ABOUT THE SSRL

The Social Sciences Research Laboratories, or SSRL, is a premiere research facility that supports faculty, staff and students doing cutting-edge research in the social sciences. This unique facility provides access to innovative, state-of-the-art research infrastructure and research supports that are unparalleled in Canada.

Our mission:

To provide shared research infrastructure and technical and administrative support to faculty, staff and students in the College of Arts & Science, the University of Saskatchewan and beyond, to facilitate the design, delivery and dissemination of cutting-edge social science research.

The SSRL consists of five complimentary and interconnected research laboratories:

- Experimental Decision Laboratory (EDL)
- Qualitative Research Laboratory (QRL)
- Spatial Analysis For Innovation in Health Research Laboratory (SAFIHR)
- Survey and Group Analysis Laboratory (SGAL)
- Video Therapy Analysis Laboratory (ViTAL)

The SSRL has three interrelated objectives:

- To provide researchers access to shared research infrastructure and technical and administrative support.
- To enable hands-on research training opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students in the social sciences.
- To enable and support investigator-driven and community-engaged research.

The SSRL and its component laboratories have been made possible by the combined support of the Canada Foundation for Innovation, the Government of Saskatchewan, the University of Saskatchewan, and several of its colleges, schools and supporting units.

For More Information

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INTRODUCTION

Background
Founded in 2011, the Social Sciences Research Laboratories (SSRL) is a major undertaking for the Division of Social Sciences in the College of Arts & Science at the University of Saskatchewan. While administratively and operationally rooted in the College of Arts & Science, the reach and scope of the SSRL extends significantly beyond to encompass colleges, schools and supporting units across campus with strong social science research traditions. This is reflected in the broad-ranging support, financial and otherwise, provided to the SSRL by its on-campus partners. Those partners include:

- College of Agriculture and Bioresources
- College of Arts & Science
- College of Education
- College of Graduate Studies and Research
- College of Law
- Edwards School of Business
- Information & Communications Technology
- Johnson-Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy
- Office of the Vice-President Research
- St. Thomas More College
- School of Environment and Sustainability
- University Library

Off-campus, the SSRL has received considerable support through direct and indirect financial contributions from the Canada Foundation for Innovation (CFI) and the Government of Saskatchewan Innovation and Science Fund (ISF).

As a collaborative, multi-disciplinary undertaking, the SSRL represents a significant investment in social sciences research infrastructure on the University of Saskatchewan campus, and across Canada. Encompassing approximately 500 m² in the Arts Building in the heart of the University of Saskatchewan campus, the SSRL has been the recipient of a combined investment exceeding $3.5 million (from the CFI, the Government of Saskatchewan, and the University of Saskatchewan).

Given the significant investment in the SSRL, both financial and otherwise, a need was identified to ensure not only value and return on investment, but also to ensure operational and strategic accountability of the SSRL to its many partners and stakeholders (on- and off-campus). As a result, the SSRL Evaluation and Impact Assessment Framework was identified in fall 2011 as a critical element of ongoing evaluation and performance management activities. Work on the framework began in May 2012 and was completed in August 2012 with its public release.

Goals and Objectives
The SSRL by its nature is an ambitious undertaking. This is reflected in the mission of the SSRL:

To provide shared research infrastructure and technical and administrative support to faculty, staff and students in the College of Arts & Science, the University of Saskatchewan and beyond, to facilitate the design, delivery and dissemination of cutting-edge social science research.

An ambitious initiative such as the SSRL requires an equally-ambitious plan to monitor, assess and report on outputs, outcomes and impacts. This evaluation and impact assessment framework seeks to accomplish those goals by setting out a comprehensive ‘blueprint’ or ‘plan’ to actively and systematically monitor, assess and report on the outputs, outcomes and impacts.
This evaluation and impact assessment framework was developed to address a number of interrelated and interconnected goals and objectives:

1. To ensure sound administrative and operational oversight of the SSRL and its component laboratories.
2. To ensure sound financial stewardship of the SSRL and its component laboratories in order to safeguard their long-term operation and viability.
3. To provide factual information and evidence that will inform short- and long-term strategic planning within the SSRL and its component laboratories.
4. To contribute to annual reporting activities, including annual reporting to off-campus funding partners (e.g., CFI, SSHRC, CIHR) and annual reporting to on-campus partners and stakeholders.
5. To provide a deliberate mechanism that will aid in the identification of targets and benchmarks and provide a sound means upon which to identify ‘success’.

Using best practices in program evaluation theory and practice, this evaluation and impact assessment framework draws upon resources and expertise within and outside of the SSRL to monitor, assess and report on outputs, outcomes and impacts of the SSRL in a deliberate and systematic way. Using a blend of quantitative and qualitative research methodologies, and consolidating and combining those methodologies where appropriate, it is expected that this framework will provide a strong foundation upon which subsequent strategic and operational decisions may be made.

**Structure of this Document**

The balance of this document is structured in a way that details the progressive steps that were followed in the development of this evaluation and impact assessment framework. Similarly, it follows a natural sequence of events that will be reflected in the implementation of the described evaluation and impact assessment activities.

The **theoretical framework** section presents the conceptual and theoretical models upon which this evaluation and impact assessment framework are based. Set within the paradigm of the knowledge systems approach (knowledge creation, knowledge transfer, knowledge application, and monitoring and evaluation), the framework is positioned within and against other ongoing measurement frameworks, including the CFI’s Outcome Measurement Study (OMS) and annual reporting requirements.

The **program logic model** illustrates the program theory and identifies linkages between the SSRL’s inputs, activities, outputs, short-term outcomes and long-term impacts. Narrative is provided detailing those linkages, along with how they were derived, and how they relate to the goals and objectives of the evaluation and impact assessment, and the goals and objectives of the SSRL more broadly.

Building on the program logic model, the **methodological approach** presents specific issues that will be addressed in the evaluation and impact assessment (in the form of research questions), along with more specific performance indicators that will be used to operationalize each question. Specific research methodologies and data sources are also described and discussed.

Next, potential **opportunities and challenges** that may facilitate or impede implementation of this evaluation and impact assessment are identified and discussed.

Last, the section on **reporting activities** delineates a short- and long-term plan for reporting on the outputs, outcomes and impacts of the SSRL and SSRL-facilitated research through both formal and informal means.
SSRL Evaluation and Impact Assessment Framework

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Evaluation Context
Evaluation and impact assessment frameworks are developed and implemented as a primary means to identify the outputs, outcomes and impacts produced by a program, service or initiative (Rossi et al., 2004). Further, evaluation and impact assessment frameworks help to determine the extent to which intended outputs, outcomes and impacts are achieved – thereby measuring the net effect of a program, service or initiative (Rossi et al., 2004).

Partners and Stakeholders
The SSRL is a rather complex system and employs a unique structure involving a variety of partners and stakeholders on- and off-campus. As such, the many needs and interests of these partners and stakeholders have been considered in the development of the SSRL Evaluation and Impact Assessment Framework. According to Rossi et al., stakeholders (or partners) are individuals, groups or organizations that have a vested interest in the activities, operation and success of a program, service or initiative (Rossi et al., 2004). A high-level depiction of partners and stakeholders involved in the SSRL, either directly or indirectly, is presented in Figure 1, below.

Figure 1. SSRL Partners and Stakeholder Model

Operating outside of the core of the SSRL, but still critical to its success, is infrastructure funding provided by the CFI, the Government of Saskatchewan ISF and on-campus partners and stakeholders. Outside funding of SSRL-facilitated research (e.g., tri-council research funding) is necessary to ensure the SSRL research infrastructure is used to the fullest extent possible.

Within the operational core of the SSRL, a number of key groups play important roles to ensure the ongoing operations and maintenance of the facilities. Within this operational core lie SSRL operations staff who manage and maintain the day-to-day operations of the SSRL and its component laboratories. A formal governance structure, consisting of an SSRL Operations Committee and an SSRL Management Committee provide strategic and directional support to the SSRL and its operations staff members. Also at the SSRL operational core are a variety of on- and off-campus partners and stakeholders who have a vested interest in the SSRL and the research it generates (e.g., users of the SSRL, university community, community partners or stakeholders (including the general public)).

Evaluation Structure
As mentioned in the introduction, the SSRL is an ambitious undertaking that requires an equally-ambitious evaluation and impact assessment framework. In recent times, evaluation and impact assessment activities (and by extension, evaluation and impact assessment frameworks) have shifted toward a ‘systems’ approach as opposed to measuring discrete or individual units (Arnold, 2004). Researchers and evaluators now recognize that research, programs and interventions can be evaluated more effectively when considering their position within a larger context or network (Arnold,
These systems or portfolio evaluations tend to centre around a similar and unifying topic or theme (Srivastava, Towery, & Zuckerman, 2007). In this case, the system is represented by the whole of the SSRL. However, the evaluative approach employed within this evaluation and impact assessment framework considers the SSRL to be comprised of two complimentary and interrelated domains of influence and activity that are centred around shared infrastructure and facilitated research.

More specifically, these two domains of influence include:
- SSRL research infrastructure and research supports; and
- SSRL-facilitated research.

This distinct yet interdependent relationship between the infrastructure/supports and the research undertaken within the SSRL forms the backbone of this evaluation and impact assessment framework and all proposed data gathering, analysis and reporting activities. All subsequent sections of this framework and the plan presented herein has considered the relationship and the resulting effect of this two-domain model of influence (see Figure 2, below). While these two domains require different resources, engage in separate activities, and produce distinct products, many of their intended outcomes and impacts are shared. Therefore, an approach that considers both domains, as well as the influence of their shared efforts, is required, and is presented in this evaluation and impact assessment framework.

**Knowledge Systems Approach**

The two-domain model of influence provides a strong structural foundation for the implementation and ongoing management and maintenance of the SSRL Evaluation and Impact Assessment Framework. Such a model is premised on and firmly rooted in a knowledge systems approach that encompasses multiple dimensions of knowledge creation, knowledge transfer, knowledge application, and monitoring and evaluation. The knowledge systems approach further strengthens the theoretical and contextual basis for the evaluation and impact assessment framework, and more practically speaking, will frame many of the monitoring, analysis and reporting activities presented in this document.

The SSRL was initially conceived as part of an emerging social sciences knowledge system which promotes the creation, transfer and application of knowledge within society. These components are interrelated, and with the inclusion of evaluation and monitoring activities, form an iterative feedback loop (see Figure 3, below).

**Figure 3. Knowledge Systems Cycle**

The SSRL’s five component laboratories are an example of the technical capacity required within the emerging social sciences knowledge system. The SSRL, through the efforts of its operational staff and governing bodies, is positioning itself as a ‘tool box’ of research technologies and associated technical and administrative knowledge and research supports. Such infrastructure and supports are available to enhance the research programs and the research capacities of researchers both on and off the University of Saskatchewan campus.

Components within the knowledge system may be further distinguished through the contribution of three dimensions that are found within the SSRL: the specific technologies (the research infrastructure),
the social roles (the research supports), and the interface between the technology and the people that use it (the research infrastructure and the research supports). For example, the SSRL research infrastructure may play a critical role in knowledge creation as it is a necessary prerequisite in the design and implementation of research. However, the role of the SSRL is minimized at the knowledge application stage as the responsibility for mobilizing or applying knowledge moves to policymakers or others in a position to implement change as result of SSRL-facilitated research.

Community-engaged research is also a defining feature of the emerging social sciences knowledge system. Community-engaged research refers to research that is conceived, planned and completed through a collaborative relationship between university-based researchers and community-based individuals, groups or organizations. It is through these partnerships that the knowledge system can function best. Effective knowledge translation, transfer and application require the involvement of end users in the knowledge creation process. It is premised on respectful, mutually beneficial relationships between community-based knowledge users and university-based researchers.

**Existing Frameworks**
A comprehensive review and examination of existing evaluation and impact assessment frameworks was conducted during the initial stages of framework development. While the plan presented herein is largely unique, it also encapsulates elements of existing evaluation and impact assessment frameworks that measure the outputs, outcomes and impacts of research infrastructure and/or research.

Most notable to the SSRL Evaluation and Impact Assessment Framework is the CFI Outcome Measurement Study (OMS). The OMS was established in 2006 as a tool in the CFI’s suite of evaluation activities to identify and evaluate the outcomes and impacts of CFI-funded research infrastructure through the realization of five outcomes: 1) strategic research planning; 2) research capacity; 3) the training of highly qualified personnel; 4) research productivity; and 5) innovation and extrinsic benefits (Tremblay, Zohar, Bravo, Potepp, & Barker, 2010).

Given the shared focus on the (CFI-funded) SSRL research infrastructure in this framework, various elements of the SSRL Evaluation and Impact Assessment Framework are premised on the strategies and approaches identified in the CFI OMS. Other similar frameworks and evaluations and impact assessments (e.g., tri-council managed evaluations) are reflected in various ways and to varying degrees throughout this document.
A program logic model is a graphical representation of how a program, service or initiative intends to achieve its goals and objectives. Program logic models are commonly used when engaging in evaluation and impact assessment as a means of representing the relationships between the components in a program, service or initiative (Rossi et al., 2004). It presents logical relationships among the resources invested (inputs), the activities that take place (activities), what is produced through the activities (outputs), and benefits or changes that accrue from the program, service or initiative (outcomes and impacts). A program logic model is the foundation of any comprehensive program evaluation and impact assessment.

The SSRL Program Logic Model (presented in Figure 5) delineates the expected sequence of steps that lead to the SSRL’s anticipated short-term outcomes and long-term impacts. The SSRL Program Logic Model is divided into two halves and colour-coded to denote the elements associated with SSRL research infrastructure and research supports, and those relating specifically to SSRL-facilitated research. The former is colored in light green and the latter in dark green. The orange boxes represent components that are perceived to operate across both domains.

Program logic models typically consist of five general categories: 1) inputs, 2) activities, 3) outputs, 4) outcomes, and 5) impacts. The first three categories function in a relatively sequential relationship to produce the outcomes and impacts (see Figure 4, below).

**Inputs**

Inputs are the resources needed (e.g., human, financial, space) to ensure the implementation and operation of a program, service or initiative (Knowlton & Phillips, 2009). The SSRL relies on a variety of inputs to ensure ongoing operations, ranging from funding to the provision of SSRL infrastructure. Each is discussed in further detail below.

The SSRL and its five component laboratories were funded through a variety of sources, including the Canada Foundation for Innovation (CFI) Leaders Opportunity Fund, the Government of Saskatchewan Innovation and Science Fund (ISF), and other funding received from on-campus partner colleges, schools and units (see p. 1 for a detailed listing of those partner colleges, schools and units). Additional financial support for three SSRL operations staff positions (Director, Survey Research Manager and Specialist, and Clerical Assistant) was provided by the University of Saskatchewan Provost’s Committee on Integrated Planning (PCIP). These and other SSRL operations staff positions are primarily responsible for providing technical, administrative, and operational support to users and potential users of the SSRL and its five component laboratories.

Strategic direction and support of the SSRL is provided through a formal governance structure that consists of an SSRL Management Committee and an SSRL Operations Committee. Each committee serves as an independent body, supporting the ongoing operations and administration of the SSRL and its component laboratories.

A considerable amount of space (approximately 500 m²) was provided to the SSRL by the College of Arts & Science to house the SSRL General Office and the five component laboratories.
Research funding, which may originate from a variety of external and internal sources (e.g., SSHRC, CIHR, NSERC, matching funds), are necessary to ensure that researchers (including principal investigators and student research assistants) have the financial support in place to successfully initiate and undertake their research within the SSRL (the initiation and generation of SSRL-facilitated research).

All inputs depicted in Figure 5 are funneled through the operation and use of the SSRL infrastructure that includes the five component laboratories (EDL, QRL, SAFIHR, SGAL, ViTAL).

It should be noted that while some of these inputs may appear to be finite contributions to the achievement of SSRL goals and objectives, they are in fact required on a recurring basis. Most of the resources identified are continuous requirements (e.g., funding, space, researchers) to ensure the sustained maintenance and operation of SSRL research infrastructure and research supports, and of SSRL-facilitated research.

Figure 5. SSRL Program Logic Model
Activities

Activities encompass any action or work initiated to meet the goals and objectives of a program, service or initiative (Rossi et al., 2004). As with inputs, SSRL activities relate specifically to SSRL research infrastructure and research supports, or specifically to SSRL-facilitated research, or to both.

The SSRL Program Logic Model identifies four activities that are specifically associated with SSRL research infrastructure and research supports. As indicated by the arrows presented in Figure 5, SSRL operations staff play an important role in the implementation of many of the activities. Operations staff offer technical, administrative and operational support to users of the SSRL, including methodological advice and guidance, oversight of data collection activities, quality control, recruitment of research participants, training and employment of student research assistants, among many other activities. While technical, administrative and operational support is a direct result of the SSRL research infrastructure and research supports, it is also identified as an input for the research itself. That is, some degree of technical, administrative and operational support is required in order to access the research infrastructure, and certainly before the initiation of any SSRL-facilitated research.

SSRL operations staff also directly engage in communications and public relations activities. These activities aim to raise awareness of the SSRL as a facility and raise awareness of research generated through the SSRL (SSRL-facilitated research). Such activities include on- and off-campus promotional efforts, including partnership opportunities with the media where relevant and appropriate. Such partnerships may include news articles and stories, or the promotion of major SSRL events or initiatives. SSRL operations staff are also responsible for development and maintenance of the SSRL website (http://ssrl.usask.ca), Facebook page (http://www.facebook.com/UofSSSRL) and Twitter feed (@SSRLUofS). These online/social media sites were developed to provide a conduit to the campus and broader community, and to provide real-time updates on SSRL-related news and events.

Monitoring and reporting activities relate directly to the plan identified in this evaluation and impact assessment framework. The Methodological Approach section of this document specifically delineates that plan, including the identification of indicators (performance measures), and methods and data sources that support implementation of the framework. SSRL operations staff play a pivotal role in the ongoing success of all monitoring and reporting activities, including design, implementation, analysis and reporting. Deliberate, systematic, and formal and informal reporting on the results of the evaluation and impact assessment is necessary to ensure accountability to on- and off-campus partners and stakeholders.

SSRL operations staff also engage in various forms of partnership building and community outreach. This activity encompasses programs and initiatives that seek to engage on- and off-campus individuals or groups of individuals in the SSRL and SSRL-facilitated research. Such activities may or may not be initiated and/or led by the SSRL, but all are premised on the notion that the SSRL has the technical and operational capacity to bring academic and community groups together in mutually-beneficial ways. Examples of these activities include meetings, roundtable discussions and luncheon events. SSRL operations staff also provide tours of the facilities and deliver presentations to government representatives and the businesses community to increase awareness of SSRL’s research capacity, activities and objectives.

Training of personnel encompasses activities that relate to both SSRL research infrastructure and research supports, and to SSRL-facilitated research. In broad terms, training of personnel includes activities that further develop the skills, abilities and research capacity of faculty, staff and students. SSRL operations staff play an important role in most training activities. Examples of training activities include workshops on specific analytical software packages (e.g., SPSS, NVivo) or research methodologies employed by the SSRL’s component laboratories (e.g., survey research, experimental research, mapping and geographic information systems). Additional one-on-one training and support is also provided when needed. Student research assistants employed by the SSRL, or who intern in the SSRL, are provided training to ensure
their success in the SSRL. For example, student research assistants hired to conduct telephone surveys are provided an intensive three-hour training session prior to their first telephone call. Training of personnel is also directly linked to the research generated through the SSRL, as faculty, staff and students directly engage in the collection and analysis of data within the SSRL.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the primary activity associated with SSRL-facilitated research is the research itself. In this instance, research refers to the act of performing or conducting the research within the SSRL. Research undertaken within the SSRL is broad and varied, representative of the vast array of research methodologies employed by the SSRL and across the social sciences more broadly. All research activities are facilitated by, and are a direct result of the SSRL research infrastructure and research supports.

**Outputs**

Outputs are the direct result or product of activities undertaken by a program, service or initiative (Knowlton & Phillips, 2009). The SSRL, through its many activities, produces or generates a number of program outputs. Those outputs are described in greater detail below.

Several activities generated through or by the SSRL research infrastructure and research supports result in promotion of the SSRL and SSRL-facilitated research. Promotion relates to the scope and reach of any communications-related activity. For example, the number of website hits, Facebook friends and Twitter followers are indicators of promotion that may reflect on the success of the SSRL’s communications and public relations activities. Partnership building and community outreach also generate promotion-related outputs, such as numbers of meetings facilitated or numbers of presentations to partners, stakeholders or community groups. Promotion of the SSRL and SSRL-facilitated research is largely supported by SSRL operations staff, although not exclusively, as promotional support is also received and facilitated by other on- and off-campus partners and stakeholders.

**Workshops and conferences** may be generated as a result of partnership building and community outreach, communications and public relations activities, training of personnel, and through the provision of technical, administrative, and operational support. Although not explicitly identified as an expected output of the SSRL in its goals and objectives, workshops and conferences may be developed, planned or hosted by the SSRL or in conjunction with other interested partners or stakeholders. Such workshops and conferences may relate to specific research methodologies, specific initiatives or the social sciences more broadly.

Much of the information collected and generated through the SSRL’s monitoring and reporting activities, including this evaluation and impact assessment framework, will feed into the production and dissemination of reports and other documents. These reports, as outlined in the section on Reporting Activities below, will provide a vehicle through which the SSRL will share and make publicly available, data and information collected on the SSRL’s outputs, outcomes and impacts. Data and information generated through the monitoring and reporting activities will also feed into project-specific reports to various funding agencies and granting councils.

Four outputs listed on the SSRL Program Logic Model are a direct result of SSRL research infrastructure and research supports and of SSRL-facilitated research. Media articles include any digital or print story that profiles or identifies the SSRL or SSRL-facilitated research in any way. These media articles may be produced by media outlets on- and off-campus, and are a function of and a result of a number of the activities identified in the SSRL Program Logic Model.

Leveraging of research grants and contracts is expected as existing SSRL-facilitated research generates additional research questions, and ultimately, additional research funding in the form of grants or contracts. As an activity, the training of personnel helps to support researchers’ ability to leverage grants and contracts due to their enhanced skills and expertise, along with enhanced skills and expertise of student research assistants.
Collaborations fostered through partnership building and community outreach, as well as interest and exposure generated from communications and public relations activities are expected to raise awareness of the SSRL that will indirectly facilitate researchers’ ability to leverage future grants and contracts, and attract additional researchers (and resources) to the SSRL.

Opportunities for student training and employment are directly linked to the training of personnel and through student involvement in SSRL-facilitated research. Students may be employed in one or more of the SSRL component laboratories, during which time they receive relevant training to ensure their success in the SSRL. Most student training and employment within the SSRL is initiated and facilitated by SSRL operations staff (hence, the link to SSRL research infrastructure and research supports).

Research publications are a typical output generated from most scholarly research as a means of disseminating important and noteworthy research results. Publications generated through the SSRL will be tracked and monitored, as an output of both SSRL-facilitated research and SSRL research infrastructure and research supports.

Faculty usage and research studies are outputs that result exclusively from the activities of SSRL-facilitated research. That is, while SSRL infrastructure is required, it is through the research activity that faculty usage and research studies are achieved. Faculty usage refers to faculty members who make use of one or more of the SSRL’s component laboratories in order to conduct their research. Research studies, as a quantitative measure, are an output of doing that research (e.g., number of research studies).

Outcomes are the desired changes or anticipated net benefits that accrue as a result of a program, service or initiative’s goals and objectives (Knowlton & Phillips, 2009). Outcomes tend to be directional in nature and are achieved or appear within a relatively short period of time; typically within five years. Given that outcomes occur in a shorter frame than the more distal impacts, it is reasonable to attribute them directly to a program, service or initiative (Rossi et al., 2004). In this instance, short-term outcomes may be attributed directly to the SSRL (including SSRL research infrastructure and research supports, and SSRL-facilitated research). Therefore, the coordinated efforts of the SSRL, consisting of the aforementioned inputs, activities and outputs, contribute directly to the realization of the SSRL’s short-term outcomes (see Figure 6, below).

The SSRL Program Logic Model presents 10 short-term outcomes. All but one short-term outcome relates to both SSRL research infrastructure and research supports, and to SSRL-facilitated research. Each intended short-term outcome is discussed in greater detail below.

**Enhanced research capacity** relates directly to the provision and usage of SSRL research infrastructure and research supports. It is expected that by simply providing research infrastructure and associated supports, the research capacity of faculty, staff and students will be enhanced in terms of the quality and quantity of research performed. Quality of research refers to the shared theoretical and methodological explorations (e.g., multi-method projects) that are made possible by the SSRL’s component laboratories, while quantity of research refers to an increase in the number of research studies made possible through the existence of the SSRL. The interplay of quality and quantity forms the basis of the expected enhanced research capacity.

Building on enhanced research capacity, **new and innovative research programs** refer to the promise and potential made possible by the unique...
consolidation of diverse methodological approaches inherent in the SSRL. Such research programs may relate to new lines of inquiry and/or new areas of strength or expertise amongst faculty, staff and students using the SSRL. These new lines of inquiry and/or new areas of strength or expertise may generate creative and innovative research programs never before seen on- or off-campus.

The SSRL endeavours to promote greater community engagement within and between the university and the broader community. Community engagement encompasses research studies that are conducted with and for the community. Each of the SSRL’s component laboratories can work independently or together to identify and execute research that addresses questions of both academic and practical importance. This collaborative, capacity-building model encourages the involvement of community partners throughout all stages of the research cycle. Through effective knowledge transfer processes, the SSRL may encourage and promote greater engagement of community partners and the general public in research and research findings.

It is expected the SSRL will contribute to an enhanced student experience by providing practical, hands-on, experiential learning opportunities that better prepare students for careers in their respective field of study. The SSRL encourages faculty and staff to actively engage students, at undergraduate and graduate levels, through all stages of the research cycle. An enhanced student experience also encompasses gains in student research activities and funding at undergraduate and graduate levels, and opportunities to partake in interdisciplinary research studies and collaborations. Enhanced student experiences are also important on an administrative level, as they contribute to student recruitment and retention objectives.

Many of the outcomes presented in the SSRL Program Logic Model are expected to relate, to varying degrees, to the achievement of an increased college and university profile. The presence of the SSRL on the University of Saskatchewan campus has augmented the research capacity of the university by adding modern, state-of-the-art research facilities and equipment. New and innovative research and collaborative research programs that engage the community and other academics from outside the university hold the potential to increase the profile of the College of Arts & Science and the University of Saskatchewan more broadly. Further, engaging community partners and the public in research findings through effective knowledge transfer processes will likely further enhance the profile of the college and the university.

With new opportunities available as a result of SSRL research infrastructure and research supports, and of SSRL facilitated research, it is anticipated that the SSRL will generate and promote enhanced faculty recruitment and retention and enhanced graduate student recruitment. The added opportunities made possible and facilitated by the SSRL are expected to provide exciting possibilities for faculty and graduate students alike. The added research capacity and research supports are expected to serve as a catalyst for recruiting the best and the brightest social science faculty and graduate students, and retaining those faculty members once they arrive.

Usage of SSRL research infrastructure and research supports and involvement in SSRL-facilitated research studies, through research, training or employment activities, are expected to lead to greater preparedness of highly qualified personnel. It is presumed that individuals, including faculty and graduate students who use or work in the SSRL, will report greater success in, and greater preparedness for, their later endeavors. These successes may relate to future job prospects, career advancement, graduate school admission, or an increase in research- and work-related skills and opportunities.

Encompassing five laboratories that present and offer differing and diverse methodological approaches, the SSRL may serve as a focal point for developing and fostering increased interdisciplinary collaborations. SSRL-facilitated research studies may involve faculty, staff and students from colleges, schools and units across the University of Saskatchewan campus, in addition to faculty, staff and students from other post-secondary institutions (from Saskatchewan, Canada and beyond). As discussed earlier, the SSRL encourages and promotes greater community engagement, thereby increasing opportunities for further interdisciplinary collaborations that involve off-campus community groups and partners.
Last, inputs, activities and outputs of the SSRL are expected to produce **greater research impact**. Greater research impact encompasses anticipated outcomes that go beyond what was produced or developed prior to the existence of the SSRL. Examples of greater research impact include publication of research findings in higher impact journals, greater engagement of external partners or stakeholders (including the general public) in research findings (through more effective knowledge transfer processes), or novel methodological approaches that influence further social science research or social science researchers.

**Impacts**

While the realization of short-term outcomes will be a significant achievement for the SSRL, they are also intended to lead to the attainment of a number of impacts (see Figure 7, below).

**Figure 7. Pathway to Impacts**

Impacts are the ultimate desired change that results from all other components of a program, service or initiative (Knowlton & Phillips, 2009). Impacts tend to be more difficult to measure than outcomes and are more ambitious and ambiguous in regards to causation, as many factors may influence impacts outside of a program, service or initiative (Rossi et al., 2004). However, impacts are usually of greatest interest due to their practical and political significance (Rossi et al., 2004). By their nature, impacts take longer to come to fruition and are not likely achievable within the first five years of a program, service or initiative; however, exceptions are always possible.

Outcomes presented in the SSRL Program Logic Model, singularly or in combination, are intended to lead, either directly or indirectly (more likely), to the achievement of three long-term impacts. These long-term impacts are examples of effective knowledge application within the broader paradigm of the knowledge systems approach.

First, it is anticipated that the SSRL research infrastructure and research supports, and SSRL-facilitated research will help to inform the strategic direction of the College of Arts & Science, the University of Saskatchewan, and the social sciences more broadly. These impacts may include increased prominence, stature and support for the social sciences on- and/or off-campus.

Second, increased capacity for groundbreaking social sciences research activity as a result of the SSRL research infrastructure and research supports, and of SSRL-facilitated research may facilitate an enhanced national and international reputation of the College of Arts & Science and the University of Saskatchewan. An enhanced national and international reputation may take many different forms; however, it is premised on the notion that the SSRL and the social sciences more broadly (at the university), is doing something novel and unique that is deserving of recognition and reward.

Third, SSRL-facilitated research may generate or expedite **new or improved policies, programs, and practices**. These policies, programs and practices may be economic, social or political in nature, or any combination of the above.
Previous sections of this document have set the theoretical and contextual basis for the SSRL Evaluation and Impact Assessment Framework. Building on those foundational elements, and moving from the theoretical and conceptual to an evaluative approach that is both relevant and actionable necessitates a comprehensive and systematic plan for monitoring and measuring the outputs, short-term outcomes and long-term impacts identified in the SSRL Program Logic Model.

Evaluation Questions
The methodological approach to this evaluation and impact assessment framework is based on 14 evaluation questions that relate directly (and in some ways indirectly) to the short-term outcomes and long-term impacts delineated in the SSRL Program Logic Model. Much like the program logic model, the evaluation questions are also partitioned according to their links to:

- SSRL research infrastructure and research supports;
- SSRL-facilitated research; and
- (Both) SSRL research infrastructure and research supports and SSRL-facilitated research.

Each evaluation question intends to identify and measure the achievement and the degree of achievement of short-term outcomes and long-term impacts. This is reflected in usage of the words, ‘to what extent’. Each evaluation question also includes a directional element and a means of inquiry into the achievement of short-term outcomes and long-term impacts through inclusion of the words, ‘in what ways’.

The 14 evaluation questions derived from the SSRL Program Logic Model are the cornerstone of the SSRL Evaluation Matrix presented in Table 1. Those evaluation questions are as follows:

**SSRL research infrastructure and research supports:**
1. To what extent and in what ways has the SSRL generated enhanced research capacity at the University of Saskatchewan?

**SSRL-facilitated research:**
2. To what extent and in what ways has SSRL-facilitated research contributed to new or improved policies, programs, or practices?

**SSRL research infrastructure and research supports and SSRL-facilitated research:**
3. To what extent and in what ways has the SSRL and SSRL-facilitated research fostered greater levels of community engagement?
4. To what extent and in what ways has the SSRL and SSRL-facilitated research fostered new and innovative research programs?
5. To what extent and in what ways has the SSRL and SSRL-facilitated research enhanced student experiences?
6. To what extent and in what ways has the SSRL and SSRL-facilitated research produced greater research impacts?
7. To what extent and in what ways has the SSRL and SSRL-facilitated research fostered interdisciplinary collaborations?
8. To what extent and in what ways has the SSRL and SSRL-facilitated research enhanced faculty recruitment and retention?
SSRL Evaluation and Impact Assessment Framework

9. To what extent and in what ways has the SSRL and SSRL-facilitated research enhanced graduate student recruitment?
10. To what extent and in what ways has the SSRL and SSRL-facilitated research prepared highly qualified personnel?
11. To what extent and in what ways has the SSRL and SSRL-facilitated research increased the college and university profile?
12. To what extent and in what ways has the SSRL and SSRL-facilitated research informed the strategic direction of the College of Arts & Science, the University of Saskatchewan, and the social sciences more broadly?
13. To what extent and in what ways has the SSRL and SSRL-facilitated research enhanced the national and international reputation of the College of Arts & Science and the University of Saskatchewan?
14. What have been the unintended outcomes of the SSRL and SSRL-facilitated research, if any?

What is an ‘Evaluation Matrix’?

Evaluation matrices serve as a guide or a roadmap in the implementation of evaluation and impact assessment activities. An evaluation matrix, typically presented in tabular format, identifies a series of evaluation questions - that is, questions associated with the achievement of goals and objectives of a program, service or initiative; in our case, the SSRL (e.g., questions related to SSRL relevance, performance and effectiveness). Evaluation matrices further identify indicators of potential success in relation to specific evaluation questions (e.g., number of grants secured, students trained, creation of new and innovative research programs) and identify methods and data sources for each indicator.

Figure 8. Evaluation Matrix Logic Sequence
### Table 1. SSRL Evaluation Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation Questions</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Methods &amp; Data Sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>SSRL Research Infrastructure and Research Supports</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 1. To what extent and in what ways has the SSRL generated enhanced research capacity at the University of Saskatchewan? | • # of research projects using the SSRL  
• % of projects using multiple SSRL laboratories  
• # of researchers using SSRL  
• # of grants received  
• $ of grants received  
• # of contracts  
• $ of revenue generated  
• # of students employed  
• # of students trained  
• # of workshops, public presentations, conferences hosted, and meetings facilitated  
• Perceived influence of SSRL on research capacity | • Review of Operations Tracking Database  
• Faculty Engagement Survey  
• Key informant interviews:  
  • Administrators  
  • Faculty members |
| **SSRL-Facilitated Research** | | |
| 2. To what extent and in what ways has SSRL-facilitated research contributed to new or improved policies, programs, or practices? | • Perceived effect of SSRL-facilitated Research on polices, programs, and practices | • Key informant interviews:  
  • Administrators  
  • Faculty members  
  • Community partners |
| **SSRL Research Infrastructure and Research Supports and SSRL-Facilitated Research** | | |
| 3. To what extent and in what ways has the SSRL and SSRL-facilitated research fostered greater levels of community engagement? | • # of community-engaged projects  
• # of community-engaged partnerships  
• # of off-campus media articles, stories, and reports  
• # of workshops, public presentations, conferences hosted, and meetings facilitated  
• # of publicly available products and services  
• Perceived value of community/university engagement | • Review of Operations Tracking Database  
• Key informant interviews:  
  • Administrators  
  • Faculty members  
  • Community partners |
| 4. To what extent and in what ways has the SSRL and SSRL-facilitated research fostered new and innovative research programs? | • # of research projects using the SSRL  
• % of projects using multiple SSRL laboratories  
• # of grants received  
• $ of grants received  
• Composition of research teams  
• Perceived value of involvement with new and innovative research programs | • Review of Operations Tracking Database  
• Key informant interviews:  
  • Administrators  
  • Faculty members  
  • Community partners |
### Table 1. SSRL Evaluation Matrix (continued...)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation Questions</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Methods &amp; Data Sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>SSRL Research Infrastructure and Research Supports and SSRL-Facilitated Research</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 5. To what extent and in what ways has the SSRL and SSRL-facilitated research enhanced student experiences? | • # of students trained  
• # of students employed  
• # of courses integrating SSRL in curriculum  
• Perceived effect of SSRL and SSRL-facilitated research on student experiences | • Review of Operations Tracking Database  
• Student Engagement Survey  
• Follow-up student survey  
• Faculty Engagement Survey  
• Key informant interviews:  
  • Administrators  
  • Faculty members |
| 6. To what extent and in what ways has the SSRL and SSRL-facilitated research produced greater research impacts? | • # of publications  
• Journal impact factors of publications  
• # of conference presentations and posters  
• # of grants received  
• $ of grants received | • Review of Operations Tracking Database |
| 7. To what extent and in what ways has the SSRL and SSRL-facilitated research fostered interdisciplinary collaborations? | • Composition of research teams  
• Mixed methods employed  
• Perceived value of SSRL-facilitated collaborations | • Review of Operations Tracking Database  
• Key informant interviews:  
  • Administrators  
  • Faculty members |
| 8. To what extent and in what ways has the SSRL and SSRL-facilitated research enhanced faculty recruitment and retention? | • # of faculty using the SSRL  
• # of faculty who cite the SSRL as a factor in accepting a position at the University of Saskatchewan  
• Perceived value of the SSRL as a tool to facilitate faculty recruitment  
• Perceived influence of the SSRL as an incentive for accepting a position at the University of Saskatchewan  
• Perceived contribution of the SSRL and SSRL-facilitated research as a reason to stay at the University of Saskatchewan | • Review of Operations Tracking Database  
• Faculty Engagement Survey  
• Key informant interviews:  
  • Administrators  
  • Faculty members |
| 9. To what extent and in what ways has the SSRL and SSRL-facilitated research enhanced graduate student recruitment? | • # of graduate students using the SSRL  
• Perceived value of the SSRL as a tool to facilitate graduate student recruitment  
• Perceived influence of the SSRL as an incentive for attending the University of Saskatchewan | • Review of Operations Tracking Database  
• Student Engagement Survey  
• Faculty Engagement Survey  
• Key informant interviews:  
  • Administrators  
  • Faculty members |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation Questions</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Methods &amp; Data Sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 10. To what extent and in what ways has the SSRL and SSRL-facilitated research      | • # of faculty trained  
• # of students trained  
• # of students employed  
• # of grants received  
• $ of grants received  
• Perceived effect of SSRL and SSRL-facilitated research on faculty career opportunities and advancement  
• Perceived influence of SSRL and SSRL-facilitated research on student employability | • Review of Operations Tracking Database  
• Faculty Engagement Survey  
• Follow-up student survey                                                                                                           |
| prepared highly qualified personnel?                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                           |
| 11. To what extent and in what ways has the SSRL and SSRL-facilitated research       | • # of on- and off-campus media articles, stories, and reports  
• # of publications  
• # of workshops, public presentations, conferences hosted, and meetings facilitated  
• # of collaborations  
• # of grants received  
• $ of grants received  
• # of website hits, Facebook likes, and Twitter followers  
• Perceived effect of the SSRL and SSRL-facilitated research on the College and University profile | • Review of Operations Tracking Database  
• Key informant interviews:  
  • Administrators  
  • Faculty members  
  • Community partners                                                                                                                |
| increased the college and university profile?                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                           |
| 12. To what extent and in what ways has the SSRL and SSRL-facilitated research       | • Perceived extent and ways in which the SSRL and SSRL-facilitated research has informed strategic directions                                                                                           | • Key informant interviews:  
  • Administrators  
  • Faculty members  
  • Community partners                                                                                                                |
| informed the strategic direction of the College of Arts & Science, the University   |                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                           |
| of Saskatchewan, and the social sciences more broadly?                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                           |
| 13. To what extent and in what ways has the SSRL and SSRL-facilitated research       | • Perceived influence of the SSRL and SSRL-facilitated research on the College’s and University’s reputation                                                                                           | • Key informant interviews:  
  • Administrators  
  • Faculty members  
  • Community partners                                                                                                                |
| enhanced the national and international reputation of the College of Arts &        |                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                           |
| Science and the University of Saskatchewan?                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                           |
SSRL Evaluation and Impact Assessment Framework

Unintended Outcomes

Question 14 of the SSRL Evaluation Matrix asks, “What have been the unintended outcomes of the SSRL and SSRL-facilitated research, if any?”

Unintended outcomes are the unexpected or unplanned results or consequences of a program, service or initiative. Unintended outcomes may be either positive (favourable) or negative (unfavourable). By their very nature, unintended outcomes are unknown at the outset of an evaluation and impact assessment and cannot be identified. However, thorough and systematic evaluations such as this are generally effective at identifying and measuring unintended outcomes. As a result, the identification of unintended outcomes will be integrated directly and indirectly into all research tools and data sources.

Indicators

Indicators (also commonly referred to as performance measures) are used to identify areas of strength and weakness, and success and failure in relation to the evaluation questions. The exact number and nature of indicators varies from one evaluation question to the next, however all indicators presented in the SSRL Evaluation Matrix in Table 1 follow a common and basic set of principles:

- Mixed-method approaches that blend quantitative indicators (e.g., counts of research projects, publications, grants received, students trained) and qualitative indicators (e.g., perceived and subjective opinions and experiences) are employed where permissible and practical.
- Where possible, indicators will be used to provide evidence for multiple evaluation questions, thereby reducing duplication of effort and maximizing returns on data collection activities.
- Indicators chosen for inclusion in the SSRL Evaluation Matrix have been selected not only on the basis of their relevance to the evaluation questions, but also on the basis of their ease of collection and use. That is, the chosen indicators must be actionable and allow for data to be collected and analyzed in an expeditious, systematic and comprehensive manner.
Indicators selected for inclusion in the evaluation matrix are broad-ranging and relate directly to the evaluation questions and by extension, the long-term impacts and the short-term outcomes, and indirectly to the outputs identified in the SSRL Program Logic Model. The complete list of indicators and their associated evaluation question(s) can be found in Table 1: SSRL Evaluation Matrix.

Methods and Data Sources
While indicators identify ‘what’ is being measured, methods and data sources identify the ‘how’ of that measurement. Employing a blend of quantitative and qualitative approaches derived from administrative data and primary data collection activities, the SSRL Evaluation Matrix identifies five core methods and data sources in the implementation of the evaluation and impact assessment (see Figure 9, below).

Figure 9. Methods and Data Sources

![Methods and Data Sources Diagram]

Further details on each method/data source are provided on subsequent pages, including goals and objectives, intended audience(s) and contributor(s), and an implementation schedule (see Figure 10 on the next page for a detailed implementation schedule).

Operations Tracking Database
The operations tracking database plays a major role in the implementation of the SSRL Evaluation and Impact Assessment Framework. As a relational database in Microsoft Access, the operations tracking database will provide a versatile and easy-to-use tool that will aid in the capture and reporting of the vast majority of administrative data captured by the SSRL.

Much of this information will include quantitative indicators (e.g., number of research projects using the SSRL, number of faculty trained, number of publications) along with some limited qualitative indicators (e.g., composition of research teams). Given the relative focus on quantitative indicators and measures, the operations tracking database will be structured in such a manner that it captures this quantitative, numerical data in a systematic and consistent fashion – to facilitate later analysis and reporting.

The operations tracking database will be stored on SSRL server space and will be available to all SSRL operations staff beginning in 2012/13. It is expected that operations staff from each laboratory and the general office will populate the operations tracking database with relevant data and information on an ongoing basis in order to ensure the database is up-to-date at any given point in time.

The primary level of entry into the database is at the project-level. That is, individual projects that flow through any of the five laboratories in the SSRL will be entered into the database as the base unit of analysis. Within that base unit of analysis (project-level), operations staff will be provided a variety of options to enter data and information related to each of the following four topics:

- **Project information**: Including project title, project timelines, resultant publications, media articles and conference presentations, in addition to other relevant project-specific information not captured in the other three topics.
- **Project funding**: Including total amount of funding received for the project, in-kind or partner contribution(s), amount of funding dedicated for work in the SSRL, and source(s) of funding.
- **Faculty engagement**: Including number of faculty involved in the project and home department(s) and institution(s) of faculty members.
- **Student engagement**: Including number of students involved in the project, their year of study and their major field(s) of study.
Most fields of entry within the operations tracking database will be defined fields with specified ranges of acceptable entry, such as numeric responses that accept certain value ranges, checkboxes or drop-down menus. Employing this approach will ensure consistency in data entry (and later analysis and reporting) across the laboratories within the SSRL, and will facilitate and expedite usage of the database by SSRL operations staff.

Other administrative data that is not project-specific will be captured in the operations tracking database in 'Other Administrative Data' fields. These fields will capture and facilitate tracking and monitoring of other administrative data identified in the SSRL Evaluation Matrix, such as number of website hits, Facebook likes, Twitter followers and non-project specific media articles about the SSRL. These fields will be similarly pre-defined (e.g., acceptable ranges of entry, checkboxes, drop-down menus) that will facilitate later analysis and reporting.

**Key Informant Interviews**

Following a semi-structured format, the key informant interviews are intended to elicit much of the qualitative, subjective data and information that cannot be expeditiously captured through the operations tracking database. For example, key informant interviews will be structured to measure: perceived influence of the SSRL on research capacity; perceived effect of SSRL and SSRL-facilitated research on student experiences; and perceived effect of the SSRL and SSRL-facilitated research on the College and University profile; among others.

Given the breadth and scope of these questions, three separate versions of a key informant interview guide will be prepared. These versions of the interview guide will be based on the classification or category of the interviewee, and will include:

- **University Administrators**: Including the Office of the Vice-President Research (OVPR) and relevant Deans, Vice-Deans and Associate Deans Research.
- **Faculty members (on- and off-campus)**: Including faculty members who have used the SSRL.
- **Community partners**: Including those who have been involved in SSRL-facilitated research.

It is expected that each key informant interview will last anywhere from 45 to 60 minutes. Interviewers will include SSRL operations staff or student research assistants employed by the SSRL.

The key informant interviews with University Administrators will take place on a three-year rotation beginning in 2013/14. That is, interviews with individuals in the identified positions (e.g., Vice-President Research, Dean of Arts & Science, Vice-Dean Social Sciences) would take place every three years, with the number of interviews distributed equally across the three-year rotation to decrease the burden on the interviewer(s) in any given year.

Interviews with faculty members (on- and off-campus) and community partners will be project-driven and will take place approximately one-year
after completion of a project in order to account for some short-term outcomes. As a result, the number of interviews with faculty members will vary in any given year based on the number of research studies that have been generated through the SSRL. Further follow-up may be identified and warranted at the discretion of the interviewer, particularly in those cases where some long-term impacts are anticipated or expected. These interviews will also begin in 2013/14.

**Faculty Engagement Survey**

While the key informant interviews provide a depth of information from faculty members who have used the SSRL, they unfortunately do not provide any data or information from faculty members who have not used the SSRL (including faculty who are aware and unaware of the SSRL). To fill this gap and provide information on such indicators as ‘perceived value of the SSRL as a tool to facilitate faculty recruitment’, a faculty engagement survey will be developed and administered as part of the ongoing evaluation and impact assessment activities.

Using online survey software employed by the Survey and Group Analysis Laboratory (SGAL) in the SSRL, the faculty engagement survey will be deployed as a 10-minute web-based survey. All aspects of survey administration and analysis will be conducted in-house within the SSRL.

In order to diminish the burden on faculty members who are called on to partake in regular administrative data collection exercises, the faculty engagement survey will follow a similar three-year rotation beginning in 2013/14. That is, one-third of the faculty in each college and school on the University of Saskatchewan campus will be randomly selected in the first year to participate in the survey. In the second year, half of the remaining faculty will be randomly selected to participate. In the third and final year of the rotation, the remaining faculty will be invited to participate. Over a three-year period, faculty from across the entire campus will be covered and the cycle will begin once again in year four (2016/17). Invitations to participate in the online survey will be distributed by e-mail, and will be coordinated and vetted with the Institutional Planning and Assessment office each year.

While most questions in the faculty engagement survey will be tailored to those who have not used the SSRL facilities, they will also capture some limited data from those who have used the SSRL, allowing for some comparisons between the two cohorts of faculty.

**Student Engagement Survey**

Intended to collect data and information from students that have worked or interned in the SSRL, the student engagement survey will ask questions related to the ‘perceived effect of SSRL and SSRL-facilitated research on student experiences’; ‘perceived value of the SSRL as a tool to facilitate graduate student recruitment’; and ‘perceived influence of the SSRL as an incentive for attending the University of Saskatchewan’.

Deployed as a 10-minute web-based survey using the online survey software utilized by the SGAL in the SSRL, each student employed by the SSRL (either as a student research assistant or as a student intern) will be requested to complete the online survey at the end of their employment, regardless of the length of their term. Each student will be provided with a link to the online survey, along with a unique code to access the survey.

Given the variable number and nature of students employed in the SSRL at any point in time and the varying length and nature of each SSRL-facilitated research study, the student engagement survey will be made available to recently-employed students on an ongoing basis. SSRL operations staff will be responsible for providing the link and access code to all recently-employed students throughout each year. Initial surveys will be conducted beginning in 2012/13.

All aspects of survey administration and oversight will be handled in-house within the SSRL. Analyses of these data will take place once per year, at minimum, with each cohort identified by the fiscal year (May to April) they completed the survey.

**Follow-up Student Survey**

While the student engagement survey will focus on immediate experiences of students employed in the SSRL, short-term outcomes of student employment
SSRL Evaluation and Impact Assessment Framework

in the SSRL will be addressed through a follow-up student survey. The follow-up student survey will measure short-term outcomes through surveys of former student employees three years after the completion of their employment in the SSRL. Results of the survey will be used to identify and understand the impacts of SSRL student experiences on employability, career growth and development, and/or graduate studies.

Administered as a 10-minute online survey using the SGAL online survey software, students taking part in the follow-up student survey will be asked a series of closed- and open-ended questions to gauge the outcomes of their employment in the SSRL.

To maximize the utility and usefulness of this survey, the follow-up student survey will be consistently administered to former students three years after their employment in the SSRL. Doing so will require a degree of coordination with the Institutional Planning and Assessment Office and an ongoing association with Alumni relations – from whom we hope to receive fairly accurate and up-to-date lists of students who have worked in the SSRL, along with e-mail contact information.

It is expected that invitations to participate in the follow-up student survey (to be sent via e-mail with a link to the survey and a unique access code) will be distributed beginning in 2014/15 – three years after the SSRL was founded in 2011. Analyses of data from the follow-up student survey will take place annually beginning in 2014/15 with each cohort identified by the fiscal year (May to April) they were employed in the SSRL. All aspects of administration and oversight of the follow-up student survey will take place within the SSRL.
The SSRL Evaluation and Impact Assessment Framework is a unique and innovative undertaking. Like the SSRL, it is ambitious in nature, setting a comprehensive and systematic plan for monitoring and measuring outputs, outcomes and impacts of the SSRL and SSRL-facilitated research. As such, this evaluation and impact assessment presents a number of important opportunities, and faces a number of challenges to its successful implementation.

Opportunities
A review of the literature has revealed that the SSRL Evaluation and Impact Assessment Framework, combining an evaluation of research infrastructure/research supports and the impacts of research is unique. That is, evaluations have historically focused on one or the other, but have not considered the two as part of a larger comprehensive evaluation and impact assessment. Multiple opportunities to disseminate this unique and innovative evaluation and impact assessment framework (an initial positive unintended outcome of the SSRL) will be explored and pursued, including publications and conference presentations.

It is expected that this evaluation and impact assessment framework and subsequent evaluation activities may also serve as a useful tool to guide the development and implementation of similar evaluative activities across the University of Saskatchewan campus. SSRL operations staff will make a concerted effort to share this framework, along with best practices in program evaluation and performance measurement and lessons learned with colleagues across campus.

In addition to the opportunities identified above, a number of factors are considered assets, and by extension opportunities, in the implementation of this evaluation and impact assessment framework:

- A commitment to a culture of accountability is being developed and fostered by SSRL operations staff and its governing bodies.
- The availability of evaluation expertise among SSRL operations staff and across the University of Saskatchewan campus.
- The availability of tools (e.g., online survey software, data analysis capacity) and resources (e.g., SSRL operations staff, student research assistants) within the SSRL to support the implementation of the evaluation and impact assessment.
- The broad array of partners and stakeholders with a shared interest in measuring and assessing the outcomes and impacts of research infrastructure/research supports and the impacts of research.

Challenges
Successful implementation of the SSRL Evaluation and Impact Assessment Framework also faces a number of potential challenges that may impede implementation. While some challenges may be controlled and managed, others fall outside of the bounds of SSRL control and accountability. Potential challenges include:

- The ambitious nature of the SSRL, and by extension this evaluation and impact assessment framework, will require considerable resources to ensure its ongoing implementation and success.
- Situating and coordinating the evaluation and impact assessment within a larger set of roles and responsibilities among SSRL operations staff, its governing bodies and other invested partners and stakeholders.
- Ensuring continued buy-in and support from SSRL operations staff and its governing bodies.
SSRL Evaluation and Impact Assessment Framework

- Recognizing and understanding that not all outcomes and impacts are directly attributable to the SSRL and SSRL-facilitated research. More complex systems and process are likely at play and will be identified and addressed where possible and where appropriate.
- The time required to observe and recognize the short-term outcomes and the long-term impacts in particular may be considerable and is likely to vary.
- The need to develop accepted standards and benchmarks early in the evaluation and impact assessment.

Appropriate steps will be taken during the implementation of the evaluation and impact assessment to isolate and mitigate those challenges where possible and permissible.
The plan set forth in this evaluation and impact assessment framework will generate a considerable amount of data and information. While much of the data and information will be used internally by the SSRL for continuous service and operational improvements, results of the evaluation and impact assessment are also intended to feed ongoing reporting of the outputs, outcomes and impacts of the SSRL and SSRL-facilitated research in a number of ways (see Figure 11, below).

Figure 11. Intended Reporting Activities

First, results of the evaluation and impact assessment framework will feed directly into annual reporting to the CFI and to various other research funding bodies, such as the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), among others. Most research funding provided to faculty and students using the SSRL requires annual progress reports, in addition to a final research report. The CFI, as a primary funder of the SSRL research infrastructure also requires annual progress reports on the outputs, outcomes and impacts of its funded infrastructure, along with a final report that is due after approximately five years of operation — again, covering the outputs, outcomes and impacts of the CFI-funded infrastructure during its initial five years of existence.

Given the ongoing nature of this evaluation and impact assessment and the implementation schedule identified in the previous section (Methodological Approach), data for reporting to the CFI and to other research funding bodies will be readily available at any given time. Such data will include a blend of outputs, outcomes and impacts, and will include a mix of qualitative and quantitative measures from multiple lines of evidence. This approach will enable and facilitate ‘real time’ reporting to the CFI and other research funders, ensuring that reported data is comprehensive, complete and up-to-date.

Second, data and information generated through the SSRL Evaluation and Impact Assessment Framework will form the basis of new reporting activities within the SSRL. Reports that identify the achievement of outputs, outcomes and impacts over the previous fiscal year (May – April) will be profiled in a new ‘SSRL Annual Report’ that will be produced and published each summer — beginning in 2013/14. Incorporating a blend of narrative, tables and graphs, these reports will outline progress toward the goals and objectives of the SSRL and will identify outputs and significant outcomes and impacts achieved over the last year, and since inception. As a means of reporting to our multiple partners and stakeholders (on- and off-campus), these annual reports will identify benchmarks and track longitudinal changes over time, incorporating quantitative and qualitative measures derived from SSRL administrative data and primary data collection activities. These colour- and photo-rich reports will serve as one means of ensuring ongoing accountability to our partners and stakeholders. The SSRL Annual Report will be distributed electronically
via e-mail, will be made publicly available on the SSRL website, and will be available in print.

In addition to the more formal reporting activities identified above, the SSRL will explore and pursue avenues to share and disseminate the results of this evaluation and impact assessment in unique and innovative ways. Using available tools (e.g., SSRL website, Facebook page, Twitter feed) and resources (e.g., SSRL operations staff, SSRL governing bodies), ongoing outputs, outcomes and impacts will be shared and disseminated throughout the year. Multiple and creative means of communicating our findings will be considered, tailored and made relevant to our multiple partners and stakeholders. Such reporting activities will be framed and guided by the approach and the models presented throughout this document.


NOTES