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Automotive Innovation Challenge (AIC) Program Guidelines

Project Requirements:

Eligible Applicants	Post-secondary institutions with industry partners
Available Funding	Up to \$100,000
Matching Requirements	1:1 match, at least 50% of which must come from the private sector
Application Deadline	Monday, November 18th at 5 PM EST

Background Information:

In early 2022, OVIN launched the [Talent Strategy and Roadmap](#), which outlined 4 key strategies to grow and prepare Ontario’s automotive and mobility workforce for the future of the sector as it undergoes transformation: collaboration and coordination across the province; talent attraction and sourcing; workforce development and retention; and equity, diversity, and inclusion. To deliver on these strategies, OVIN has launched multiple programs and initiatives.

In late 2022, OVIN launched the Regional Future Workforce (RFW) program to provide STEM skills development and career education programs to students across the province. The program reached over 45,000 students, nearly half of whom came from underrepresented groups, and forged 225 partnerships among academic, industry, government, and community stakeholders. OVIN built on the success of this program by launching iterations specific to underrepresented groups and to the critical minerals segment of the sector in 2024.

OVIN has also launched [OVIN Learn](#), a platform through which individuals interested or employed in the sector can complete career assessments and micro-credentials to learn more about opportunities in the industry and expand their knowledge and skills for in-demand jobs. Employers can also leverage OVIN Learn to train employees on new topics relevant to their facility’s operations as they transition to advanced manufacturing techniques, EV production, or battery production.

OVIN is launching the Automotive Innovation Challenge (AIC). The AIC aims to foster collaboration between emerging talent, post-secondary institutions, and employers in Ontario’s automotive and mobility sector. This collaboration will help emerging talent learn about and prepare for careers in this sector while helping the sector engage with and recruit talent that is familiar with the problems they are trying to solve. In the Automotive Innovation Challenge, post-secondary institutions will collaborate with one or more industry partners in Ontario’s automotive and mobility ecosystem to design a competition in which their students will compete to solve a real-world problem the industry is facing.

The success of Ontario’s automotive and mobility sector hinges on its ability to cultivate talent and adapt to evolving demands. Through strategic investments and collaborative efforts aimed at engaging talent early and promoting diversity and inclusion, the province’s automotive and mobility sector is poised to chart a course towards sustained growth and global leadership.

Program Overview:

The Automotive Innovation Challenge (AIC) is designed to support Ontario-based automotive and mobility companies in connecting with emerging talent that can help solve their most pressing problems while supporting this talent in gaining real-world experience in the sector.

Through the AIC, post-secondary students will engage in practical, hands-on experiences that leverage their knowledge and skills to solve real-world problems that Ontario’s automotive and mobility sector is facing. Accordingly, we invite **colleges and universities with industry partners** to apply for up to \$100,000 in funding to develop and implement an AIC program in which at least 50 students and ideally up to 200 students on their campus participate.

Applicants will select a real-world problem that an industry partner is facing and offer students at the college or university the opportunity to participate in a competition of solutions. The exact structure of the competition – including the specific problem to be solved, the format of the competition, and any benefits for participants and/or winners – will be determined by the educational and industry partners.

Program Objectives:

The goals of OVIN’s Automotive Innovation Challenge (AIC) are:

- To help post-secondary students develop practical, real-world experience that draws upon their knowledge and skills, connects them to the Ontario automotive and mobility sector, and enhances their career development.
- To provide Ontario-based automotive and mobility employers with fresh solutions to some of the problems they face.
- To build a larger, more diverse talent pool for Ontario’s automotive and mobility sector by facilitating collaboration between higher education institutions and automotive and mobility industry stakeholders in the province.

Benefits:

For Post-Secondary Institutions	For Industry Partners	For Student Participants
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of relationships with industry stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of relationships with post-secondary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity to solve interesting, intellectually

<p>in Ontario’s growing automotive and mobility ecosystem.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity to position own institution as a leader in innovative experiential and applied learning programs. • Development of relationships with post-secondary institutions and industry stakeholders in Ontario’s evolving automotive and mobility ecosystem. 	<p>institutions training the province’s future automotive and mobility workforce.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of a talent pool with a keen awareness of and an innovative solution to a problem your company is facing. • Opportunity to position own company as a leader in early talent engagement and innovative methods of employer brand-building and campus recruitment. 	<p>challenging problems and develop problem-solving skills.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exposure to career opportunities in Ontario’s growing automotive and mobility sector. • Access to learning and development opportunities, including potential networking with and/or mentorship from industry professionals.
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Program Structure:

Under the Automotive Innovation Challenge (AIC) program, selected applicants will develop and deploy an applied learning challenge during the winter semester of the 2024-2025 academic year.

- Programs must be developed in response to a real challenge that at least one industry partner in Ontario’s automotive and mobility sector is currently facing.
- Programs must be fully developed, delivered, and closed by April 30, 2025 – and all reports must be submitted by May 9, 2025.
- Programs must provide opportunities for students from one or more academic programs to apply their knowledge and skills and learn about relevant career opportunities in the province’s automotive and mobility sector.
- Applicants must demonstrate a plan for how they will engage students at the post-secondary institution – including students from equity-deserving groups – and encourage them to register for and fully participate in the Challenge.
- Applicants must demonstrate their commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. This includes diversity of backgrounds and expertise for those at the educational institution and those at the industry partner delivering the program, as well as tailored plans for engaging all students in a meaningful way.
- The specific problem to be solved, how student teams are created, the length of time students are given to work on their solutions, how the competition is facilitated, and any benefits participants and/or winners receive will be determined by the applicant and their industry partner.

Key Components:

- **Design, development, and implementation of programming**
 - Description of the real-world problem students will be asked to solve
 - Description of how participating in this program will increase students' awareness of and preparation for career opportunities in Ontario's automotive and mobility sector
 - The academic levels (certificate, diploma, undergraduate, and/or graduate), year/s of study, and program/s of study the applicants plan to engage in this program, and the number of students expected to participate in the program
 - Elements of the program structure that make it engaging, innovative, and responsive to the automotive and mobility sector's future demand for talent
 - Note: Programs should be offered to participating students at no cost to them.
 - Note: OVIN must agree to and sign off on the program before the implementation stage.
- **Detailed program logistics and administration plan – applicants must establish a plan for the successful deployment of the Automotive Innovation Challenge (AIC), and this plan must be approved by OVIN prior to the implementation stage. This plan must include:**
 - Staffing requirements for the program
 - Number of staff required to run the program
 - The contact information of the staff member who satisfies OVIN's matching contribution requirement (as described below in the Matching Contribution section)
 - Each staff member's:
 - Respective area(s) of expertise
 - Role title and responsibilities
 - Materials required for the program – see Eligible Expense Guidelines (linked below) for a detailed breakdown of what materials are eligible for OVIN funding
 - Detailed program timeline for program participants
 - Opportunities for participants and/or winners to engage with the industry partner(s) in ways that support the students' skill development, professional development, and/or future employability
 - A Letter of Support from each industry partner outlining their commitment to the project and how they will contribute to its operations and success
- **Marketing, promotion, and outreach strategy**
 - Description of how applicants will encourage students to sign up for the program
 - Note: In all publications, communications, and products of any kind, written or oral, that refer to the Project and that the Applicant offers to the public, the Applicant shall obtain OVIN's prior approval.

- Note: Any marketing and promotional materials that use images and videos of people (including program participants) must have a process and documentation for obtaining informed consent of those shown.
- **Program evaluation**
 - OVIN will provide an evaluation framework comprised of standardized pre- and post-program surveys for student participants as well as a standardized post-program survey for post-secondary coordinators and for industry partners
 - The types of data OVIN intends to collect through these surveys are outlined in the [Application/Proposal Questions](#)
 - Each successful applicant and their partner(s) will be expected to administer these surveys to their participants, and to complete them themselves
 - Surveys will assess the extent to which programs have met the following key measures of success:
 - For students:
 - Types and level of skills developed
 - Depth of engagement with industry
 - Strength of professional network
 - Interest in pursuing a career in the automotive and mobility sector
 - For post-secondary institutions:
 - Demographic diversity of participants
 - Number and depth of industry partnerships created
 - Innovativeness of program design and implementation
 - Learnings about effective student-industry engagement
 - For industry partners:
 - Innovativeness of program design and implementation
 - Learnings about effective student-industry engagement
 - Achievement of the project's objective
 - Satisfaction with solutions presented
 - Number and depth of mentorship opportunities created, if any
 - Number of participants converted into job applicants or hires

Eligible Applicants:

- Post-secondary institutions based in Ontario

Eligible Partners:

- All post-secondary institutions applying, and their industry partners, must be based in Ontario

- Industry partners must be Ontario-based automotive and mobility companies or organizations, including but not limited to:
 - Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs);
 - Tier 1 suppliers; and/or
 - Relevant start-ups or SMEs operating in the automotive and mobility space.

How Funding Works:

- Eligible applicants can apply for a maximum of \$100,000 to develop and deploy an Automotive Innovation Challenge (AIC) program for post-secondary students.

OVIN Contribution	Reimbursement of half (maximum) of total project eligible costs, up to \$100,000, triggered by signing of funding agreement and submission and approval of reports.
Matching Requirement	Half (minimum) of total eligible project costs (i.e., minimum 1:1 match to OVIN contribution). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least 50% of the match must come from the private sector. • Matching contributions must be unencumbered from other government grant sources.
Example	Total eligible project costs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximum OVIN Contribution = \$100,000 • Minimum Matching Contribution: \$100,000, \$50,000 of which must come from the private sector
Funding Recipient	OVIN funds flow only to the Applicant. The Applicant is responsible for reimbursing their Partner(s), if applicable.

Eligible Expenses:

- Under this program, expenses incurred by the applicant under the following categories are eligible for OVIN funding:
 - Operating expenses
 - Salaries
 - Travel
- Please refer to the [Eligible Expenses Guidelines](#) for more information.

Matching Contribution Requirements:

Applicant institutions and their industry partners are required to support the program through contributions equal to OVIN's requested contribution, at least 50% of which must come from the private sector.

From Applicants that are classified as Post-Secondary Institutions:

Applicants that are classified as post-secondary institutions must contribute to the program by having at least one full-time employee whose salary for the program's duration is paid wholly by the applicant. This employee must be dedicated to the development and implementation of the program. This employee's role within the applicant's organization and this employee's expertise must be described in the applicant's proposal. This employee will also be OVIN's point of contact.

Note:

1. Matching contributions must be unencumbered from other government grant sources (it cannot be used to leverage other public funds to pay for a portion of the same activity) and must come directly from the applicant institution's own budget. This must be clear in the applicant's budget justification.
2. Applicants are responsible for meeting their commitment to the matching contribution. Underspending will result in an equal amount deducted from OVIN's final contribution.

From Industry Partners:

Applicant institutions' industry partners are required to support the program through contributions equal to at least 50% of OVIN's requested contribution and outlined in a Letter of Support. Contributions can include staff time, expertise, opportunities for student participants to engage with industry, and other appropriate resources.

Flow of Funds:

- Only eligible expenses will be reimbursed to successful applicants. Please refer to the Eligible Expenses Guidelines document linked under the Eligible Expenses section above.
- OVIN will start disbursing approved funding to the successful applicant after the funding agreement has been executed by all parties.
- An advance payment of up to 10% of the total OVIN award project value, at the sole discretion of OVIN, will be released upon activation of the project.
- Applicants will be required to work with their industry partners to submit an interim report mid-way through the program to demonstrate their progress in developing the program and indicate whether they are on track to spend the OVIN funds they have been awarded. Upon receipt of the interim report, OVIN will release a subsequent payment of up to 45% of the OVIN award project value.

- Subsequent payment of 45% will be released upon receipt of the final report, which will also be written by the applicant with their industry partner.
 - The report should describe the status of program milestones and financial spending. All reports must be accompanied by the receipts of expenses incurred towards the program, and attestation from the institution regarding the use of funds.

How to Apply:

Full Application Submission Due Date: Monday, November 18th, 2024 at 5 PM EST

- Once ready to apply for the Automotive Innovation Challenge (AIC) Program, the applicant should connect with their Ontario Centre of Innovation (OCI) Business Development and Commercialization Manager (BDCM) to initiate an application.
- If new to OCI, the applicant should complete the [Program Enquiry Form](#) to connect with an OCI BDCM to discuss their eligibility and the application process for OVIN funding.
 - Once the Program Enquiry Form has been completed, an OCI BDCM will contact you to discuss the opportunity and, if required, assist in initiating the application.

A full application proposal includes the following sections:

- **Background:** The applicant institution's background and experience managing similar program deployments.
- **Program Design, Development, and Implementation:** Details about how the applicant will plan and lead the program. Please use the questions provided above, in the Key Components section, as a guide. Applicants should also include how they plan to meet key milestones, and their timelines for doing so.
- **Logistics and Administration:** A draft of the program's logistics plan, following the questions provided in the Key Components section above.
- **Program Marketing and Promotion:** Applicants are required to outline what marketing materials they plan to develop, and what channels they will use to share these materials and promote the program to potential participants.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** How the applicant plans to measure program outcomes and impact, including what data they would like to collect and how.
 - Please include OVIN's pre- and post-program surveys as part of your evaluation plan. These surveys will be provided to successful applicants.
- **Budget Breakdown and Justification:** How the approved funds will be used.

Assessment:

- The Automotive Innovation Challenge (AIC) program is a discretionary, non-entitlement program with limited funding. OVIN will fund qualified projects with potential for the

greatest economic benefits and contribution to transportation advancements to Ontario. Not all eligible applications can be funded.

- All eligible applications are assessed on their merit and undergo a review process in which the applications are reviewed against program objectives and evaluation criteria.
- Full applications are internally reviewed for eligibility, completeness, and financial compliance prior to evaluation by independent external reviewers with domain and sector expertise.
 - Each application will undergo a written external review by three subject matter experts. All reviewers are bound by Non-Disclosure Agreements (NDAs).
 - The External Review Panel will review the submitted applications and make the funding recommendations to OVIN. OVIN makes the final funding decisions.
- Applicants may be invited to present their proposals in person or by video conference to OVIN’s External and Internal Review Panels.
- OVIN will notify successful applicants and provide any additional information necessary to activate the project.

Timeline:

Action Item	Due Date
Applications open	October 25, 2024
Applicant information session	November 1, 2024
Full application due	November 18, 2024
Internal initial review of applications for eligibility	November 21, 2024
Applicants to address elements flagged from Eligibility Check	November 26, 2024
Final Eligibility Check	November 29, 2024
External Review Panel evaluation period	Week of December 2, 2024
Selected applicant presentations to OVIN	Week of December 9, 2024
OVIN response to confirm contact info. with applicants AND OVIN Final Decision - Award and Decline letters sent	Week of December 16, 2024
Project activation (Note: this triggers the release of OVIN funds. The day this milestone is reached is the day the applicant can begin incurring project-related expenses. Any expenses incurred prior to this date cannot be reported and claimed).	Upon signing of funding agreement
Signed Funding Agreement due	January 15, 2025
Interim reports due	February 25, 2025
Project close	April 30, 2025
Final reports due	May 9, 2025

Evaluation Criteria:

- Applicant’s previous experience running successful applied learning, professional development, and employability programming for post-secondary students
- Applicant’s demonstrated ability to support students from underrepresented groups
- Clarity around the levels/years of study and academic programs that applicants plan to design their Challenge for
- Feasibility of attracting and retaining at least 50 student participants, and ideally up to 200 student participants
- Strength of partnership(s) with industry stakeholder(s), demonstrated through industry’s proposed level of engagement in the project and the ways in which their involvement will enhance students’ experiences and outcomes
- Segment(s) of the automotive and mobility sector that the Challenge touches on, to ensure that the programs we fund reflect the breadth of the sector
- Innovation of proposed program design, including the problem students will be solving and the format of the competition proposed
- Sufficiency of proposed data collection methods
- The region(s) of Ontario where applicants plan to implement their Challenge
 - Note: To ensure that OVIN’s work is representative of diverse audiences across the province, OVIN will prioritize funding one applicant per region (as appropriate based on applications received)

Project Administration:

Project Activation:

- Upon approval of a project for funding, the selected applicant will be forwarded a copy of the funding agreement with schedules specific to the approved proposal. This funding agreement must be signed via OVIN’s online electronic signature function by all contracting parties within 30 days of notification of the award.
- The purpose of the funding agreement is to define roles and obligations for the program partners regarding OVIN’s guidelines and funding contribution only.
- The program will be activated upon receipt of the signed funding agreement. The start date will by default be the date of activation and cannot be changed.

Links to Important Documents:

- [Funding Agreement - Template](#)
- [Eligible Expense Guidelines](#)
- [Application/Proposal Questions](#)

Contacts

For further questions regarding program guidelines, eligibility, and the online application process, please contact your OCI Business Development and Commercialization Manager (BDCM) or you

can contact Shannon Miller, Project Lead on OVIN's Talent Strategy and Workforce Planning team at smiller@oc-innovation.ca for further information.