

# **Evaluation of the Leslie Harris Centre Suite of Applied Research Funds: Impacts and Outcomes**

Prepared for:  
The Leslie Harris Centre of  
Regional Policy and Development  
Memorial University

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July 26, 2013



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## **Executive Summary**

The purpose of the given project was to evaluate the impact of funding programs for the suite of all applied research funds since inception at the Leslie Harris Centre of Regional Policy and Development (2004). Of the 72 recipients contacted, 23 agreed to be interviewed regarding the outcomes of their research.

Several key findings were produced:

- 43% of funding recipients interviewed had leveraged additional funding from outside sources. Some researchers leveraged millions of dollars to contribute to their projects.
- 70% had published their Harris Centre funded project in some way.
  - Some publications were peer-reviewed journal articles while others were industry, community or conference publications.
  - Others contributed to published articles and chapters in books as well.
- Of the researchers who had published, 57% had produced at least one peer-reviewed journal article.
- Qualitative feedback was also received and participants expressed a generally positive view of the Harris Centre Applied Research Funds.
  - Areas for improvement included: considering funding for conference travel, providing feedback for researchers and collecting project outcome data in the future.

## List of Acronyms

ARF	Applied Research Fund
CFI	Canadian Foundation for Innovation
DFO	Department of Fisheries and Oceans
HC	Harris Centre
IRF	Immigration Research Fund
ISER	Institute of Social and Economic Research
MASP	Masters of Applied Social Psychology
MMSB	Multi Materials Stewardship Board
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
NSERC	Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council
PRNL	Petroleum Research Newfoundland & Labrador
RBC	Royal Bank of Canada
RDC	Research and Development Corporation
SPF	Strategic Partnership Fund
SSHRC	Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada
UNDP	United Nations Development Program

## **1.0 Introduction**

This report presents the results of the evaluation of the impacts and outcomes of the Leslie Harris Centre's funding programs. The project was conducted during a 12-week work term period from May-August 2013. It was completed by graduate student Meghan Mahoney as part of the Masters of Applied Social Psychology program at Memorial University.

The document is organized as follows:

- Section 1 provides an overview of the Harris Centre's funding programs
- Section 2 describes the evaluation focus and methods used
- Section 3 provides the evaluation findings
- Section 4 sets out the overall conclusions

The appendices include the sample questionnaire and evaluation matrix.

### **1.1 Introduction & Overview of Funding Programs**

The primary goals of the Leslie Harris Centre of Regional and Policy Development is to facilitate the progress of the region, economy and society of our province while stimulating and encouraging informed discussion of relevant issues. These goals are accomplished through a suite of efforts including funding opportunities, which play a major role in fostering the development of

Newfoundland and Labrador. Since 2005, the Harris Centre has funded 117 projects totaling \$1,459,902 through its applied research funds.

The Harris Centre currently provides applicants with four funding programs. However, six funds were examined during this project including two that are no longer in operation. In choosing a funding option researchers must consider the type of project at hand and the type of researcher seeking funding. While some funding programs are available for both students and faculty some are limited to one or the other.

The first and most common fund is the Applied Research Fund (ARF). This fund has a maximum amount of \$15,000 per grant and provides \$100,000 a year to support the research of Memorial faculty, staff and students on projects contributing to regional development and/or public policy. Since 2005, it has provided \$802,199 to its recipients.

The Harris Centre's Strategic Partnership Research fund is available for students only. This fund incorporates representation from the Provincial Government, the Business Coalition and the Federation of Labour with the intention to stimulate research in the field of provincial competitiveness. It currently distributes a maximum of \$5000 per project and has contributed \$84,500 to recipients thus far.

The Harris Centre Royal Bank of Canada (RBC) Drinking Water Research and Outreach fund provides up to \$15,000 per grant for projects researching rural and remote drinking water issues in the province and totals between \$30,000 and \$80,000 per year. This program has also leveraged funding from between the

governments of Newfoundland and Labrador and Canada. Since the funding program began in 2010 it has contributed \$134,819 to recipients.

The Harris Centre Multi-Materials Stewardship Board (MMSB) Waste Management Applied Research Fund distributes up to \$100,000 per year to research projects dealing with solid waste management concerns in Newfoundland and Labrador. It funds a maximum of \$15,000 per project and has contributed \$128,900 since it was first distributed in 2010.

Other funding opportunities that existed in previous years include the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) collaborative agreement fund (2006-11) and also the Immigration Research Fund (2009-10). These funding programs contributed \$279,484 and \$30,000, respectively, to recipients during the years in which they were offered (Figure 1).

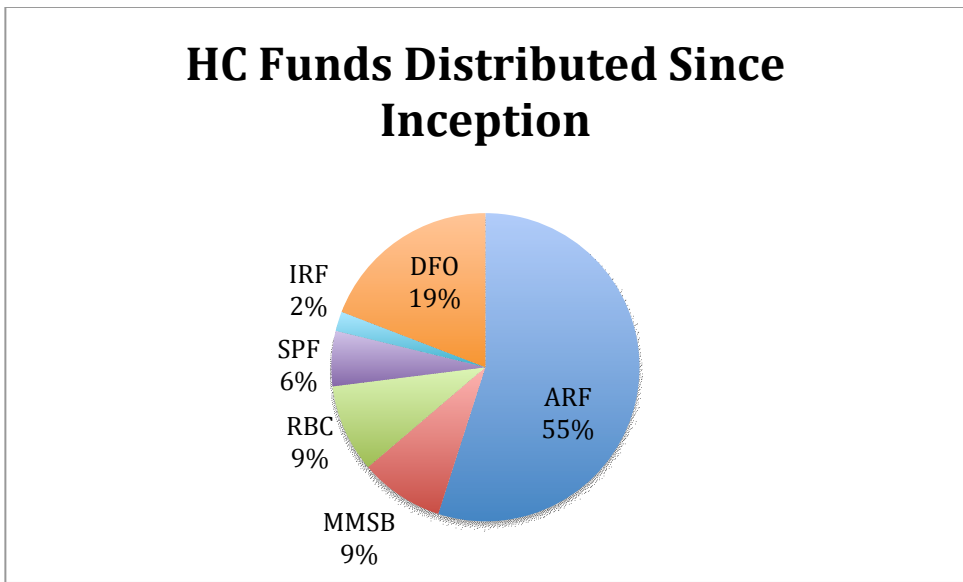


Figure 1- Harris Centre Funds distributed since inception (2005)

## 1.2 Purpose & Objectives of Project

The purpose of the current project is to evaluate the impact of funding programs for the suite of all applied research funds since inception at the Leslie Harris Centre of Regional Policy and Development (2005). Several key aspects of the funding program hoped to be addressed. Specific objectives included:

- Determine who received funding and how much.
- Determine any peer-reviewed publications that were produced from the projects.
- Determine whether any additional funding was leveraged in addition to that provided by the Harris Centre.
- Identify any knowledge mobilization and public outreach activities that were produced including partnerships and collaborations with non-governmental organizations, communities, government or businesses.
- Determine whether students were utilized in various projects, whether any additional projects were spawned or inspired and all/any other known impacts.



## **2.0 Evaluation Focus and Approach**

### **2.1 Evaluation Approach**

This section provides an overview of the methodology used in the current evaluation. Both quantitative and qualitative information was gathered from participants using a single questionnaire and was analyzed accordingly.

### **2.2 Evaluation Methods**

#### ***Procedure***

Information was collected and summarized in order to identify which funds were granted to recipients, their departments, the year funds were distributed, and the titles of their projects. Contact information including e-mails and telephone numbers were gathered and updated in the Harris Centre's contact database. Once completed, an e-mail was sent requesting funding recipients to meet for a brief session to discuss their projects. Participation was voluntary and no incentive was included in the offer. Those who were interviewed met for an approximate half-hour session in which they discussed their projects using objectives that were outlined in a questionnaire. Information collected in the questionnaires was then organized so that statistical analysis could be conducted where it was deemed appropriate. Qualitative data was also drawn from the questionnaire and discussed with Harris Centre staff to address any concerns expressed by recipients.

## ***Materials***

Harris Centre staff members designed the questionnaire in collaboration with Meghan. It included 13 questions that examined the impacts of funding by discussing knowledge mobilization, public outreach activities, funding leveraged, and teaching and learning impacts. There was also an opportunity at the end of the session to provide the Harris Centre with any general feedback regarding the distribution and usage of funds. The questionnaire can be found in Appendix B of this report.

## ***Participants***

All researchers who had received funding from the Harris Centre since inception in 2005 were included in the project. Of the 72 recipients contacted, 23 agreed to meet for a brief interview discussing the impacts and outcomes of their projects.

The 23 respondents represented various departments at Memorial and several memorial centres or administrative units. The department with the highest number of participants agreeing to be interviewed was Geography with five researchers, followed by Engineering with three, and Political Science, Business and Economics having two respondents each (Figure 2)

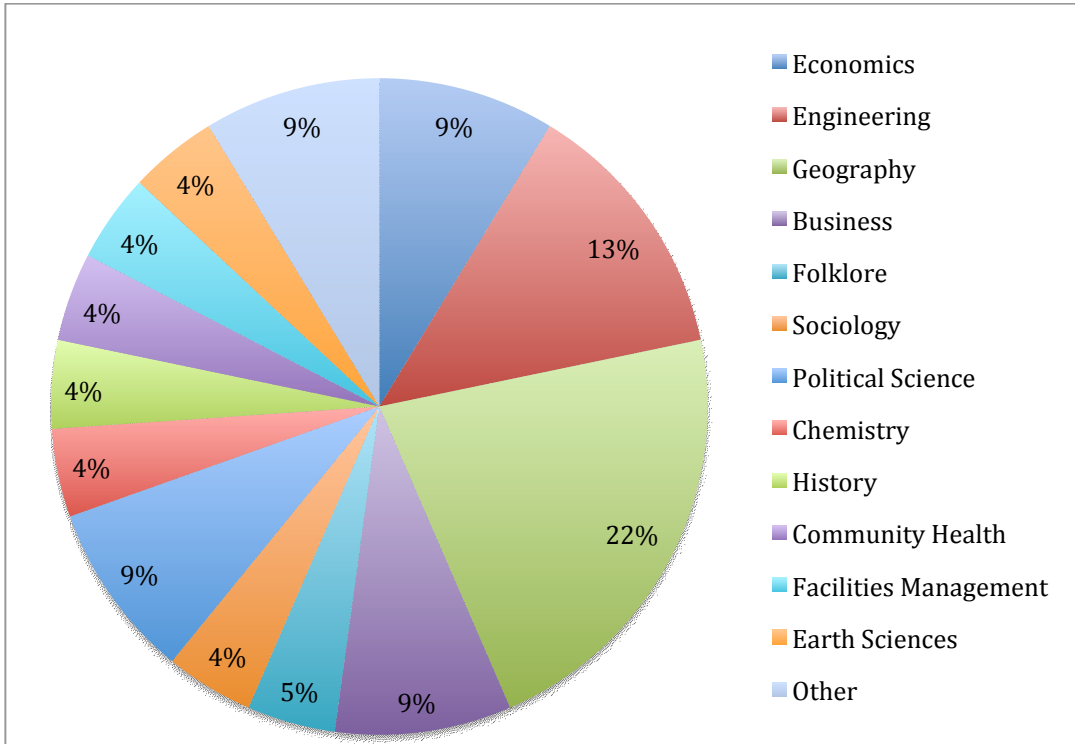
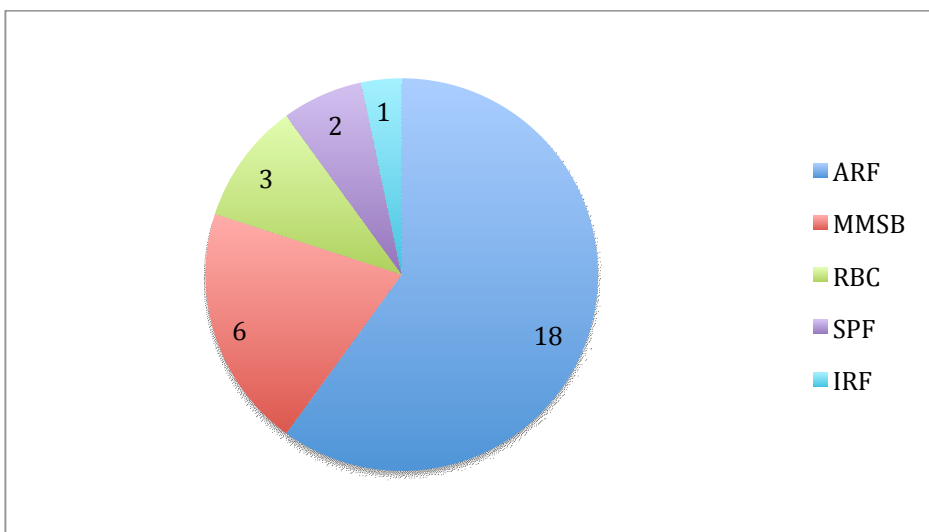


Figure 2- Departments/Organizations of Funding Recipients interviewed

Of the 30 projects that were completed by these recipients, the majority, (eighteen projects) were funded through the Harris Centre’s Applied Research Fund. The MMSB fund, the RBC fund, the Strategic Partnership fund and the immigration funds followed with six, three, two and one project(s) respectively (Figure 3).



*Figure 3- Funding sources of projects discussed with participants*

## **2.3 Limitations**

Several limitations were identified throughout the project. The year in which recipients received funding ranged from very recent (2012-2013) to several years ago (2005-2006). As a result, some projects had not yet reached a point in which they were ready for publication or able to leverage additional funding. Moreover, projects that were funded several years ago were more likely to have yielded more knowledge mobilization activities and participated in public outreach given that they had been established for quite some more time. On the other hand, it is more likely that researchers who were involved in more recent projects were better able to recall specifics regarding their projects (i.e. amounts of funding leveraged, specific public outreach activities). In some cases, researchers had difficulties recalling the exact amounts that were leveraged towards their projects, which made it somewhat more difficult to report exact figures.

In addition, some questions were more relevant to certain participants than to others. For example, many of the researchers were professors who were able to speak about teaching and learning impacts while some others did not have experience in a teaching environment and were unable to speak about this topic.

Furthermore, there were a variety of relationships acknowledged when discussing partnerships with NGOs, communities, businesses and government. Some partnerships were formal and concrete while others were casual affiliations.

Although this made partnerships a difficult concept to measure quantitatively,

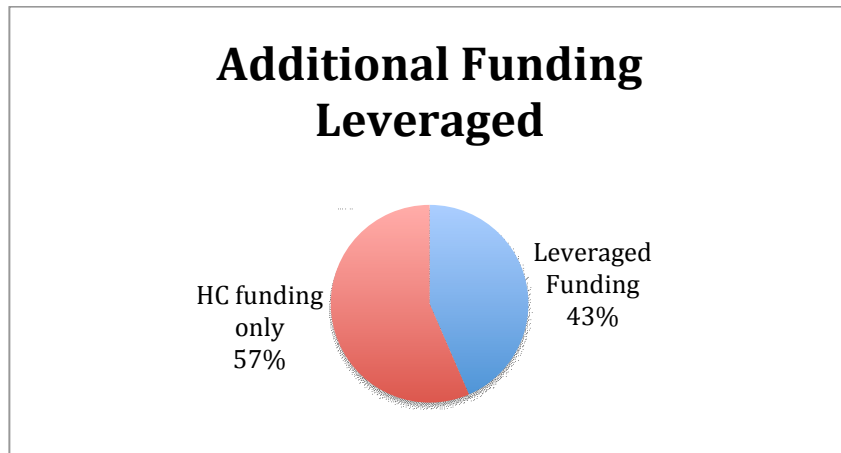
partnering organizations were still identifiable and thus continue to be relevant to the project on a more qualitative level.

## **3.0 Findings**

This section outlines the key findings of the project. It will first discuss numerical results followed by qualitative findings and feedback.

### **3.1 Additional Funding Leveraged**

Using the funding provided by the Harris Centre to leverage additional funding on a given project is a major advantage for any researcher in the applied field. While some projects are more appropriately suited for supplementary funding than others, the Harris Centre encourages all funding recipients to expand the scope and impact of their projects in this way if and when possible. Of the sample, 43% (ten participants) had obtained additional funding. This was an impressive statistic considering many of the projects that we spoke about had received funding recently and were still in preliminary stages of research where they had not yet reached a point in which they could gain further funding (Figure 4). Of the cases identified, researchers leveraged substantial amounts of funding. Several even reported obtaining total amounts upwards of \$140,000, 1.3 million and 4 million dollars. Funding sources included SSHRC, NSERC, ISER, CFI, RDC, PRNL, UNDP, the Agricultural Research Initiative, the Rural Secretariat, Citizenship and Immigration Canada and Statistics Canada



*Figure 4- Additional Funding leveraged*

### **3.2 Publications**

Of the 23 funding recipients interviewed, 16 of them (70%) had published their Harris Centre funded project in some way (other than the report that they are required to submit). Some of the publications were peer-reviewed journal articles while others were industry, community or conference publications. Others contributed to long-term articles and chapters in books as well.

Researchers who had not produced publications were often in the process of doing so, or had been funded so recently that their projects had not yet reached the publication stage. Of the 16 researchers who had published, 13 (57%) had produced at least one peer-reviewed journal article (Figure 5).

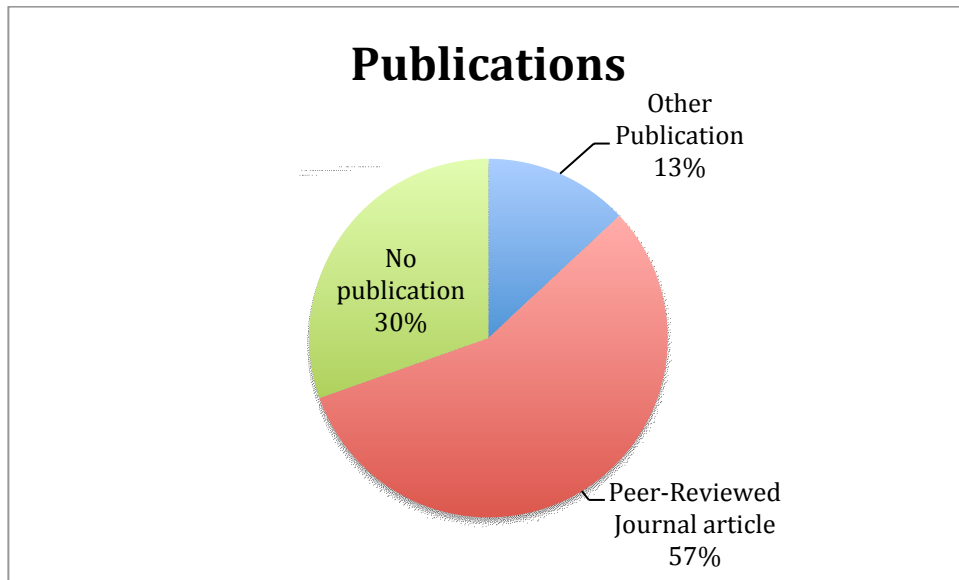


Figure 5- Researchers publications of Harris Centre funded projects

### 3.3 Qualitative Findings

#### *Funding Feedback*

As noted, each of the participants was given the opportunity to express any feedback that they were willing to share regarding the Harris Centre’s programs and services. They were also encouraged to speak about their personal experience with the funding programs and Harris Centre staff.

Feedback received was generally positive. Many funding recipients expressed that they felt the Harris Centre staff was very accommodating, flexible and supportive. They were described as prompt and collaborative folks whose interactions with recipients were viewed as open and helpful. Several recipients also noted that the application process was very accessible and that they were pleased with the experience overall.



Several participants mentioned that they appreciated the small and accessible amounts of funding that was made readily available for them with quick turnaround. They felt that the funding was an ideal value (\$15,000 in this case) to produce work and also leverage other funding that was essential to some projects.

Researchers were pleased with the funding itself and were very grateful for the opportunity. They explained that oftentimes the type of work they were looking to complete would fail to be funded elsewhere. Some participants explained that their work consisted of very valuable research that is not often seen to larger funding bodies as being so valuable. Some said that they felt privileged to have had such opportunities and that the Harris Centre had been a major asset in identifying their specific needs. Several participants said that they would not hesitate to apply for this type of funding again.

On the other hand, some funding recipients had criticisms that will be reviewed and incorporated into the Harris Centre cycle of continuous program and process improvement activities. The objectives of which are to improve services to meet the needs of the academy. While some researchers were very pleased with the application process, others said that they would like to see more clarity with regards to eligibility. It was also noted that the call for the ARF was sporadic and that it was lacking in how it was announced. It implied that the communication of some of this information appeared to involve only small pockets of people in the university who were well informed.

It was also noted that it would be convenient to receive funding for a longer duration of time as some researchers found the one-year deadline to be somewhat

restricting. Others mentioned that funding mobilization could be slow at times. Some interviewees expressed that they would like to see the Harris Centre provide funding for workshop and conference travel, as this is not currently covered by HC funds. It was also brought to our attention by one researcher that they would like to know who is on the funding committees to ensure fair selection.

Researchers expressed that follow through on knowledge mobilization could be a bit stronger. Specifically, that it would be nice to receive some sort of feedback on their final report. Moreover, some felt that Memorial University should enhance its coordination between teaching, engagement and research as a whole.

An interesting point noted by some researchers was that the type of work associated with applied research funding could be perceived in some cases as a hindrance to the academic advancement of the individual undertaking the project.

Ultimately, recipients felt that the Harris Centre funding was essential to their success of their work. They acknowledged that the Harris Centre fulfills an important mandate when serving the public. They recognized the value of investing effort into moving information to the right places and thus into the minds of the right people. They hope that the Harris Centre continues to ensure strong relationships with communities. Having their own work and the work of other researchers matched up to meet the needs of the province is an idea that was embraced and appreciated.

Several recipients expressed that they felt that the Harris Centre demonstrated flexibility that allowed them to do different and innovative work. All approaches including traditional and non-traditional were embraced and

researchers appreciated the opportunities that such practices inspired. Overall researchers were impressed with of the Harris Centre and are enthusiastic about where its future is heading.

### ***Teaching and Learning Impacts***

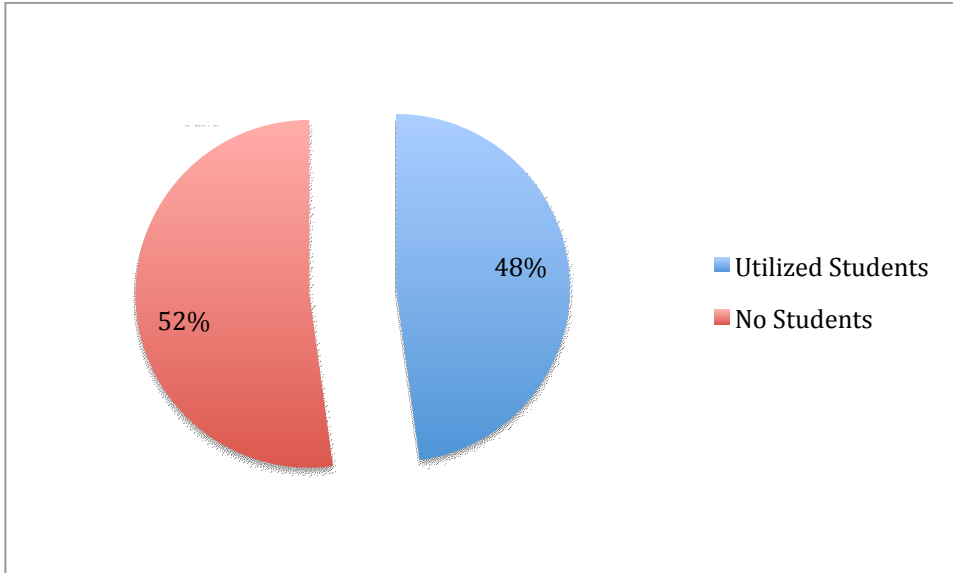
Question three in the sample questionnaire asked participants whether or not they had used any research support provided by the Harris Centre in their teaching (for example, conference reports, Memorial Presents or Synergy Session digital recordings etc.). While this question was more applicable to some recipients (i.e. professors) than to others (i.e. students), very few funding recipients claimed to have used these resources and many were unaware of their availability and benefits.

### ***Partnerships***

Every funding recipient described some type of partnership that existed between themselves and communities, NGOs, government or business. As noted in the limitations section, some partnerships were formal while others were much more casual which made them slightly difficult to classify quantitatively. However, having all recipients involved in collaborations of some sort speaks volumes regarding the efforts made towards knowledge mobilization and public engagement within these types of projects.

## ***Students***

Eleven of the 23 researchers noted that they had used funding to hire students to partake in the projects (Figure 6). Some researchers worked with only one or two students while others utilized up to ten depending on the nature of the project. This value is important to note as some students aspired to continue with the work of their supervisors or planned to carry on with research ideas that spawned from the original work. It also demonstrates the long-term impacts that can arise from funding this type of research.



*Figure 6- Researchers utilizing Harris Centre Funding to hire students*

## ***Knowledge Mobilization Activities***

Another valuable aspect of the interview was the feedback regarding knowledge mobilization activities. All 23 recipients completed knowledge mobilization tasks of some sort. Some activities were more traditional (i.e. conference presentations) while others were creative and innovative (i.e.

presentation at a bookstore, quick information videos). Regardless of the methods, it is promising to see that researchers have made efforts with the support of the Harris Centre to share and apply their work with stakeholders and the general public.

## **4.0 Conclusions & Recommendations**

The findings of this project were generally very positive. 43% of researchers interviewed managed to leverage additional funding towards their projects. This speaks volumes about the Harris Centre funding programs and the possibilities that can stem from such opportunities. It also demonstrates the impact that such projects are having in our province. While more funds are being leveraged, more partnerships and collaborations appear to be established. This in turn results in a larger impact on the regions and people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Another promising statistic came from identifying that 57% of researchers had published their work as a peer-reviewed journal article. As expressed in the feedback received, applied research funding opportunities may be perceived as a hindrance to those who do not realize the possibilities that exist for this type of work. While making substantial impacts in our province it is also possible for researchers to establish themselves within the academic community and to make significant contributions to their departments and to Memorial University as a whole.

Qualitative feedback collected during this project will also be very valuable to Harris Centre staff when funding programs are reviewed. Researchers provided much positive insight while also expressing concerns professionally. The staff plans to discuss any issues and changes will be made if and when appropriate.

It is recommended that the purpose and scope of existing funding programs be reviewed so that the Harris Centre may more easily track the outcomes evaluated during this project. Revised logic models could be drawn up for each of the funds so

that objectives and outcomes are clear. It would be beneficial for the Harris Centre to receive and record any information regarding publications, additional funding and projects spawned/inspired as it occurs so that more specific conclusions may be drawn.

The findings produced from this project will be presented in an upcoming Harris Centre funding conference in Fall 2013. All concerns voiced by funding recipients, outcomes and implications of this work will be addressed during this time.

## Appendix A- Evaluation Matrix

Key Questions	Objectives	Indicators	Data Sources	Due Dates	Personnel Responsible
<b>Who received Harris Centre funding? How much? From which fund?</b>	Gather information surrounding funding since inception	Values funded to certain researchers and departments	Advisory Board Book, Contact database	May 24 <sup>th</sup> , 2013	MASP Student
<b>Are publications being produced from HC funded projects?</b>	Determine what research has been published	Number of publications produced and what type (i.e. peer-reviewed, conference)	Participant interviews	July 26 <sup>th</sup> , 2013	MASP Student
<b>Are researchers using HC funding to leverage additional funds?</b>	Determine whether projects are leveraging outside sources of funding	Value of funds leverage, Funding sources	Participant interviews	July 26 <sup>th</sup> , 2013	MASP Student
<b>Are collaborations and partnerships being established?</b>	Identify existing partnerships stemming from projects	Relations with NGOs, communities, business & government	Participant interviews	July 26 <sup>th</sup> , 2013	MASP Student
<b>Are public outreach and knowledge mobilization activities being conducted?</b>	Note any activities that stem from projects	Activities completed, public interest, media coverage	Participant interviews	July 26 <sup>th</sup> , 2013	MASP Student
<b>Can we generate feedback and other known impacts?</b>	Gather valuable information regarding funding programs	Funding recipient feedback regarding Harris Centre funding	Participant Interviews	July 26 <sup>th</sup> , 2013	MASP Student



## Appendix B- Sample Questionnaire

Thank you for taking your time to speak with me today. As you know, we're conducting an evaluation of the impact of our funding programs so I would like to talk you about the funding that you received from the Harris Centre. I would like to get an idea of the outcomes of your project (for example, whether any outreach activities stemmed from your research or whether partnerships and collaborations were established through your work). Any feedback that you can provide us with will help us to better understand the impact of our financial aid and we appreciate your input.

1. What is your current profession/ position? Where are you located? Update contact information if available
  
2. The Harris Centre funded you through the \_\_\_\_\_ research fund and your report was posted to the Harris Centre website and a lay summary contributed to Yaffle. Additionally, you would have conducted various knowledge mobilization activities both on your own and/or with the Harris Centre's support.
  - a. Did this research contribute to one or more publications?
    - i. If yes who collaborated on this/these publications?
  
  - b. Was any additional funding leveraged to contribute to the project? (e.g. NSERC, SSHRC, CIHR, RDC, AIF, NGO or other community partner)
    - i. If so which funds and how much?
  
  - c. Could you summarize the knowledge mobilization activities conducted? Examples could be workshops, conferences, meetings, presentations, town halls, publications, Yaffle entries, media coverage, etc?
    - i. If so when/where?

