

---

## **CONTRACT RESEARCH OPPORTUNITY**

### **Strengthening Toronto's Technology Sector Innovation Incubation Ecosystem**

---

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this project is to investigate strengths and shortfalls (gaps) in Toronto's current innovation incubation ecosystem that serves technology-focused entrepreneurs and small companies, and to identify strategies for addressing the identified gaps. The study should build on previously completed research.

Questions to be probed include the following:

1. What innovation incubation infrastructures are lacking and how can they be created?
2. Is there a need for strategies / infrastructure to better support the success of technology sector entrepreneurs who are newcomers or members of other under-represented equity-deserving groups to build strategically for a more inclusive and equitable economy? If so, how can they be created?
3. Where do technology sector entrepreneurs and innovators go after "graduating" from incubation? Is there a need for increased access to "after-care" support? How can we establish clear pathways for entrepreneurs' post-incubation, including access to mentorship, funding opportunities and ongoing business development support? Are there "best practice" examples of successful post-incubation support systems that Toronto could use as models?
4. How can accelerators better help technology sector companies commercialize?
5. Where are the gaps in the innovation ecosystem that affects innovation hubs in Toronto?

#### **Background**

This project is being commissioned by the Intergovernmental Committee for Economic and Labour Force Development (ICE) in collaboration with the City of Toronto Economic Development and Culture Division (EDC)'s Business Growth Services Unit.

ICE strives to build bridges between the supply and demand sides of labour force development, ultimately informing the delivery of effective labour force and economic development policies and programs. More information about the Committee and its work is provided at <https://www.icecommittee.org>

The City of Toronto has been operating a multi-pronged program to support entrepreneurship development and business incubation for several decades within a culture of continuous improvement. It has commissioned or been involved with several studies of the incubation ecosystem in recent years.

The intention of this project is to build on this body of research by (a) looking at the needs of incubators working in the technology sector, and (b) focusing on how well current services support the success of entrepreneurs who are newcomers or members of other equity-deserving groups who are under-represented in the economy.

Previous research reports and information resources about Toronto's incubation ecosystem include the following:

- [A City of Entrepreneurs, Building a Supply Chain of Innovation](#), June 2021 Prepared by the Innovation Economy Council, MaRS
- [Research Summary Report, on Business Incubation and Commercialization Program 2.0](#), December 2021, Prepared by Code for Canada
- [Directory of Incubators and Accelerators](#) (known to the City of Toronto)
- [Business Incubation & Commercialization Grant Program, City of Toronto](#)
- [The Global Startup Ecosystem Report 2023, Prepared by Startup Genome](#)

## Scope of Work

The specific responsibilities and key activities of the successful proponent will include:

1. A **project work plan** that describes the approach to research and stakeholder consultation and outlines how the project will be completed within the timeframe set out below.
2. **Project kick-off and periodic update meetings** with ICE-Toronto EDC Project Advisory Committee.
3. A **review of past research and literature** relevant to the five questions posed in the "purpose" statement above and an identification of "best practices" and/or lessons learned.
4. **Interviews and/or focus groups and/or survey to gain insights** with key informants who have expertise and experience relevant to the five questions posed above.
5. A summary of **key findings** on the adequacy of Toronto's innovation incubation infrastructure for the technology sector, the need for additional strategies or supports for entrepreneurs in technology industries who are newcomers or members of other under-represented equity-deserving groups, and where they go after "graduating" from incubation? Is there a need for increased access to "after-care" support? Are there "best practice" examples of successful post-incubation support systems that Toronto could use as models?
6. **Conclusions and recommendations** on filling any infrastructure gaps, how any needed strategies or supports for technology-focused entrepreneurs who are newcomers or members of other equity-deserving under-represented groups might be created, and how clear pathways for technology sector entrepreneurs post-incubation might be established, including access to mentorship, funding opportunities and ongoing business development support.

## Deliverables

The deliverables for this project will include:

- Development of detailed project work plan, including plan for stakeholder consultation.
- Detailed report in a form suitable for public distribution and publication on the ICE Committee website. The report should summarize the work undertaken, list interviewees and their affiliated organizations, findings from the literature review and interviews and recommendations. A user-friendly "quickly readable" Executive Summary should be

included that summarizes the analysis and findings at a high level and presents the recommendations.

- Presentation of report at an ICE Committee meeting for internal discussion; and
- Participation in a report launch event after the completion of the report. The ICE Committee will determine whether this event will be an in-person discussion forum held in Toronto or a webinar.

## **Budget**

The maximum budget for this contract research project is **\$23,500** including applicable taxes.

## **Timeline**

The anticipated project start date is November 1, 2024, with a draft report due in late February 2025 and a final report due March 19, 2025. The successful applicant(s) should be available for the launch event of the report beyond completion of the report.

## **Application Process**

To apply, email a short submission (ideally three to four pages) to [info@icecommittee.org](mailto:info@icecommittee.org) with the subject line "ICE Contract – "Strengthening Toronto's Technology Sector Innovation Incubation Ecosystem".

Your submission should:

- Outline your approach to the scope of work and how you propose to carry out the work related to this project.
- Demonstrate you/your team's requisite experience.
- Provide an overview of your capacity to carry out the project in the allotted timeframe.
- In addition to the three- to five-page submission, include a short resume or CV.

**Application deadline: 12:00 PM on Thursday, October 3, 2024**

We will accept joint applications from groups of individuals or organizations. We encourage applications from current graduate students and graduates with relevant degrees. Credentials and professional experience earned either in Canada or internationally will be recognized. Preference will be given to organizations/individuals with leaders self-identifying as Indigenous, Black, and equity-deserving led organizations, leaders, and individuals, including women, newcomers, and immigrants.

Selection schedule (subject to change):

- All applicants will be notified of the receipt of their submission. If you do not receive acknowledgement of receipt within 24 hours, please check back to ensure receipt.
- Short-listed candidates may be interviewed. It is anticipated that interviews will take place by video conference during the second half of October.
- It is anticipated that the project contract will be awarded by November 1, 2024.
- The project start date will be in early November 2024.

## **Evaluation Criteria**

Written submissions will be evaluated based on:

- Research team's general credentials and experience in delivering projects on time and on budget,
- Research team's project-relevant experience and knowledge,
- Approach to completing scope of work and deliverables,
- Quality of written proposal, and
- Price will be a consideration amongst teams who score well on the other evaluation factors.

## **About the ICE Committee**

The ICE Committee was established in 1997 by officials in the Government of Canada, the Province of Ontario, and the City of Toronto. The purpose of the committee is to coordinate the economic and labour force development activities of the three governments (and the various departments and ministries within each government) in Toronto.

The ICE Committee's functions include commissioning and publishing research that can inform policy and program understanding and coherence in the areas of economic and labour force development in Toronto. It is in that context that the current Request for Proposals is issued.

The ultimate goal of the ICE Committee is to achieve the effective delivery of economic and labour force development programs in Toronto. ICE has played a key role in bringing together critical players to share information on their respective programs and projects. For more information about ICE, please visit [www.icecommittee.org](http://www.icecommittee.org).