

Presentation Name: Partnered Innovation: The Role of Colleges in Canada's Innovation Ecosystem

Organizer:

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Abstract:

Canada's colleges, institutes, cégeps and polytechnics have emerged over the past 50 years to become significant new players in the innovation ecosystem. They are mandated to deliver training programs that meet and adapt to the rapidly changing needs of the 21st century workplace. Deeply embedded in the regions they serve, colleges and institutes have particularly close relationships with SMEs and local employers. Students are immersed in the world of work by faculty who come from industry, curriculum designed in consultation with employers, and hands-on access to current -- and emerging -- tools and technology. Experiential learning is a centerpiece of their applied education model and increasingly, students have opportunities in applied research that give them first-hand experience of the innovation process.

The most recent data on applied research activity in colleges and institutes show strong growth since federal funding programs were introduced. In 2014-15, over 5,500 private sector partners -- 86% of which were SMEs and micro-enterprises -- worked with colleges and institutes. Federal investments are matched dollar for dollar and the results come quickly: the vast majority of projects are completed in less than one year, yielding new and improved products, processes and services. Community organizations have responded enthusiastically to pilot opportunities for applied research in social innovation. Over 700 specialized research centres have been created, spawning innovative networks such as Tech-Access Canada that connect faculty, facilities and industry clients across the country.

As Canada constructs an Innovation Agenda that will lead to inclusive growth and increased competitiveness, the government is asking how colleges can play a larger role in the innovation ecosystem. With over 1000 campuses serving 3000 urban, rural and remote communities, colleges and institutes can serve as “innovation hotspots” and commercialization partners, capable of delivering a rich supply of talent, expertise, facilities and R&D services attuned to local opportunities. What will it take to scale up the success achieved to date? And how should these assets be integrated with those of other players in the system?

Denise Amyot, President and CEO of Colleges and Institutes Canada, will report on the experience to date and explore some of the opportunities to mobilize colleges and institutes in making Canada a global centre for innovation.