

Investing In Youth, Empowering Our City's Potential: Creation of a Toronto Youth Employment Program

Date: January 7, 2025

To: Economic and Community Development Committee

From: City Council

Wards: All

CITY COUNCIL DECISION

City Council on December 17 and 18, 2024, referred Motion MM24.2 to the Economic and Community Development Committee for consideration.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Councillor Parthi Kandavel, seconded by Councillor Jamaal Myers, recommends that:

1. City Council request the Federal Government to allocate an additional investment in the Canada Summer Jobs program for the City of Toronto to run the Toronto Youth Employment Program.
2. City Council request the Provincial Government to provide an investment into the City of Toronto to run the Toronto Youth Employment Program.
3. City Council request the Executive Director, Social Development Finance and Administration, in collaboration with City Divisions, Agencies, Boards and Corporations, including Economic Development and Culture, Parks, Forestry and Recreation, Toronto Employment and Social Services, People and Equity, Toronto Community Housing Corporation, and Toronto Public Library to:
 - a. create a multi-sector, career-focused, Toronto Youth Employment Strategy in 2025, in partnership with the Toronto Youth Cabinet, with the goal of hiring an additional 10,000 equity-deserving youth ages 15-24 by Summer 2026 through a Toronto Youth Employment Program;
 - b. prioritize summer employment opportunities with wrap-around supports and mentorship as a violence prevention strategy; and

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c. report back to the Economic and Community Development Committee with a development, engagement and outreach, implementation, and evaluation plan that leverages and grows existing youth employment initiatives by the end of the first quarter of 2025.

4. City Council request the Chief People Officer to conduct a comprehensive capacity assessment across all City Divisions, Agencies, Boards, and Corporations to determine their ability to expand youth employment opportunities as part of the proposed Toronto Youth Employment Program, and report back by the end of the first quarter of 2025; such assessment shall identify:

a. the current number of youth aged 14-24 employed within each entity over the past 5 years, including socio-demographic data to understand potential employment gaps and measuring program outcomes;

b. projected hiring needs and available positions suitable for youth employment in the upcoming years;

c. existing training programs, mentorship initiatives, and support structures that could be leveraged or expanded to facilitate increased youth hiring;

d. physical workspace, supervisory capacity, and other operational factors that may impact the ability to onboard additional youth employees; and

e. potential barriers or challenges to increased youth hiring, such as union agreements, or policy limitations.

5. City Council request the City Manager to convene an inter-divisional table that includes all relevant City Divisions, Agencies, Boards and Corporations, including Economic Development and Culture, Parks, Forestry and Recreation, Social Development, Finance and Administration and Toronto Employment and Social Services, People and Equity, Toronto Community Housing Corporation, and Toronto Public Library, as well as the Toronto Youth Cabinet, to guide and support the development and implementation of the Youth Employment Program.

6. City Council request the City Manager to explore opportunities to leverage major events hosted in Toronto, such as the FIFA 2026 World Cup, to create targeted youth employment and skill development opportunities tied to the planning and execution of these events.

7. City Council request the Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration, and the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture, to explore partnerships and agreements with successful youth employment agencies and organizations that specialize in specific sectors, such as technology, skilled trades, and others, with the goal of developing sector-specific internship programs, apprenticeships, and career navigation support for participating youth in the Toronto Youth Employment Program.

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SUMMARY

Youth unemployment in Toronto is at crisis levels, with the city experiencing the highest rates since 2014, with exception made for 2020 and 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This lack of economic opportunities disproportionately impacts equity-deserving groups such as Black, Indigenous, and youth living in priority neighbourhoods or Toronto Community Housing. The consequences are severe - youth firearm arrests have spiked 161 percent over the past two years, with youth perpetrating two-thirds of violent carjackings. Research shows clear links between youth unemployment and increased risks of violence, crime, and justice system involvement.

Investing in robust youth employment programs has proven to be an effective upstream prevention mechanism to break this cycle. Successful initiatives in cities like Boston, Atlanta, Chicago, and New York have seen significant decreases in violent crime after implementing robust Summer Youth Employment Programs. Youth Employment Programs provide proven protective factors like job skills training, mentorship, networking opportunities, wraparound support, and tailored programming for equity-deserving groups. Nearly 90 percent of Summer Youth Employment Programs participants in the aforementioned Cities report developing new skills, making community connections, and increased hope for their future.

This motion was initiated through the advocacy efforts of the Toronto Youth Cabinet, the City of Toronto's official youth advocacy body, who have been actively engaging youth across the city and amplifying their voices.

Over the past year, the Toronto Youth Cabinet and its partners including; The Neighborhood Group Community Services, The Neighborhood Organization, have engaged over 30,000 youth across the city, where young people have told them directly about their desire for meaningful and gainful employment opportunities to learn, grow, contribute to communities, and develop skills for long-term career success.

Youth have expressed their strong support for a Toronto Youth Employment Program, especially as youth unemployment levels are at their highest since 2014, coupled with significant cuts to employment services. The most vulnerable youth - particularly Black, Indigenous, those living in priority neighbourhoods and Toronto Community Housing - are disproportionately impacted. This has severely impacted their ability to develop job skills, social capital, community connections, and a sense of hope for the future, with dire consequences like the spike in youth involvement in serious violence.

The federal government has recognized the importance of youth employment through initiatives like the Canada Summer Jobs program. Most recently, the Government of Canada announced [a proposed \\$200.5 million investment for 2025–26 in the Canada Summer Jobs program](#). However, dedicated funding streams are required to meet Toronto's specific needs. The Province of Ontario also has existing youth employment programs that could be leveraged through greater investment in the city. The City of Toronto has existing youth employment initiatives through agencies like Toronto

Community Housing and programs like Toronto Youth Partnerships and Employment, but a coordinated, multi-sectoral large-scale strategy is still lacking.

Toronto's 10 Year SafeTO: A Community Safety and Well-Being Plan has prioritized investing in people and providing economic opportunities to reduce youth violence. A large-scale Youth Employment Program, developed in partnership with the private sector, community organizations, and coordinated across the City's Divisions, Agencies, Boards and Corporations, directly aligns with this goal.

This motion presents an opportunity for collaborative action. This is more than just a job creation effort - it is an upstream investment in Toronto's future. By aligning various funding sources, conducting capacity assessments, and fostering cross-sector partnerships, the City can create a comprehensive Toronto Youth Employment Strategy. Providing 10,000 additional summer jobs for youth aged 15-24 by 2026 through a Youth Employment Program will equip young people with skills, mentors, capacity-building and pathways to economic security and career success, while also preventing violence through productive engagement.

Background Information (City Council)

Member Motion MM24.2

(<https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2024/mm/bgrd/backgroundfile-251457.pdf>)

Fiscal Impact Statement from the Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer

(<https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2024/mm/bgrd/backgroundfile-251733.pdf>)

Communications (City Council)

(December 16, 2024) Letter from Stephen Mensah, Toronto Youth Cabinet (MM.New)

(<https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2024/mm/comm/communicationfile-185575.pdf>)

(December 17, 2024) Letter from Neethan Shan, Chair, Toronto District School Board (MM.New)

(<https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2024/mm/comm/communicationfile-185679.pdf>)