



Office of the Chief Planner  
Corporate Services Department

## MEMORANDUM

To: Members of Committee of the Whole

From: Paul Freeman  
Chief Planner

Date: January 6, 2021

Re: Update on York Region Business Support during COVID-19

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### **York Region Business Recovery Support Partnership works collaboratively to assist businesses throughout York Region**

This memorandum provides an update on the support delivered to businesses across York Region during the COVID-19 pandemic. It focuses on activities delivered through the York Region Business Recovery Support Partnership approved by Regional Council on [April 30, 2020](#).

Members of the partnership work collaboratively to assist businesses throughout York Region to access the various government support programs they need and provide additional support. Members of the Partnership include:

- York Region's Economic Strategy Division
- Nine local municipal economic development teams
- Nine Chambers of Commerce/Boards of Trade
- York Region Business Coalition
- Workforce Planning Board of York Region
- ventureLAB
- Seneca College
- York University

## **Four sub-groups were established to identify and lead execution of projects launched from the collaboration**

The primary goals of the York Region Business Recovery Support Partnership are economic impact assessment, streamlined business advisory support and business community communications. Four sub-groups were established to identify and lead execution of projects launched from the collaboration. The sub-groups are Agriculture & Agrifood, Business Advisory, Crisis Response Supply Chain, and Tourism, Arts & Culture.

Through these subgroups several projects were launched to support the businesses. These include:

- [Business Impact and Recovery Survey](#)
- COVID-19 Economic Impact Analysis
- Targeted communications portals: via [YorkLink.ca](#), [Yorksmallbusiness.ca](#) and associated social media channels [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) to ensure easy navigation to government supports
- [Foreign worker awareness campaign](#)
- [Ready When You Are campaign](#) to improve consumer confidence
- Supply Chain Resiliency Study
- [COVID-19 small business funding program](#): \$500,000 through the Small Business Centres and via Community Investment Plan (CIP) programs
- [COVID-19 Business Recovery Webinar Series](#) in collaboration with the Newmarket and Vaughan Chambers of Commerce

The outcomes from these initiatives include increased information sharing, campaigns to support the agriculture & agri-food business and the tourism arts & culture community and additional funding support to local small businesses.

## **Federal and Provincial programs are leading the support to businesses impacted by COVID-19 providing significant financial support programs to the community**

The majority of support being provided to residents and businesses is being delivered by the [Federal](#) and [Provincial](#) governments. Many significant financial support programs have been launched to help businesses manage a range of challenges. The programs include:

- [Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy](#) (CEWS)
- [Canada Emergency Business Account](#) (CEBA)
- [Canada Emergency Rent Subsidy](#) (CERS)
- [COVID-19 Energy Assistance Program](#)

Information on these and other programs are available on the [Federal](#) and [Provincial](#) websites. All nine cities and towns in York Region have also taken measures to help relieve the burden on businesses, and help access these programs. The range of measures also includes deferred taxes and service fees to loosening noise by-law enforcement enabling businesses to work outside their normal hours.

Efforts being undertaken by York Region and through the York Region Business Recovery Support Partnership are meant to complement those of all levels of government. Issues raised through the partnership are also shared during calls with staff from the Federal Ministry of Innovation Science and Economic Development (ISED).

More information on activities delivered through the York Region Business Recovery Support Partnership organized by subgroup is provided below.

## **AGRICULTURE & AGRIFOOD SUBGROUP**

### **Projects have been initiated to share best practices for issues faced by temporary foreign workers**

This subgroup is comprised of members of the York Region Agriculture & Agrifood Advisory Committee and other industry experts. The focus is on exploring the challenges and opportunities for the agriculture and agri-food industry. Based on issues faced by temporary foreign workers and opportunities to share best practices, the group initiated three key projects. The first was an [awareness building campaign](#) to highlight the importance of these workers in the community. It was shared by a number of organizations including the [Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance](#). Secondly, the group worked closely with York Region Public Health to facilitate mobile COVID-19 testing at multiple farms across the Region. The final project was a series of [agri-food specific workshops](#). See Attachment 1 for a summary of outcomes.

## **BUSINESS ADVISORY SUBGROUP**

### **The first project launched through this subgroup was the Business Impact and Recovery Survey in May**

Approximately 1,000 businesses participated in the [Business Impact and Recovery Survey](#). It provided insight into the support business leaders were seeking now and moving forward. These included information on government financial assistance programs, support with marketing visibility, networking opportunities and business advocacy. This information, combined with data from Statistics Canada, industry groups and input from the business community through the representatives at the Business Recovery and Support Partnership led to new initiatives. These initiatives include the [COVID-19 Small Business Funding Program](#) the [COVID-19 Business Recovery Webinar Series](#) and the COVID-19 Economic Impact Analysis.

## **The COVID-19 Small Business Funding Program is on target with nearly 25 per cent of the funds disbursed through the first quarter of implementation**

The COVID-19 Small Business Funding Program is intended to support small business across the Region. It leverages \$500,000 from the York Region Innovation Investment Fund and is administered through the four Small Business Enterprise Centres for seven communities in the Region and through a Community Improvement Plan (CIP) in King Township and Whitchurch-Stouffville. Through the Small Business Enterprise Centres, eligible businesses can qualify for up to \$5,000 based on criteria in the Starter Company Plus Program. The program supplements the Federal and Provincial programs and is available until December 31, 2021. Program delivery is on target with nearly 25 per cent of the funds disbursed through the first quarter of implementation.

The [COVID-19 Business Recovery Webinar Series](#) was delivered through a collaboration between the Newmarket and Vaughan Chambers of Commerce. This was a series of 12 webinars providing relevant information to help businesses cope with the pandemic and get back to business. This was delivered over four months ending in November 2020.

Outcomes from the COVID-19 Economic Impact Analysis were shared with the local municipal economic development teams to help inform decision making.

The core activities of the Economic Strategy team have contributed to the outcomes of the Business Advisory Subgroup. To directly address requests from the business community for additional information and awareness building, targeted business communication was provided. This was delivered through [YorkLink.ca](#), [Yorksmallbusiness.ca](#) as well as [Twitter](#) and [LinkedIn](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and newsletters. The platforms were used to share information on [Federal and Provincial programs](#) and blogs highlighting funding programs and business successes. Links to this information is also highlighted on York.ca. These led to over 2M impressions of business-related content. The team has provided on-line business advisory support to over 600 business engagements. See Attachment 2 for a summary of outcomes.

## **CRISIS RESPONSE SUPPLY CHAIN SUBGROUP**

### **A manufacturing Supply Chain Resiliency Study was initiated to provide insight into key manufacturing supply chains in the Region and provide preliminary best practices**

The Crisis Response Supply Chain subgroup was set up to help assess responses from local businesses interested in replying to calls from the province and federal government as well as York Region Public Health to provide personal protective equipment (PPE). Through the process more than 50 companies were evaluated to help with the supply of PPE to York Region Public Health and partners. One early success was [Last Straw Distillery](#) supplying hand sanitizers to York Region. As the initial personal protective equipment challenges were being solved, the subgroup mobilized a manufacturing Supply Chain Resiliency Study to provide insight into key manufacturing supply chains in York Region and provide preliminary (high-level)

best practices to facilitate manufacturing supply chain resilience in the event of continued COVID-19 challenges or future major economic disruptions.

This work is being conducted by Supply Chain Alliance and Supply Chain Canada and will be completed in March 2021. See Attachment 3 for a summary of outcomes.

## **TOURISM, ARTS AND CULTURE SUBGROUP**

### **Campaign involved the creation of several videos and promotional materials celebrating attractions and businesses in York Region**

This subgroup considered impacts of the pandemic on the tourism industry and explored the role of tourism, arts & culture in recovery. In collaboration with the York Region Arts Council, the work of this team led to the [Ready When You Are Campaign](#) to improve consumer confidence as the Region was opened up in Phase 2. The campaign promoted the many local businesses that were open and ready to safely engage clients. This involved the creation of several videos and promotional materials celebrating attractions and businesses in the Region. The campaign started in August 2020 and had over 1.2M impressions by October 2020. This program is being evaluated to understand how best to leverage it going forward. See Attachment 4 for a summary of outcomes.

### **Additional support was provided to the small business technology community through the Entrepreneurship and Innovation Fund**

Staff worked with ventureLAB to reposition a portion of the \$100,000 York Region Entrepreneurship and Innovation Fund (EIF) managed by ventureLAB to include a COVID-19 support stream. This resulted in a total of \$50,000 being awarded during the [Made In York Region](#) event on December 3, 2020 to three small tech companies that pivoted to provide COVID related business solutions. The companies were:

- [Eaigle](#): developing artificial intelligence solutions to protect employees during COVID-19
- [Hotspots Outdoor Heat](#): developing heated furniture to extend the patio season
- [Infield Solutions](#): developing connected “cubbies” for a curb-side pickup and delivery management system driven by a mobile app

### **Partners are exploring further opportunities to maximize support through the York Region Business Recovery Support Partnership**

Federal and Provincial funding support programs will continue to provide most of the support to businesses. York Region and the economic development stakeholders will continue to promote and explore opportunities to make these programs more effective locally.

The collaboration between economic development stakeholders is making a difference to the business community in a variety of ways, providing much needed information and funding support. York Region, in partnership with local municipalities and other economic development delivery partners, will continue to support businesses during the pandemic with a focus on

recovery. Partners will be exploring additional opportunities to maximize support at the next York Region Business Recovery Support Partnership meeting scheduled in January 2021.

York Region Economic Strategy Division will continue to monitor the economic impacts of COVID-19 while maintaining business support programs to local businesses in need.

For more information on this publication, please contact Jonathan Wheatle, Director of Economic Strategy, at 1-877-464-9675 ext. 71503. Accessible formats or communication supports are available upon request.

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Bruce Macgregor  
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Attachments (4)  
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