit of the community is the collaboration between the City of St. John's with researchers at Memorial University and Mitacs to improve asphalt binder and mixtures used in pavement.

#### CivicLabTO

<https://www.toronto.ca/news/city-of-toronto-research-partnership-with-torontos-higher-education-institutions/>

The City of Toronto has piloted a new partnership model with eight higher education institutions (HEIs) in the city via CivicLabTO on projects with mutually beneficial outcomes recognizing that complex city challenges can benefit from collaborative and multidisciplinary solution development. This partnership is a component of the CivicLabTO program to create a more systemic approach to collaboration between the City and Toronto's eight universities and colleges. and connect the expertise in HEIs to the City's research needs.

The research progress selection process is as follows: 1) City staff put forward research proposals related to priorities set out by Toronto's Office of Recovery and Rebuild, 2) All HEIs had an opportunity to express interest in the research proposals based on their expertise, and 3) The City selected partners and formed project teams to best meet the City's research needs. Research projects that require funding to move forward are being paid for by the City and Mitacs, and are funded by the federal, provincial, and territorial governments.

#### Alberta Innovates

<https://albertainnovates.ca/who-we-are/>

Alberta Innovates is a public corporation and the province's largest research and innovation agency. The organization provides funding programs, advice, connections, technical expertise, and applied research services to stimulate and grow research and innovation across Alberta.

Alberta Innovates maintains several partnerships with not-for-profit organizations, consortia, associations, and networks in all sectors and includes specific partnerships with jurisdictions globally to drive economic growth, health and well-being, and a thriving environment to improve the lives of Albertans today and for generations to come.

#### Proposed Approach

Municipalities play a key role in fostering integrated approaches to respond to social and economic development challenges. Canadian municipalities have started collaborative initiatives with local universities and research communities to develop partnerships which help create more innovative and inclusive cities. Research partnerships between municipal governments and research organizations are vital to driving economic growth, building vibrant communities, and improving the lives of people living and working in local communities.

Effective engagement by municipal entities in research is a key condition for societal transformation towards sustainability and is a critical success factor in developing solution-oriented approaches that can tackle complex sustainability challenges such as biodiversity loss, climate change problems, and social stress.

This type of collaboration is particularly useful for municipal work as it can help uncover underlying assumptions in existing policy and help develop methods for working within a range of uncertainty and contingencies.

Social and science research, appropriately selected and resourced, can help solve challenges in Nova Scotia. Research Nova Scotia seeks to support research that will contribute solutions to Nova Scotians' problems and provide tangible real-world benefits. Collaboration between HRM and RNS helps to increase both the speed and likelihood of successfully achieving intended outcomes and would be a great opportunity to tap into the expertise and capacity of Nova Scotia's research community to find solutions for key societal, science, and economic issues.

The Halifax Regional Municipality is piloting a partnership model with Research Nova Scotia (RNS) to collaborate on research priorities. This partnership represents a new and innovative mechanism for HRM to identify root causes and address issues related to economic development, public safety, climate change, and biodiversity loss. This collaboration enhances HRM resources and capabilities in multiple ways. Although NS has less than 2% of federally supported research investment, this partnership can be an innovative approach to research collaboration and a hub for municipal policy research which is rare in Canada and many other countries. Moreover, this partnership offers HRM a good standing in federal discussion and engagement with federal agencies. A strong partnership will allow HRM to have a stronger influence on federal policies which will be a great benefit for the city.

The first step is to establish a research agenda which identifies how and where research can most effectively support the municipality's greatest challenges. This partnership brings the following benefits to HRM:

- Using expertise available at other institutions to develop creative and innovative solutions and approaches to City businesses and services.
- No new hiring as work can be outsourced to experts in the field.
- Providing new expertise, knowledge, innovation, and resources to support multidisciplinary problem solving.
- RNS could potentially contribute to research activities managed by HRM.
- Building a hub may help to develop other municipalities in the province and the region.
- Developing ad-hoc and agile teams to provide solutions for current situations (ex. Covid situation).
- Enhancing HRM's role in using evidence-based research in decision and policy making.
- Using cutting-edge knowledge in social sciences to build a healthy, livable, and creative city.
- A new and innovative approach to engage with research communities and relationship building.
- Provide a forum for sharing information, building consensus, and making decisions on a go-forward basis.

A working group of Government Relations and External Affairs (GREA) staff with RNS's Director of Research has been formed to establish the research agenda. This group has engaged with a number of stakeholder groups, all of whom emphasized the importance of clearly identifying problems, looking at tangible, meaningful solutions, and developing processes of mutual learning between parties for joint problem-solving.

As a litmus test for a potentially deeper partnership, the working group is undertaking a specific research pilot in the 2023-24 cycle that will engage Research Nova Scotia's knowledge cluster to explore best practice mechanisms for multi-level governmental and community group collaboration. This would be particularly focused on the regional-municipal equivalents of the provincial-municipal ecosystem in order to determine how best to leverage the capacities and authorities of both levels of government and maintain the voice and autonomy of community across project and policy implementations. Simply put, this would result in a research paper on best practices for doing 'with' as opposed to 'to' community with proposed projects to test those practices in HRM. The Statement of Work and the associated contribution agreement for this pilot are currently being drafted. Should this pilot be a success, the working group will propose that

the partnership be developed into a more formal relationship that would create a medium to long-term coordinated research agenda, and that staff return to Council for approval of these items.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

GREA has earmarked \$10,000 from existing budget to pilot this work in E400 - 6919. This will be cost-matched by ResearchNS.

### **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

Consultation was undertaken with the Youth Advisory Committee, Accessibility Advisory Committee and Women's Advisory Committee. Substantial feedback was received on potential future direction for the partnership as well as specific research projects.

### **ATTACHMENTS**

None.

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A copy of this report can be obtained online at [halifax.ca](http://halifax.ca) or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210.

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