

Automotive Innovation Challenge (AIC) Program Guidelines

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Project Requirements:

Category	Stream 1	Stream 2
Program Type	Competitive, challenge-based learning experience	Experiential learning with structured placements
Program Duration	Fall and/or Winter 2025–2026 term	Full 2025–2026 academic year
Eligible Applicants	Ontario-based publicly funded post-secondary institutions with industry partners	Ontario-based publicly funded post-secondary institutions with industry partners
Available Funding	Up to \$100,000 per term (Fall + Winter possible = \$200,000 max)	Up to \$200,000 total
Matching Requirement	1:1 match (minimum 50% from private sector)	1:1 match (100% from private sector)
Application Deadline	Fall: July 14, 2025 – 12 PM EDT Winter: September 15, 2025 – 12 PM EDT	July 14, 2025 – 12 PM EDT
Student Participation	Minimum 100 students across all challenges	Minimum 25 students with structured placements and potential job offers
Industry Commitment	Industry-led challenge + 1 Career Readiness session	Industry-led placements, training, and possible post-program hiring
Formats Allowed	Hackathons, sprints, site visits, course-integrated challenges	Co-ops, full-time & part-time roles, internships, embedded capstones

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.

Given the success of the Automotive Innovation Challenge (AIC) Pilot Program and the demonstrated ecosystem impact, OVIN is relaunching the AIC as one of its pillar programs to ensure the continued development of employer-led talent attraction and workforce readiness through direct industry engagement. 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, ensuring a skilled, industry-ready workforce that meets evolving employer demands.

As Ontario's automotive and mobility sector undergoes a significant transformation — driven by electrification, battery technology, and the critical minerals supply chain — the Automotive Innovation Challenge will engage industry partners from these sectors and provide participants with direct exposure to real-world problems in automotive and mobility. 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 or to design an experiential learning training program.

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), powered by OVIN, invites Ontario post-secondary institutions and their industry partners to co-design high-impact, real-world applied learning opportunities that respond directly to talent and innovation needs in the province's automotive and mobility sector.

For the 2025–2026 academic year, the program is delivered through two complementary streams:

- **Stream 1:** Challenge-based learning tied to specific industry problem statements
- **Stream 2:** Experiential Learning Stream (ELS) with paid placements and direct pathways to employment

The AIC helps students develop industry-relevant skills and explore career opportunities, while employers gain fresh perspectives, access to emerging talent, and strengthened talent pipelines.

Program Requirements (All Streams)

- Address a real challenge from an Ontario-based automotive or mobility company
- Provide hands-on experiences for students to apply knowledge and build skills
- Programs must be offered at no cost to students
- Include a plan for student engagement and outreach

- Pre- and post-program evaluation is required for students, post-secondary leads, and industry partners

Benefits:

For Post-Secondary Institutions	For Industry Partners	For Student Participants
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultivating strategic partnerships with industry stakeholders in Ontario's growing automotive and mobility ecosystem. • Opportunity to position own institution as a leader in innovative experiential and applied learning programs. • Cultivating strategic partnerships with post-secondary institutions and industry stakeholders in Ontario's evolving automotive and mobility ecosystem. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultivating strategic partnerships with post-secondary institutions training the province's future automotive and mobility workforce. • Development of a talent pool with a keen awareness of and an innovative solution to a problem your company is facing. • Opportunity to build a clear talent pathway via Talent Acquisition Sessions with participants, and position their own company as a leader in early talent engagement, not only for mentorship but also for easy transitions into roles post-graduation and/or co-op opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity to solve interesting, intellectually challenging problems and develop problem-solving skills. • Exposure to career opportunities and access to industry mentors and recruiters in Ontario's growing automotive and mobility sector. • Access to learning and development opportunities, including opportunity to meet and build relationships with industry mentors and recruitment professionals.

Program Structure:

Stream 1: Challenge-Based Learning

- **Objective:** Deliver short-term, team-based problem-solving challenges tied to real industry needs during the Fall or Winter academic terms.
- **Key Features:**
 - Students work in teams on a problem defined by an industry partner
 - Programs are co-designed with post-secondary and industry partners
 - Use a "knowledge-before-challenge" model, allowing time for problem exploration and solution iteration
 - Includes at least one Career Readiness session where industry partners share hiring pathways and workplace insights
- **Formats May Include:** Hackathons, site visits, sprints, capstones, course-integrated projects

- **Timing:**
 - Fall Term: End by Dec. 1, 2025 | Report due Jan. 15, 2026
 - Winter Term: End by Mar. 30, 2026 | Report due Apr. 30, 2026
- **Target Participation:** Minimum 100 students across all Stream 1 activities
- **Funding:**
 - Up to \$100,000 per term
 - Requires 1:1 match, with at least 50% from the private sector
- **Application Deadlines:**
 - Fall Term: July 14, 2025 at 12 PM EDT
 - Winter Term: September 15, 2025 at 12 PM EDT

Stream 2: Experiential Learning Stream (ELS)

- **Objective:** Offer structured work-integrated learning placements that align with industry hiring needs, supporting job readiness and potential hired outcomes.
- **Key Features:**
 - Co-op, internship, or embedded placement opportunities
 - Jointly developed and executed Learning & Development Plan
 - Includes Placement Participation Agreement covering roles, expectations, and safety
 - Focused on training, mentorship, real-world deliverables, and career development
- **Formats may include:** Co-ops, internships, and applied research projects
- **Timing:**
 - Program ends by Mar. 30, 2026 | Final report due Apr. 30, 2026
- **Target Participation:**
 - Minimum 25 students with confirmed placements and hiring pathways
- **Funding:**
 - Up to \$200,000 total
 - Requires 1:1 match, with 100% from private sector
- **Application Deadline:**
 - July 14, 2025 at 12 PM EDT

Program Evaluation (All Streams)

Participants and partners must complete standardized pre- and post-program surveys.

Metrics Measured Include:

- Student skills development, industry engagement, career interest, and employment outcomes
- Partnership strength and innovation in program design
- Industry satisfaction and conversion into hires or co-op positions

Eligibility

- Applicants:
 - Ontario-based publicly funded post-secondary institutions
- Industry Partners:

- Ontario-based automotive or mobility companies, including OEMs, Tier 1 suppliers, startups, and SMEs

Program Administration Requirements

Applications must include a logistics plan covering:

- Staffing and roles, including matching contribution contacts
- Materials and eligible expenses (see OVIN guidelines)
- Timeline of activities
- Student-industry engagement initiatives
- Letter(s) of support from industry partners defining their role and contributions

Marketing & Outreach Requirements

- Must include a student engagement and recruitment strategy
- All communications referencing OVIN require prior approval and must adhere to OVIN branding requirements
- Any program images or videos must include documented informed consent

How Funding Works:

Stream 1 – Automotive Innovation Challenge (AIC)

Category	Details
Maximum OVIN Funding	Up to \$100,000
OVIN Reimbursement	Covers 50% of total eligible project costs
Required Match	Minimum 1:1 match to OVIN's contribution At least 50% of the match must come from the private sector
Example	Total Project Cost: \$200,000 OVIN Contribution: \$100,000 Matching Contribution: \$100,000 (min. \$50K private sector)
Funding Flow	OVIN funds flow to the Applicant only. Applicant is responsible for reimbursing partners (if applicable).

Stream 2 – Experiential Learning Stream (ELS)

Category	Details
Maximum OVIN Funding	Up to \$200,000
OVIN Reimbursement	Covers 50% of total eligible project costs
Required Match	Minimum 1:1 match to OVIN's contribution 100% of the match must come from the private sector
Example	Total Project Cost: \$400,000 OVIN Contribution: \$200,000

	Matching Contribution: \$200,000 (all of which comes from the private sector)
Funding Flow	OVIN funds flow to the Applicant only. Applicant is responsible for reimbursing partners (if applicable).
Optional Faculty Role	Faculty or co-op coordinators may support students and ensure placements align with institutional standards.

Eligible Expenses (for both Streams)

- Operating expenses directly related to program delivery
- Salaries (including program coordination and admin roles)
- Travel related to program execution
- Refer to OVIN's Eligible Expenses Guidelines for full details
- Important Note: If matching commitments are not met, or if the project is underspent, OVIN's final contribution will be reduced proportionally

Flow of Funds:

- OVIN only reimburses eligible expenses. Refer to the Eligible Expenses Guidelines for details.
- Funding starts once the agreement is signed by all parties.
- An advance payment of up to 75% may be released at OVIN's discretion once the project begins.
- Applicants must give a progress presentation halfway through the program.; during this progress presentation, applicants will be asked to present on program progress including any successes, challenges, and a budget update to see if any alterations are needed. The budget update will need to include total expenditures of OCI project funding and total industry in-kind contributions.
- The final 25% is paid after OVIN approves the final report, which must include financials, receipts, proof of payment, and confirmation of how funds were used.

How to Apply:

- Applicants must contact their OCI Business Development and Commercialization Manager (BDCM) to begin an application.
- New applicants should fill out the Program Enquiry Form to connect with an OCI BDCM.
- Once connected, the BDCM will guide the applicant through the process.

Application Deadlines:

- Stream 1 – Fall Cohort: July 14, 2025, at 12 PM EDT
- Stream 1 – Winter Cohort: September 15, 2025, at 12 PM EDT
- Stream 2 (Experiential Learning): July 14, 2025, at 12 PM EDT

Note: Applicants can apply to both Stream 1 cohorts, but must propose distinct programs (different partners, challenges, and budgets).

Full Application Must Include:

- Background of the institution and similar program experience
- Program design and implementation plan
- Logistics and administration outline
- Marketing and promotion strategy
- Monitoring and evaluation plan (include OVIN's pre/post surveys)
- Budget breakdown and justification

Assessment:

- Applications are reviewed for eligibility, completeness, and financial compliance.
- Each application undergoes an external review by 3 experts under NDA.
- Applicants may be invited to present to the review panels.
- OVIN makes the final funding decision and notifies successful applicants.
- AIC is a discretionary, non-entitlement program with limited funding. All eligible applications undergo a review process where the applications are assessed against program objectives and other criteria. Not all eligible applications will be approved for funding.

Evaluation Criteria:

- Applicant's experience delivering effective applied learning, professional development, and employability programming for post-secondary students
- Ability to support students across a range of academic years and programs
- **Stream 1:** Feasibility of engaging and retaining at least 100 student participants within the challenge
- **Stream 2:** Feasibility of engaging at least 25 student participants and successfully placing them into meaningful experiential learning opportunities (e.g., work placements, co-ops, internships) with a clear pathway to employment with the industry partner
- Strength of industry partnerships, demonstrated through level of engagement and how these relationships will enrich student experience—especially through Career Readiness sessions and tangible opportunities
- Coverage of different segments of the automotive and mobility sector to reflect the full range of opportunities in the field
- Innovation in program design, including the nature of the challenge students will address and the format of the competition
- Quality of data collection and evaluation plan to measure outcomes and impact
- Geographic diversity: OVIN aims to fund one applicant per Ontario region, as appropriate based on the applications received

Timeline (Stream 1: Fall):

Action Item	Due Date
Applications open	June 16, 2025
Applicant information session	June 25, 2025

Full application due	July 14, 2025 at 12 PM EDT
Internal initial review of applications for eligibility and applicants to address elements flagged from Eligibility Check	Week of July 14, 2025
External Review Panel evaluation period	Week of July 21, 2025
Selected applicant presentations to OVIN	July 30, 2025
OVIN response to confirm contact info. with applicants AND OVIN Final Decision - Award and Decline letters sent	Week of August 4, 2025
Project activation (Note: upon project activation, OCI will release a payment equal to 75% per cent of the OCI award).	Within a few days of signing of funding agreement
Signed Funding Agreement due	September 4, 2025
Interim Presentations	October 3, 2025
Project close	December 5, 2025
Final reports due	January 15, 2026

Timeline (Stream 1: Winter):

Action Item	Due Date
Applications open	June 16, 2025
Applicant information session	June 25, 2025
Full application due	September 15, 2025 at 12 PM EDT
Internal initial review of applications for eligibility and applicants to address elements flagged from Eligibility Check	Week of September 22, 2025
External Review Panel evaluation period	Week of September 29, 2025
Selected applicant presentations to OVIN	Week of October 6, 2025
OVIN response to confirm contact info. with applicants AND OVIN Final Decision - Award and Decline letters sent	Week of October 13, 2025
Project activation (Note: upon project activation, OCI will release a payment equal to 75% per cent of the OCI award).	Within a few days of signing of funding agreement
Signed Funding Agreement due	November 14, 2025
Interim Presentations	January 2026
Project close	March 30, 2026
Final reports due	April 30, 2026

Timeline (Experiential Learning Stream):

Action Item	Due Date
Applications open	June 16, 2025

Applicant information session	June 25, 2025
Full application due	July 14, 2025 at 12 PM EDT
Internal initial review of applications for eligibility and applicants to address elements flagged from Eligibility Check	Week of July 14, 2025
External Review Panel evaluation period	Week of July 21, 2025
Selected applicant presentations to OVIN	July 30, 2025
OVIN response to confirm contact info. with applicants AND OVIN Final Decision - Award and Decline letters sent	Week of August 4, 2025
Project activation (Note: upon project activation, OCI will release a payment equal to 75% per cent of the OCI award).	Within a few days of signing of funding agreement
Signed Funding Agreement due	September 4, 2025
Interim Presentations	January 2026
Project close	March 30, 2026
Final reports due	April 30, 2026

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.

Project Reporting section is consistently included for all OCI programs, there is no disclosure of the type, requirements, requirements or expectations in the document. E.g., Is there a Final Report, Year-End report, Mid-Term report, Restrospective Report, Metrics Report. And what they entail.

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 Curtis Lundgren, Project Lead on OVIN's Talent Strategy and Workforce Planning team at clundgren@oc-innovation.ca for further information.