New Direction for the W. Garfield Weston Awards in Northern Research and Weston Family Prize for Lifetime Achievement

March 14, 2019

Almost fifteen years ago, the Association of Canadian Universities for Northern Studies (ACUNS) and The W. Garfield Weston Foundation entered into a new partnership to establish a natural sciences awards program at the graduate level. Building on a fifty-year history of supporting various educational initiatives through awards and scholarships, the Foundation was beginning to explore funding scientific research in the North through its newly created Northern Committee. At the time, ACUNS, a non-profit organization, had almost 30 years of experience in scholarship management and was the “go-to” organization for information and knowledge about the North – a distinction that remains today.

In 2007, we presented the first W. Garfield Weston Awards in Northern Research to five deserving PhD candidates as part of a pilot program. Owing to its success and impact, the Foundation and ACUNS grew the program substantially, scaling it from a pilot to an established and prestigious program. Today, 41 awards are given annually, and now include awards in archaeology in addition to the natural sciences, as well as Postdoctoral Fellowships and the Weston Family Prize for Lifetime Achievement in Northern Research. We are proud to say that this partnership has awarded 265 scholarships to further northern science scholarship at the highest level, contributing $10M to the field.

In addition to the Award programs, the Northern Committee supports a myriad of other organizations, including non-profits and universities to enable leading Canadian scientists to undertake innovative and collaborative research. It also supports educational opportunities for Canadians to learn more about the North. With 10 years of northern-focused grant awarding experience, Foundation Directors are reflecting and focusing on how best to meet the ever growing needs of scientific research in the North.

At the same time, ACUNS continues to grow in response to the constituency it serves. In recent years, it has placed increased emphasis on ethical research priorities and the importance of working collaboratively with northern residents themselves, as evidenced in its community engagement processes in the North. ACUNS has also sought to broaden its program with social sciences, humanities and health sciences funding opportunities for early-career researchers, in addition to its long-standing administration of other scholarship and awards programs.
The W. Garfield Weston Awards are now among Canada’s most prestigious northern science awards, thanks in large part to the hard work of ACUNS’ staff and volunteers, and the members of the adjudication committees: the Natural Sciences Committee and Canadian Northern Studies Trust. Their leadership and dedication to advancing northern scholarship is evidenced by the exceptional caliber of recipients produced year after year. Over the past ten years, the W. Garfield Weston Awards in Northern Research have increased both in scope and size. The increasingly complex nature of the Award programs has been in response to growing needs, both by the scientific community and by the Foundation’s evolving strategic direction.

It is therefore with mixed emotions that today we announce the W. Garfield Weston Awards in Northern Research and the Weston Family Prize for Lifetime Achievement will be administered by a new delivery agency as of June 1, 2019. This will allow the Foundation to find efficiencies across other Award programs while also enabling the Northern Committee to meet its developing strategic needs. The Foundation and ACUNS are committed to ensuring all current and new Award recipients experience a smooth transition between organizations with no interruptions to the current Award cycle, payment and deliverables. ACUNS will oversee the adjudication of the 2019-2020 Awards applications, which will be announced this June, and we will communicate new processes with all stakeholders in the weeks and months ahead.

We are proud that our partnership has contributed so much to advancing northern science in Canada, and are both eager to see our respective visions brought to life.

Sincerely,

Geordie Dalglish  
Chairman, Northern Committee  
The W. Garfield Weston Foundation

Dr. Gary Wilson  
President  
Association of Canadian Universities for Northern Studies