

ONTARIO UNIVERSITIES: DRIVING REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



The Issue: The cities and towns that universities call home are feeling the effects of local demographic shifts brought about by aging populations and new technologies, while small businesses and local industry continue to navigate the disruption caused by the pandemic. Investments in social and economic infrastructure across Ontario is now more critical than ever to ensure the pathway to the future prosperity for the province.

Background

- As Ontario's communities look to rebuild and thrive, they will need spaces and institutions that fuel the local workforce and stimulate local economies through employment opportunities, innovation and spending activities.
- Building, maintaining and modernizing strong physical and knowledge infrastructure, such as universities, schools and libraries, within Ontario's communities helps create jobs in construction, maintenance and more, employing members of the local workforce and fueling associated supply chains.
- University infrastructure is often at the very heart of Ontario's regions. The type of spaces found on campuses, such as community centres, gyms, pools, theatres and stadiums, bring people together, enrich the everyday experience for many Ontarians and help them live healthier lives.



\$45 billion

Amount Ontario's universities' activities contribute to the province's GDP (Conference Board of Canada).

The Facilities Renewal Program (FRP) is one program that provides important funding for university infrastructure through support for deferred maintenance projects, helping campuses maximize efficiencies, operate smarter and renew their facilities. In 2018-19, universities contributed more than **\$322 million** to FRP-eligible projects that would upgrade classrooms and learning environments and address the backlog of deferred maintenance that exists, compared with the \$50 million provided by government.



487,639

Number of jobs created from Ontario's universities' activities, including those stemming from institutions, students, visitors and alumni (Conference Board of Canada).



\$50.6 billion

Contribution to Ontario's GDP, resulting from the higher human capital development of alumni (Conference Board of Canada).

How Universities Are Supporting Ontario

- As major employers and large purchasers, Ontario's universities are often one of the top five employers in the region. They collectively employed more than **138,600 Ontarians** in 2020 and purchase approximately **\$5 billion in goods and services** each year.
- As the pandemic continues to impact our local economies, communities and social well-being, Ontario's universities remain committed to helping build the social, economic and physical infrastructure of the province's communities, while acting as strong economic drivers in local communities.
 - Many small businesses and community members also access innovative facilities and spaces where they can test ideas and scale operations, providing communities and local industry with necessary resources to recover from the pandemic.
 - Technology-enhanced learning environments and cutting-edge facilities also increase a region's competitiveness by supporting the development of a highly skilled workforce and conducting ground-breaking innovation.
 - The activities that take place at these facilities not only improve the lives of Ontarians, but also attract the talent and investment communities need to create new business opportunities and jobs.



\$4.6 billion

Estimated cost of the backlog of repairs in the postsecondary sector, according to Facilities Condition Assessment Task Force data, October 2019

Partnering to Rebuild Ontario

Vibrant universities will continue to develop adaptable talent, help rebuild our health-care system, as well as drive innovation and regional economic development.

It is why in order to fully unleash this potential, Ontario's universities are asking that the government – through increases to university revenue sources, such as expanding spaces in high-demand programs – make critical investments in the sector today to rebuild a better Ontario for tomorrow.

By working together, we can navigate through this pandemic, safeguard Ontario's health and economy and build a brighter future – not just for the students we teach and the communities we serve, but for Ontario's future and all who live here.

PARTNERING TO BUILD STRONG COMMUNITIES

Ontario's universities are embedded in the social and economic fabric of the communities they serve and strive to find new ways to partner to help improve the quality of life for every member of their region.

Through partnerships with local municipalities, industry and Indigenous communities, universities are contributing research, expertise, ideas, community service, as well as their spaces and resources, to support community and provincial resiliency.

Below are just some of the ways universities are helping bolster regional economies and creating safe, supportive and inclusive communities where all Ontarians can thrive.



● Supporting inclusion through community programming

● Due to gym closures during the pandemic, many older adults in the Niagara region experienced a decrease in their overall physical activity and social interactions. To support their health and well-being, **Brock University** and TD Bank Group are partnering on the SeniorFit program, which connects older adults in the local community with one-on-one training sessions and in-person and online fitness classes led by students.

● More than 3,000 households in the Durham Region access emergency shelters each year. To help address this problem, researchers at **Ontario Tech University** are partnering on the Oshawa Micro-Housing Pilot Project. The project aims to help meet the needs of the local community by developing and increasing access to safe transitional housing and programming, such as financial and employment services, for individuals and families.

● Students and professionals from Black communities are currently underrepresented in the kinesiology field. To help increase access, the **University of Toronto** launched the Reach Ahead to Kinesiology program for Black high school students in the Greater Toronto Area. Through mentorship and interactive workshops, the program aims to support student success and increase representation across the program and the profession.

● Many older adults living in retirement and long-term care communities in the Waterloo Region reported feeling lonely during the pandemic. To help address this issue, students at **Wilfrid Laurier University**, in partnership with the Parkwood Seniors Community Java Music Club program, led virtual music sessions to help foster connections and conversations with residents during COVID-19.

● Fostering regional innovation through local entrepreneurship and commercialization

● Through community-based partnerships and research, **Carleton University's** Black Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub (BEKH) is exploring the scope of Black entrepreneurship in Canada to help inform government policies. Through this work, BEKH aims to help remove systemic barriers and create equality opportunity for Black entrepreneurs across the country.

● Helping students, researchers and alumni turn their ideas into scalable businesses will help spur regional innovation and Ontario-made solutions as the province rebuilds from the pandemic. In partnership with local industry, the **University of Ottawa's** intensive, four-month Startup Garage offers space, mentorship, formal training, support and funding for entrepreneurs to launch their companies.

● As the demand for energy increases across the province, new cleantech solutions will be needed to reduce costs, conserve energy and protect the environment. The Centre for Energy and Power Electronics Research at **Queen's University** is accelerating innovations in cleantech by providing industry partners with access to university experts, research services and world-class lab space.

● Waterloo Region has the second highest start-up density in the world. To support the growing number of start-ups across the region, the **University of Waterloo** launched The Accelerator Centre (AC). The AC connects entrepreneurs in the local community with academic, industry and global partners through mentorship and funding opportunities to help bring their businesses to market.

● As the province rebuilds from the pandemic, it will need Ontario-made solutions to help bolster regional economies. To help support this need, **Western University's** Morrissette Institute for Entrepreneurship is providing students, faculty, staff and researchers with the skills development opportunities and tools they need to build their businesses – from coaching and promotional support to campus-based retail space.



● Creating university campus community hubs

- As Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians work towards reconciliation, **Algoma University** and local Anishinaabe communities are honouring residential school survivors through the Mukwa Waakaa'igan Centre of Cultural Excellence. The centre will serve as a safe and inclusive gathering space for cross-cultural understanding, teaching and healing among Indigenous and non-Indigenous community members and visitors.
- To promote physical activity, skills development and teamwork among youth in the local community, **Lakehead University** is offering on-campus seasonal sports camps for kids. Run by varsity coaches and athletes at the university's recreational facilities, participants can join a range of team sports, such as basketball, soccer and volleyball.
- Transforming an idea into a successful business requires access to many critical resources, such as funding, workspace and subject-matter experts. The Foundry at **Laurentian University** is supporting local entrepreneurship by connecting students, alumni and faculty with the resources they need, such as 3D printers, laser cutters and co-working spaces, to take their product or service idea from concept to reality.
- Many community members join public athletic centres and camps to live healthier lives, learn new skills and connect with others. To help foster a sense of community as the province re-opens, **Nipissing University** is leveraging its athletics talent and infrastructure to offer sports camps to youth and adults across North Bay.

● To help university and community members learn more about local Indigenous history, practices and well-being, **Toronto Metropolitan University** created the First Nations Immersive Space in partnership with local Indigenous community members and artists. Located in the university's Recreation and Athletics Centre's circuit room, the space features images of nature, including Taddle Creek, a former meeting place for local Indigenous Nations.

● As Windsor Essex rebuilds its economy after COVID-19, the **University of Windsor** is helping support its regional economic revitalization by purchasing vacant downtown office space and transforming it into a community hub and technology innovation centre. The building will support local entrepreneurship and the expansion of university research, industry collaboration and academic programming.



● Strengthening community resilience through skills development

● Producers across the agri-business industry are actively seeking resources to support them as their farm operations become larger and more complex. To help meet this need, the **University of Guelph** launched free, self-directed professional development modules for farmers and other agriculture professionals. The modules are recorded by university experts across key areas, such as business planning, finance, human resources, risk management and mental health.

● To help address access barriers to biomedical research, **McMaster University** launched the Biochemistry and Biomedical Sciences Summer Scholars Program for students who self-identify as Black, Indigenous and/or 2SLGBTQIA+. Through the program, students have the opportunity to participate in a fully-funded experiential research program in biomedical sciences.

● Through its continuing education program ArtWorksTO, **OCAD University** is helping young artists who self-identify as Black, Indigenous, People of Colour and/or 2SLGBTQ+ access careers in the media arts industry. In collaboration with local partners, the program helps participants become job ready through mentorship, portfolio development and upskilling opportunities.

● In partnership with the local Indigenous community and municipal leaders, **Trent University** is launching The Way We Speak Together: Enwaaying Training Initiative to help address the systemic barriers faced by Indigenous women and girls in Canada. The program aims to drive systemic change, eliminate biases and improve the lives of Indigenous women and girls by leading decision makers through interactive workshops that explore the impact of historic policies and practices on Indigenous Peoples.

● Women account for only 16 per cent of business owners in Canada. To help women access the resources, professional development activities and funding opportunities they need to scale their businesses, **York University** has created the Entrepreneurship Leadership and Learning Alliance program. The program offers tailored supports and programming for women entrepreneurs across York Region.

