

CivicLabTO: Advancing a Culture of Innovation and Collaboration

Date: April 21, 2022
To: Executive Committee
From: City Manager
Wards: All

SUMMARY

This report responds to City Council's request on January 29, 2020, for an update on item [EX 12.5, "Advancing a New Culture of Innovation and Partnership"](#), and provides information on CivicLabTO and the Toronto Civic Accelerator Program (TCAP), two key initiatives that advance strategic and innovative partnerships between the City and public and private sector partners. The report offers details on the current status of the Toronto Civic Accelerator Program and summarizes the accomplishments of CivicLabTO, including the progress made in streamlining the approval process of procuring research services from academic institutions. Strategic Partnerships and the Purchasing and Materials Management Division (PMMD) continue to consult on opportunities to leverage the procurement process in support of CivicLabTO with additional work to be completed over the second and third quarters of 2022, and a report back to City Council planned for early 2023.

This report recommends that the City Manager be given authority to negotiate and enter into new non-binding Memorandums of Understanding with each Toronto Higher Education Institution to replace the existing Memorandums of Understanding that are now expiring. The Memorandums of Understanding provide a framework for research, innovation, and other projects as part of the CivicLabTO program by setting out shared goals and opportunities for collaboration.

Though delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic, Strategic Partnerships and Technology Services have consulted on the design and development of the Toronto Civic Accelerator Program (TCAP) to allow the City to strategically engage sector partners in the co-development of innovative solutions to City challenges. In addition to other procurement and partnership opportunities, TCAP is meant to leverage the talent and innovation of Toronto's strong technology and start-up sector. This report highlights some key guiding principles and program updates.

Led by Strategic Partnerships, CivicLabTO is a long-term strategic program that creates a more systematic approach to post-secondary collaborations. CivicLabTO connects students, faculty, researchers, and City staff to advance city-building goals through research, program design and evaluation, student learning opportunities, and expert problem-solving opportunities. This report highlights the achievements of CivicLabTO and the program's impact on strengthening the culture of collaboration and innovation in the City of Toronto.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The City Manager recommends that:

1. City Council authorize the City Manager to negotiate and enter into non-binding Memorandums of Understanding with post-secondary institutions collaborating with the City in order to provide a framework for research, innovation and other projects as part of the CivicLabTO program by setting out shared goals and opportunities for collaboration.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

CivicLabTO leverages Council approved funding in City Programs' Operating Budgets to access additional funding opportunities and there are no incremental financial impacts to any 2022 Council approved City Programs' Operating Budgets that result from the adoption of the recommendations of this report. Any funding to be leveraged beyond 2022 will be included as part of City Programs' Operating Budget submissions for consideration by Council during future Budget processes.

The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial impact information.

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting on January 29, 2020, City Council directed the Director, Toronto Office of Partnerships, the Chief Technology Officer and the Director, Customer Experience Transformation and Innovation to report back to the Executive Committee on the interim results of the Toronto Civic Accelerator Program and CivicLabTO in 2021.
<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2020.EX12.5>

A report on "Advancing a New Culture of Innovation and Partnership" was adopted by Executive Committee on January 23, 2020.
<https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2020/ex/bgrd/backgroundfile-141661.pdf>

At its meeting on June 24, 2019, the General Government and Licensing Committee directed the Chief Information Officer, the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture, and the Chief Purchasing Officer to identify the costs and benefits of implementing a permanent start-up in residence program, compare the Municipal Innovation Exchange (MIX) network and the City Innovate Start-up in Residence (STIR) program with other innovative procurement programs at the City of Toronto, and make a

recommendation on next steps.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2019.GL6.27>

In response to this request, a report on "Enhancing City-Academic Relations" was adopted by the Executive Committee in February 2017.

<https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2017/ex/bgrd/backgroundfile-101460.pdf>

At its meeting on February 10, 2015, City Council requested that the City Manager report on a "Town and Gowns" advisory body, or other appropriate structure, to facilitate enhancing the relationships between post-secondary institutions and the City to facilitate city building research and initiatives.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2015.EX2.1>

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

The CivicLabTO program aims to create and strengthen academic research collaborations, knowledge-sharing opportunities, and experiential learning experiences guided by a commitment to equity, inclusion and reconciliation.

The CivicLabTO Series, Curriculum, Research, and Summit initiatives seek to increase the voices of Indigenous, Black, and other racialized people and persons with disabilities within the City by providing equity-deserving professionals, academics, and student's access to municipal governance and the opportunity to provide input into the development and evaluation of City policies and programs.

Strategic Partnerships will continually assess the potential impacts of all initiatives on equity-deserving groups and engage these communities in all program components. This engagement is critical as it encourages and promotes new ways of thinking and offers creative solutions to complex issues. Continuing to work with Indigenous, Black, and equity-deserving communities is imperative and ensures that future decisions are not made in silos but through conversations with the people and communities directly impacted by the City's policies, services, and programs.

COMMENTS

The Toronto Civic Accelerator Program (TCAP) and CivicLabTO are instrumental in advancing a culture of collaboration and innovation in the City. Strategic Partnerships continues to leverage partnerships and enhance the City's ability to collaborate with new private and public sector partners through these programs.

THE TORONTO CIVIC ACCELERATOR PROGRAM (TCAP)

The Toronto Civic Accelerator Program (TCAP) is being jointly developed by Strategic Partnerships, and Technology Services. The program has been delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with staff resources prioritized toward other activities. However, internal and external consultations on commercialization opportunities for early-stage businesses to create tailor-made solutions for the City of Toronto have taken place since 2020. The City's new Digital Infrastructure Strategic Framework is a principles-

based overarching strategy on how the City will plan for and use technology and data. Under the Principle "Society, Economy and the Environment", there are four relevant implementation considerations that align well with the TCAP program:

1. Support domestic businesses to adapt and be successful in the digital economy and the City's digital transformation process, including the provision of targeted outreach and education about the City's procurement processes for Digital Infrastructure
2. Consider the role that Digital Infrastructure can play in creating local jobs and attracting investment
3. Collaborate with regional entities, businesses, not-for-profit organizations, and Higher Education Institutions to build capacity and skills, secure investment, and establish research relationships and innovation opportunities
4. Set open calls to the tech sector to help solve City challenges in a manner that is transparent, accessible, ethical, and responsible

Strategic Partnerships and Technology Services plan to report back to Council with an update on TCAP in the third quarter of 2023.

CIVICLABTO

CivicLabTO advances a new model for connecting the City's strategic priorities to resources at Toronto's Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Through initiatives such as the Academic Working Group, the CivicLabTO Series, the CivicLabTO Curriculum, the CivicLabTO Summit, and CivicLabTO Research, CivicLabTO efforts have strengthened collaborations with academic partners to facilitate intellectual exchange and increase data-driven decision making. As outlined in this report, the suite of initiatives launched during 2020-2021 have furthered a culture of change and innovation and increased networking between City divisions, HEIs, and funding partners.

For instance, CivicLabTO has reinforced existing partnerships with Centennial College, George Brown College, Humber College, OCAD University, Ryerson University, Seneca College, University of Toronto, and York University and incorporated new relationships with industry partners such as eCampusOntario and Mitacs. The City of Toronto has fostered new partnerships while strengthening collaborative opportunities with HEIs to confront the challenges of a rapidly growing city. These partnerships have forged deep ties between academic researchers, city-building practitioners, and senior City of Toronto staff for knowledge mobilization and intersectoral collaborations. The City of Toronto remains committed to continuing and strengthening these actionable partnerships that share the City's vision of resiliency and innovation through the many facets of CivicLabTO.

Strategic Partnerships and the Purchasing and Materials Management Division (PMMD) continue to consult on opportunities to leverage the procurement process in support of CivicLabTO with additional work to be completed over the second and third quarters of 2022, and a report back to City Council planned for early 2023.

Academic Working Group

The Academic Working Group is a fulsome collaboration hosted by the Director of Strategic Partnerships, and featuring Higher Education Institution Government Relations and President Office representatives, and senior City staff. Members meet regularly to facilitate solutions to the challenges facing Toronto's communities and improve the impact of City service. The primary goal is to foster collaborations that inform policies, research, and programs; aligning divisional priorities and academic research trends and resources.

At the start of the pandemic, this group was tasked under the leadership of Councillor Jennifer McKelvie to act as the Upper Education Task Force of the Mayor's Economic Support and Recovery Task Force. The Group provided strategic advice and recommendations related to COVID-19 recovery and rebuild.

One important outcome of this initiative was the creation of a sub-committee of Higher Education Institution experts to help advance the HousingTO 2020-2030 Action Plan by providing policy and program advice to the City of Toronto's Housing Secretariat in the area of affordable housing. The Academic Working Group continues to meet regularly, providing the forum for constructive dialogue, agile responses, and an aligned vision.

CivicLabTO Series

The CivicLabTO Series is a knowledge-sharing initiative that thematically links the City's strategic priorities to the biennial CivicLabTO Summit. This initiative brings together diverse groups of researchers, academic and community partners, and City staff to develop a network of expertise, setting the stage for the Summit. Each year the series is hosted by a different HEI partner and is open to City staff, faculty, students, and residents.

Launched in Spring 2021, CivicLabTO delivered a series of free, informal, virtual chats introducing key questions, collaborations, research, and opportunities around building a more resilient city. The inaugural series was hosted by Humber College and showcased a diverse array of perspectives from HEI Presidents, City staff, faculty, and researchers, as they explored how the alignment of resources and expertise can inform work in areas such as the youth justice system, the impacts of technology on equity and how to foster inclusion during pandemic recovery and rebuild. These conversations reinforced the power of partnerships, brokered new connections, and set the stage for the more in-depth discussion on City/HEI collaborations at the CivicLabTO Summit in the Fall of 2021. Session topics, speakers and recordings are available at civiclabeto.ca, and toronto.ca/civiclabeto. In addition, Strategic Partnerships will be working with the 2023 CivicLabTO Summit lead partners, Centennial College and Ryerson University, to launch the CivicLabTO Series programming for 2022.

CivicLabTO Summit

The biennial CivicLabTO Summit is designed to bring together researchers, faculty, City staff, and community partners to address the challenges we collectively face in Toronto. The inaugural CivicLabTO Summit delved into the City's strategic priorities around building back better, evaluating possible outcomes focused on equity and resilience, and presenting creative solutions. The two-day virtual event was held on November 23 and 24, 2021 and supported by a \$35,000 grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC). The Summit highlighted how the power of

collaboration can generate a grounded theory framework that ultimately leads to stronger public policy development in our ever-changing urban environment.

Approximately 500 faculty, researchers, students, City staff, and government representatives registered to join an array of free panel discussions featuring thought leaders from across academia and our municipality as they addressed the challenges facing Toronto in building an informed, equitable future. As a connecting thread throughout the Summit, panels highlighted their equity-related work and examined how to address key issues such as ensuring an equity perspective is central to their projects, the data gaps present in addressing existing inequities, and whose voice needs to be at the table to ensure full perspectives.

Programming included more than 60 speakers across 13 sessions on topics including cultural resiliency, housing and health, and stronger, safer, more just communities, as well as student-led cultural programming. Hosted by York University, the programming was developed by a working group including the City of Toronto, Humber College, OCAD University, eCampusOntario, and York University and featured speakers from all CivicLabTO partner institutions. In alignment with CivicLabTO objectives, the development and delivery of Summit programming connected City staff, HEI researchers, and community partners, which created a new network for supporting research collaborations. A summary of speakers, themes and the session recordings are available at civiclabeto.ca and toronto.ca/civiclabeto.

Awareness of critical issues and City/academic partnerships was raised within the audience and was well-received, as is evident in the feedback captured via the attendee survey. The session recordings and the survey feedback will inform planning with the 2023 CivicLabTO Summit hosts Centennial College and Ryerson University.

CivicLabTO Curriculum

The CivicLabTO Curriculum aims to develop human capital by inspiring the next generation of municipal leaders. The curriculum initiative, led by City staff and elected officials, offers students a learning opportunity focused on municipal policy, service delivery, and municipal governance.

Launched in September 2021, Strategic Partnerships collaborated with instructors from each of the Higher Education Institution partners to deliver a bi-weekly series of six virtual classes as part of their civics-focused curricula. Hundreds of undergraduate students were introduced to elected officials and staff representing more than 20 city teams, including Deputy Mayor Ana Bailão, the City Manager, and the City Clerk, for interactive and informative discussions on City priorities, the programs they lead, and the possibilities ahead. Learning objectives included raising awareness of how city hall functions, deepening an understanding of the challenges facing the City of Toronto in the areas of equity, mobility, community resiliency, cultural resiliency, and climate change, and illustrating how City programs are addressing these opportunities. Session descriptions and recordings are available at civiclabeto.ca, and toronto.ca/civiclabeto. In addition, the sessions and resulting Q&A have been leveraged by faculty and students as part of their corresponding classwork. The positive feedback from all stakeholders has reinforced the City's commitment to continue this program in the Fall of 2022,

welcoming students to City Hall virtually and in person at Toronto City Council Chamber, subject to re-opening guidelines.

CivicLabTO Research

The CivicLabTO Research initiative provides coordinated brokerage, management, stewardship, and oversight of City/HEI research partnerships. To streamline the process for securing academic partnerships and procuring research services using the existing procurement process in the City, Strategic Partnerships collaborated in the design, development, and implementation of three tools: the Toronto Collaboration Platform (TOCP), the CivicLabTO website, and the Template Research Agreement.

Strategic Partnerships, with eCampusOntario, applied the learnings from an initial research project matchmaking process in 2020 to the design and development of the Toronto Collaboration Platform (TOCP) online portal in 2021. eCampusOntario is a provincially-funded non-profit organization that facilitates funding and collaborative opportunities on behalf of students and faculty from the province's publicly-funded colleges, universities, and indigenous institutes.

TOCP delivers a systematic approach to collaboration between the City and HEI partners by standardizing and streamlining the research proposal intake process. For instance, TOCP provides online proposal intake forms that guide project initiators in articulating their projects' objectives and scope for academic audiences. In addition, it allows HEI researchers and City staff to register expressions of interest for City project proposals, facilitates the review and introductions between City staff and researchers, and connects projects to funding partners such as Mitacs and eCampusOntario. Based on HEI feedback in 2022, TOCP also delivered an online project proposal intake form for HEI project initiators, thus allowing for an enhanced degree of communication, connectivity, and collaboration.

The CivicLabTO website was designed and developed in collaboration with York University and Humber College students and supported by a grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC). The website's main objective is to promote collaborations and support the sharing of knowledge across City divisions, academic institutions, and industry leaders. In addition, the website shares abstracts and outcomes of City/HEI research projects, provides the platform for the CivicLabTO Summit, CivicLabTO Discussions, and CivicLabTO Curriculum, and fosters connections between academic expertise and City priorities.

In tandem with these efforts, Strategic Partnerships, Legal Services, and the HEIs developed an updated research agreement template to help ensure clarity and consistency on project terms as they are formalized across and between City divisions and institutions.

At the onset of the pandemic, Strategic Partnerships collaborated with partner HEIs, eCampusOntario, and student funding bodies to pilot a research matchmaking process for sourcing research services. In total, 17 research proposals were received, resulting in 8 successful research project matches in 2020. These projects focused on City identified research priorities for COVID-19 relief and provided experiential learning opportunities for students. For instance, the "Digital Access: Who is Underserved and

Why" research project appended the "[Affordable Internet Connectivity for All – ConnectTO](#)" report to City Council and informed the City's Digital Infrastructure Plan.

With the launch of TOCP in 2021, over 40 proposals were registered through the call for submissions. Approximately 15 are currently moving forward, effectively doubling the number of proposals and projects managed in 2020. All other projects remain in the process of matchmaking unless the project initiators cancel them. Additional proposals are also considered and matched on an ongoing basis.

Research projects represent a variety of programs across the City, including data governance, digital equity, and expanding the use of municipally owned creative spaces. They also support key City-led equitable placemaking initiatives such as the Recognition Review, the Little Jamaica master planning process, and the Toronto Heritage Survey. Over the past two years, funding partners have committed over \$450,000 to CivicLabTO research projects to support student researchers and provide professional development opportunities.

It is expected that TOCP will continue to evolve as a key conduit to informed public policy, further extending the City's commitment to advancing a new culture of innovation and partnership. Beyond the City of Toronto, eCampusOntario is leveraging TOCP as the model for fostering collaboration between HEIs, municipalities, and businesses across the province. A summary of the projects facilitated by CivicLabTO is available at civiclabeto.ca, and toronto.ca/civiclabeto.

As the CivicLabTO Research initiative expands, new funding opportunities have emerged that aim to leverage divisional funds with public funders. One such example is the Climate Action and Resiliency Research Fund (CARRF), a \$1 million Energy and Environment Division fund. It is anticipated that CARRF funds will be matched by Mitacs or other sources for a total of \$2 million over three years to fund 15 to 20 small to mid-sized strategic research projects in support of TransformTO, the City's climate change strategy. The CARRF program criteria are currently being developed, and the program launch is anticipated in the third quarter of 2022.

CivicLabTO Partner Programming: Support and Development

Beyond the aforementioned initiatives, CivicLabTO also supports solution-focused initiatives aligned with City/Higher Education Institution objectives that are led by partner institutions, such as Humber College's Global Systems Gap Challenge, AIMDay, delivered by Ryerson University, and a knowledge mobilization initiative, MobilizeTO, led by York University. These programs provide the forum to connect city staff and key city priorities to researchers and students worldwide for discussions on multi-disciplinary collaborations to address complex civic challenges. CivicLabTO will continue to bring these topics and resources to partner programs like these in order to enrich learning experiences and foster systemic and sustainable change.

MEMORANDUMS OF UNDERSTANDING

In 2017, Toronto City Council adopted the report "[Enhancing City Academic Relations](#)" which recognized Toronto's post-secondary institutions as integral parts of the City's economy, contributing to the City's prosperity through education, employment generation, training, research, and investment. Subsequent to that report, in 2017 and

2018, the City entered into non-binding Memorandums of Understanding with each of the eight public Higher Education Institutions, identifying areas of mutual collaboration and outlining strategies to achieve key shared goals. These Memorandums of Understanding are now expiring and this report recommends that the City Manager be given authority to negotiate and enter into new non-binding Memorandums of Understanding with each Toronto Higher Education Institutions to replace the existing Memorandums of Understanding.

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