

## Reducing Barriers to Youth Employment

**Date:** November 28, 2025

**To:** Economic and Community Development Committee

**From:** Executive Director, Social Development

**Wards:** All

### SUMMARY

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Toronto faces one of the highest youth unemployment rates in Ontario, at 19.7%, highlighting the ongoing challenges many young people are facing in accessing stable and meaningful employment. Indigenous, Black, newcomer, and 2SLGBTQ+ youth experience the greatest barriers, including limited access to networks, training opportunities, and pathways into stable work.

The City of Toronto employs more youth, aged 15 to 29, per capita, than any other Canadian municipality. Each year, over 16,000 youth are employed across the City system. Building on this strength, the City is taking steps to improve equitable youth employment and create clearer pathways from skill development to lasting careers, guided by Council direction and aligned with key Council-approved strategies.

This report provides an overview of the City's youth employment programs. Attachment 1, City of Toronto Youth Jobs Inventory, provides a comprehensive inventory of 40 youth-specific employment programs offered across 10 City divisions, agencies, and corporations. Attachment 2, Case Studies of Toronto Youth Employment Pathways, provides case studies of how youth move through training, work experience, mentorship, and into careers through these programs.

While Toronto is a leading municipal youth employer, stronger coordination and investment across governments is needed. Limited provincial funding, and the seasonal nature of federal programs like the Canada Summer Jobs, highlight the need for a more aligned, multi-government approach to meet the needs of Toronto's youth labour market.

In 2026, the City will focus on key actions to improve youth employment:

- Address barriers in hiring by reviewing and reforming practices like police reference checks, simplifying qualifications, and making job postings clearer, accessible, and more inclusive.

- Modernize recruitment systems with digital tools, data insights, and plain language for better transparency, and efficiency.
- Strengthen entry pathways through internships, and early talent programs to support smoother transitions into public service careers.
- Expand partnerships through the Youth Employment Table and the upcoming Toronto Youth Employment Charter.
- Create local jobs through major events like FIFA World Cup 2026™ and the municipal election.

These steps aim to build a more equitable system and call for stronger collaboration across governments and sectors to advance youth employment opportunities.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

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The Executive Director, Social Development recommends that:

1. The Economic and Community Development Committee receive this report for information.

## **FINANCIAL IMPACT**

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There are no financial implications resulting from the adoption of the recommendation in this report. Any future financial impacts will be requested through future budget processes for consideration along with all other City priorities.

The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has reviewed this report and agrees with the information as presented in the Financial Impact section.

## **DECISION HISTORY**

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At its September 16, 2025 meeting, the Economic and Community Development Committee adopted EC23.2 – Welcome Policy Program Access: Update, which outlined improvements to program accessibility for low-income residents, including youth, to enhance equitable participation in City recreation programs. These improvements support broader goals of economic inclusion, youth engagement, and the removal of cost-related barriers to employment and skills development.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2025.EC23.2>

At its July 24, 2025 meeting, City Council adopted MM32.36 – CityServeTO: A Youth-Based Community Service Initiative, The motion directed the Executive Director, Social Development, in partnership with relevant divisions and community partners, to develop a pilot for CityServe. This program is a youth-based community service initiative that engages Toronto youth in civic service and community development opportunities.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2025.MM32.36>

At its February 26, 2025 meeting, the Economic and Community Development Committee adopted EC18.6 – Investing In Youth, Empowering Our City’s Potential: Creation of a Toronto Youth Employment Program, referred to the Executive Director, Social Development, to create an inventory of existing City of Toronto youth employment programs, identify opportunities for new or expanded programs, and align youth employment definitions, objectives, and targets.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2025.EC18.6>

At its December 17, 2024 meeting, City Council adopted EC17.2 – A Partnered Approach to Inclusive Economic Development, which includes a definition and guiding principles of Inclusive Economic Development and requests City divisions and agencies to apply these in the development and implementation of relevant plans, strategies, and programs related to employment and entrepreneurship in Toronto.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2024.EC17.2>

At its November 13, 2024 meeting, City Council adopted EC.16.2 Sidewalks to Skylines: A 10-Year Action Plan for Toronto’s Economy (2025-2030), which set out a vision for inclusive economic growth, workforce development, and Opportunity creation across sectors. Specifically, Action 16 of the Action Plan for Toronto’s Economy directs the City to build opportunities for Toronto’s youth with local partners and the private sector to develop greater employment and professional development opportunities for Toronto’s youth with a focus on Indigenous, Black and equity-deserving groups.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2024.EC16.2>

At its June 15, 2021 meeting, City Council adopted the renewed Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy (2023–2033), which identifies equitable access to employment, training and workforce pathways as a central mechanism for reducing intergenerational poverty.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2021.QS3.3>

At its December 5, 2017 meeting City Council adopted the Toronto Action Plan to Confront Anti-Black Racism, which commits the City to dismantling systemic barriers in hiring, retention, and promotion, including for Black youth and early-career Black professionals.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2017.EX29.11>

## **EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT**

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The City of Toronto is committed to ensuring that all youth, particularly those facing systemic and intersecting barriers related to race, gender, identity, sexual orientation, disability, income status, immigration status and family composition, have equitable access to employment, skills development and pathways to economic independence.

This report has a net positive equity impact, as it advances work that directly benefits Indigenous, Black, newcomer, and 2SLGBTQ+ youth, who are disproportionately excluded from stable employment and overrepresented in precarious, low-wage labour. The report does not introduce new barriers, but it does identify where inequities persist and names the structural changes required to address them.

## COMMENTS

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### Toronto's Youth Labour Market

As of October 2025, Toronto's youth unemployment rate is 19.7%, compared to 16.3% provincially and 14.0% nationally.<sup>1</sup> The impact is greater for some groups: in May 2025, the national Black youth unemployment rate was 22% and Indigenous youth 18%, compared to 14% for all youth aged 15–24.<sup>2</sup>

Economic trends and broader shifts in the labor market add pressure including rising cost-of-living, persistent uncertainty driven by threats and impacts of tariffs, increased competition for fewer entry-level jobs, a growth of demand for contract work, and changing skill requirements needed to obtain employment. Systemic barriers like high certification costs, limited transportation, and lack of mentorship further restrict access, especially for Indigenous, Black, newcomer, and 2SLGBTQ+ youth.

A recent Toronto Youth Cabinet survey found 74% of youth face logistical or systemic barriers, and 60% believe factors such as race, age, or gender identity affects their ability to find work.<sup>3</sup> Tackling these barriers is key to creating fair and inclusive employment opportunities.

### The City of Toronto as a Youth Employer

The City of Toronto employs more youth aged 15–29 per capita than any other Canadian municipality, offering a mix of seasonal, part-time, contract, and some full-time career track opportunities. Each year, over 16,000 youth are employed across City's divisions, agencies, and corporations.

The City runs 40 distinct youth employment programs across 10 divisions and agencies, including Social Development; Parks and Recreation; People and Equity; Economic Development and Culture; Toronto Transit Corporation; Toronto Public Library; Toronto Zoo; Toronto Community Housing Corporation; Toronto Police Service; and the Canadian National Exhibition. Details can be found in Attachment 1.

Of the 40 youth-specific programs identified:

- 48% are seasonal summer jobs in recreation and parks.
- 25% are part-time roles, often in libraries and customer service.
- 22% are full-time opportunities.
- 5% are event-based or short-term contracts.

This variety underscores the City's role as a major entry-level employer and the need to improve pathways from short-term jobs to stable careers.

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1 Statistics Canada. [Labour Force Survey, October 2025](#)

2 Government of Canada. [Employment and Skills Support for Canada's Youth](#)

3 Toronto Youth Cabinet, The Neighbourhood Group. [Youth Employment Postcard Survey Report, 2024-2025](#)

## Coordinating Across Levels of Government

Addressing youth employment requires coordinated action across all orders of government.

As a municipality, the City of Toronto plays a dual role both as a major employer and a system convener. The City provides skill-building and training opportunities through initiatives such as Future Lifeguards, and Building Skills Through Recreation, which strengthen youth job readiness and promote equitable hiring and mentorship for City jobs. In addition to paid roles, the City also offers structured co-op placements and unpaid student placement opportunities, which serve as critical pathways for young people to gain sector-specific experience, fulfill academic requirements, and facilitate transitions into full-time municipal employment. Through the City's Community Benefits Framework, the City maximizes inclusive economic development opportunities when it buys or builds new projects. This includes creating workforce development and supply chain opportunities for residents, including Indigenous, Black and equity-deserving youth. This helps ensure that youth, particularly those facing systemic barriers, can build experience, networks and credentials that lead to sustained careers.

However, provincial support is limited. Provincial governments are responsible for overseeing most labour-market and employment-training programs through agreements with the federal government. While the province is responsible for setting system priorities, managing Employment Ontario, and funding workforce development, the 2025-26 fiscal update released on November 6, 2025, revealed no dedicated, province-wide youth employment strategy or stand-alone funding stream for youth employment.<sup>4</sup> By contrast, other provinces have made targeted investments towards youth employment. Alberta, for example, launched the Youth Employment Incentive in September 2025, investing \$8 million dollars and offering eligible employers up to \$7,500 to hire Albertan youth.<sup>5</sup>

Changes to Ontario's employment system have negatively impacted young jobseekers. Beginning in January 2021, the Province initiated the first phase of a province-wide employment services transformation. This transformation introduced a new model called Integrated Employment Services (IES), intended to simplify access to job search supports, skills training, and employer connections within the Employment Ontario network. Early findings from the First Work's report, "What's Working, What's Not (2025)" suggest 10% fewer youth are being served by the new model, with the overall share of youth clients dropping from 27% to 19% since IES implementation began. A key performance metric for service providers in the new model is placing clients in jobs of 20 hours per week or more, making it challenging to support clients, including many young people looking for part-time work.<sup>6</sup>

These early insights suggest that the new model may be leaving behind young people who need targeted and sustained support to enter and stay in the workforce, reinforcing the need for municipal-provincial collaboration and renewed investment in youth-specific

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<sup>4</sup> Government of Ontario. [2025 Fall Statement | Table of Contents](#)

<sup>5</sup> Careers: Take on the Future. [Alberta Youth Employment Incentive](#)

<sup>6</sup> First Work. [What's Working, What's Not: Safeguarding Ontario's Future through IES Reform](#)

pathways. In Toronto, the new model came into effect March 1, 2025 under the oversight WCG Services as the new Employment Services System Manager for the city.

The federal government also has a role to play in addressing youth unemployment, managing national labour-market systems and funding targeted supports, such as Canada Summer Jobs and Skills Development grants, which create temporary placements and subsidized roles for youth.

The 2025 Federal Budget introduced several new investments, including \$594.7 million over two years for Canada Summer Jobs, beginning with 100,000 positions in Summer 2026; \$307.9 million over two years for the Youth Employment and Skills Strategy to provide employment, training; and wraparound supports for approximately 20,000 youth facing barriers per year. Additionally, \$635.2 million over three years was announced for the Student Work Placement Program to generate 55,000 work-integrated learning opportunities for postsecondary students starting in 2026-27.<sup>7</sup> These investments will provide critical supports for youth seeking employment and training opportunities. It is currently unclear what the allocations for Toronto will be and what impacts it will have on Toronto's youth labor market.

In 2024, only 5,411 Canada Summer Jobs positions (7.6% of the national total) were allocated to Toronto youth, despite Toronto being home to more than 20% of Canada's youth population.<sup>8</sup> Federal funding is also delivered in short, and inconsistent cycles, with shifting timelines, criteria, and limited multi-year commitments. This unpredictability makes it difficult for municipalities and community partners to plan sustained pathways, maintain staff capacity, and build long-term hiring pipelines with employers. Greater consistency and earlier release of federal allocations would enable stronger alignment with municipal planning cycles and more stable opportunities for youth.

City staff efforts will focus on improving employment efforts at the City and with private and community sector partners, while continuing to identify opportunities for alignment with provincial and federal initiatives where possible. In alignment with the *Sidewalks to Skylines: An Action Plan for Toronto's Economy*, the City aims to work towards fostering youth employment pathways that are connected, inclusive, and adaptable to policy and funding shifts. The goal is to ensure that every young person, regardless of background or postal code, has a fair chance to work, contribute, and thrive. This aligns with the City's broader efforts to advance inclusive economic development to ensure that all Toronto labour force members can contribute to and benefit from the city's economic growth.

### **Building Youth Employment Opportunities Through Cross-Sectoral Partnerships**

While the City of Toronto plays a pivotal role as a direct employer, the scale of the youth unemployment challenge demands cross-sectoral action. Toronto's private sector, non-profit, and institutional partners are essential to unlocking new pathways for young people and advancing youth employment opportunities.

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<sup>7</sup> Government of Canada. [Canada Strong Budget 2025](#)

<sup>8</sup> Government of Canada. [Ontario - Organizations funded by Canada Summer Jobs 2024 - Canada.ca](#)

Expanding equitable, early-career opportunities for youth will require participation from employers across all sectors, particularly in high-growth fields such as technology, green infrastructure, creative industries, healthcare, and social services. Evidence indicates that increasing the availability of paid internships, apprenticeships, and mentorship-based placements within private and non-profit and public institutions would help strengthen youth skills, confidence, and professional networks, while creating clearer pathways into long-term careers.<sup>9</sup>

Social Development is establishing a Youth Employment Table to strengthen partnerships across sectors. In partnership with United Way Greater Toronto, the table will bring together City divisions, agencies, employers, and community partners to:

- Share best practices on recruitment, training, and retention.
- Exchange data and advocate collectively to provincial and federal governments.
- Engage major corporate, non-profit, and philanthropic employers to set shared hiring goals, align investments, and expand equitable pathways for youth.

The City and United Way Greater Toronto will convene the Youth Employment Table meeting, with key partners, in early 2026 to finalize the terms of reference and key actions ahead of summer hiring.

### **The City's Youth Employment Pathways**

Employment pathways refer to the continuum of opportunities that help youth gain the skills, experience, and confidence needed to access and sustain meaningful employment. While employment remains the end goal, establishing programs, supports, and services that foster employability are key to achieving employment outcomes. The City's youth employment pathways encompass a continuum from foundational skill development and first jobs to structured mentorship and professional entry into public service.

The City of Toronto [Youth Services Review](#), approved by Council in 2021, introduced a Youth Outcomes Framework with shared outcomes for how City-delivered and funded programs collectively support progress along the youth employment pathway: from skill development and mentorship to sustained employment.<sup>10</sup> The Youth Services Review also introduced the Violence Prevention Spectrum, which situates youth programs along a continuum from prevention to intervention, underscoring the City's role in addressing systemic barriers and advancing equity and wellbeing for all youth. Together, the Youth Outcomes Framework and Violence Prevention Spectrum, guide targeted investments to create more inclusive and supportive opportunities.

#### *From Skill Building to Careers*

The continuum of opportunities available by the City of Toronto for Toronto's youth ranges from intensive supports and first jobs that focus on foundational skill development, to structured mentorship and professional entry into public service.

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<sup>9</sup> Government of Canada. [Horizontal Evaluation of the Youth Employment and Skills Strategy](#)

<sup>10</sup> City of Toronto. [Youth Services Review](#).

Collectively, the City's various youth employment pathways are designed to prioritize access and inclusion, provide sustained mentorship and "meet youth where they are", recognizing that every young person's journey into the workforce is different.

To illustrate how the City's employment pathways work in practice, the report includes Attachment 2: Case Studies of Toronto Youth Employment Pathways that trace the journey from early supports to career-level employment. The case studies describe distinct stages along the employment pathway from life stabilization and skill development to mentorship, applied training and professional advancement, illustrating how intentional design, mentorship, and partnerships translate into real outcomes for youth.

Together, these examples highlight how the City's ecosystem of programs can function as an interconnected system that can better support youth at every step toward long-term, meaningful employment.

### **Addressing Barriers to City Employment Access for Youth**

Analysis of the City's various youth employment pathways shows that, despite the City's leadership as a youth employer, systemic and procedural barriers persist. Review of the inventory determined that challenges remain: fragmented pathways across divisions and agencies, inconsistent youth definitions, limited and inconsistent data collection, and a lack of program connectivity. These gaps make it difficult to track outcomes, identify who is being left out, and scale what is working. The City has made strides, and continues to work in improving, the following areas: recruitment and hiring process improvements, screening and certification requirements, data monitoring enhancements, and targeted hiring programs.

#### *Recruitment and Hiring Processes Improvements*

Insights from the 2024-2025 Youth Employment Postcard Survey, co-led by the Toronto Youth Cabinet and The Neighbourhood Group, show that many youth are discouraged from applying to City roles due to complex job postings, unclear eligibility requirements, and inconsistent communication related to deadlines and next steps. 62% of youth respondents reported difficulty understanding job postings or meeting application deadlines. Nearly three-quarters expressed uncertainty around which qualifications were truly required. Challenges with competency-based screening, tailoring resumes, and reliable access to technology further reduced the likelihood that youth, particularly equity-deserving youth, would apply for City positions.<sup>11</sup>

To address these challenges, People and Equity has begun implementing measures to improve the accessibility, equity, and transparency of City employment pathways. This includes introducing plain-language job descriptions that recognize transferable skills and lived experience, as well as expanding outreach through schools, community hubs, and youth-serving organizations.

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<sup>11</sup> Toronto Youth Cabinet, The Neighbourhood Group. [Youth Employment Postcard Survey Report, 2024-2025](#)

## *Screening and Certification Requirements*

Youth may encounter structural barriers built into traditional hiring and screening practices, such as requirements related to years of experience, scheduling expectations, or eligibility limitations tied to enrolment status, which may unintentionally exclude youth who are not in school, are caregiving, or balancing multiple part-time jobs. In many cases these standards are not deliberately exclusionary, but they can disproportionately impact youth who face systemic barriers to early work experience, credentialing, or stable housing.

The People and Equity division is reviewing these practices to identify where processes can be simplified, clarified, or modernized, while maintaining compliance with occupational standards. This includes work to improve transparency around what is “required” versus “preferred,” reduce unnecessary duplication in application steps, and ensure screening standards do not create avoidable inequities for equity-deserving youth.

Financial and certification-related barriers further limit youth participation, particularly in roles that require multiple paid training steps. Programs like Future Lifeguards and Building Skills Through Recreation, which provide free skills-based employment readiness training and connects participants to guaranteed summer jobs across Parks and Recreation, demonstrate how removing cost and certification constraints can significantly improve outcomes.

Since the introductions of these initiatives, participation among youth from underserved communities increased by 60%. Additionally, retention rates among youth who received mentorship rose by 20%. These results show that subsidized or funded training, combined with clear hiring pathways and mentorship, can meaningfully improve employment outcomes.

## *Data Monitoring Enhancements*

Work is underway to strengthen the City’s data governance and workforce analytics capabilities, allowing for improved tracking of recruitment, retention, internal mobility and career progression across the organization. Enhancements to the City’s identity-based workforce data collection will support more equitable decision-making and facilitate a better understanding of how different groups experience City employment.

While enhanced data systems alone will not eliminate systemic barriers, they are essential to identifying where those barriers exist, improving the transparency of hiring and promotion processes, and designing more navigable and equitable pathways into and through City employment.

Stronger data governance will also support consistent accountability and reporting across divisions, while enabling evidence-informed improvements that benefit not only youth, but all equity-deserving groups within the municipal workforce.

## *Targeted Hiring Programs*

The City's divisional programs continue to offer valuable lessons on how targeted outreach and intentional program design can improve equity and outcomes. The Youth Career Development Program, a paid employment and mentorship initiative that connects equity-deserving youth to part-time and seasonal roles across multiple City divisions, demonstrated strong results in 2025, achieving a 29% increase in total youth hires, with the largest gains among Black youth (55%) and 2SLGBTQ+ youth (67%).

Similarly, the Indigenous Youth Research Associate Program, which places Indigenous youth in research and policy roles supported by Elders and cultural mentors, achieved a 37% increase in hires and a 50% retention rate by embedding culturally grounded support. Collectively, these examples affirm that the City's strongest youth employment outcomes come from programs that pair mentorship, targeted training, and wraparound supports.

## **Next Steps**

Starting in early 2026, efforts will focus on the implementation of governance, data alignment, equitable hiring, and employer partnerships to advance youth employment opportunities. Key initiatives will include:

- **Youth Employment Table and Youth Employment Charter:** Formally launching in Q1 2026, the Table and Charter will set shared hiring commitments, equity standards, and foster cross-sector coordination. The Table will meet quarterly and publish annual progress reports.
- **Unified Data Approach:** Developing a City-wide dashboard and standardized reporting on youth employment metrics—definitions, demographics, retention, and advancement—to strengthen transparency and evidence-based decisions.
- **Addressing Barriers:** Modernizing recruitment systems, simplifying job postings, reforming police check requirements, and expanding access to subsidized certifications and mentorship.
- **Leveraging 2026 Opportunities:** Creating seasonal and skills-linked jobs through the FIFA World Cup 2026™ Community Benefits Plan and the Toronto Municipal Election, with a focus on equity-deserving youth.
- **Expansion of Building Skills Through Recreation (BSTR):** Parks and Recreation has set a target to engage 2,000 participants and hire over 1,000 net new local youth, certified, trained and placed in local jobs for the Summer 2026 season. This program is comprised of several streams including aquatic leadership, sports literacy, and camp leader employment tracks, along with all wrap-around supports needed to position youth for employment opportunities with Parks and Recreation.
- **Expanding Student Connect:** Building on past success to provide paid election-day roles and connect youth to longer-term pathways through follow-up recruitment and returning-worker strategies.

These efforts position the City as a leading youth employer and system convenor, working to create a unified, data-driven employment system that ensures equitable pathways to work, advancement, and economic mobility for Toronto youth.

## **CONTACT**

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## **SIGNATURE**

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Mohamed Shuriye  
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## **ATTACHMENTS**

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Attachment 1: City of Toronto Youth Jobs Inventory  
Attachment 2: Case Studies of Toronto Youth Employment Pathways