

## Report of the Commissioner of Corporate Services and Chief Planner **Innovation Investment Fund Application – Project JumpSTART**

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### **1. Recommendations**

1. Council approve up to \$1.08 million over three years from the Innovation Investment Fund for Project JumpSTART to increase York Region’s innovation capacity.
2. Commissioner of Corporate Services be authorized to execute the funding agreements and any future extensions or amendments that may be required.
3. Regional Clerk circulate this report to the Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade, York University, Treefrog Inc. and local municipalities.

### **2. Purpose**

This report recommends Council support the proposed Project JumpSTART initiative by leveraging the York Region Innovation Investment Fund (IIF) to support economic growth.

#### **Key Points:**

- The purpose of IIF is to drive innovation in the community and attract investment in transformational initiatives of regional, provincial or national significance
- Project JumpSTART is a joint proposal from York University and Treefrog Inc. requesting \$1,080,600 over three years from the Region to enter into the necessary agreements to expand two programs:
  - [York University’s Entrepreneurial Leadership and Learning Alliance \(ELLA\) program](#) – focused on supporting women entrepreneurs
  - [Treefrog Accelerator Program](#) – delivered jointly by Treefrog Inc. and York University, focused on attracting and supporting Ontario-based and Internationally based entrepreneurs

- Project JumpSTART builds on York University's and Treefrog's already proven and funded models for start-up acceleration and is anticipated to generate 300 jobs over a three-year period
- This initiative meets the criteria of the IIF and fits with the goal of being a catalyst of innovation and building innovation capacity in York Region's northern six municipalities

### **3. Background**

#### **York Region is an enabler and funder of innovation**

The [Economic Development Action Plan 2020-2023](#) outlines York Region's role as an enabler and funder of innovation. In [November 2019](#), Council approved the principles for the IIF with the primary purpose of driving innovation in the community. This Fund supports regionally significant projects directly related to innovation and use of new technologies. Since 2019, this fund has received quarterly contributions determined by the budget process.

Applications for the IIF are solicited through meetings with economic development stakeholders and innovation enablers across York Region. Applications can be received for consideration at any time.

Appendix A lists principles for the IIF adopted by York Region Council in 2019.

#### **A joint application to the Innovation Investment Fund was received from York University and Treefrog Inc.**

In August 2023, York Region received a joint proposal for funding from the IIF from two established innovation partners: York University and Treefrog Inc. This proposed initiative, Project JumpSTART, will combine elements of York University's women's entrepreneurship program and Treefrog Inc.'s Accelerator Program.

York University's innovation hub, [YSpace](#), offers 14 different programs designed to assist a diverse group of entrepreneurs and startups from ideation to establishing a growing company. YSpace delivers its services at two hubs located in the City of Markham and Town of Georgina. Launched in April 2021, [YSpace Georgina](#) serves entrepreneurs across York Region's northern six municipalities. The hub was developed in partnership with the Towns of Georgina and East Gwillimbury to support local business owners and entrepreneurs in launching and scaling their businesses.

[Entrepreneurial Leadership and Learning Alliance \(ELLA\)](#) is York University's women-focused business accelerator for entrepreneurs offered by YSpace. Tailored programs are delivered to support women entrepreneurs in accelerating business growth by providing access to training, mentorship, peer circles, hands-on workshops, and a community of women business founders and experts.

[Treefrog Inc.](#) is a digital transformation agency located in Newmarket providing services and expertise to assist organizations in transforming their digital landscapes. Treefrog Inc. offers two [Accelerator Programs](#) to provide startups with tools and knowledge to scale their businesses through workshop learning, personalized mentorship matching, pitch skill development, and access to investors. Delivery of Treefrog's accelerator programs is enabled through its partnership with York University, Town of Newmarket, and the Newmarket Chamber of Commerce.

Appendix B captures an overview of the Project JumpSTART proposal. This initiative will leverage IIF funding to expand two successful innovation and entrepreneurship training programs with a combined focus on supporting and attracting women tech entrepreneurs into northern York Region.

## 4. Analysis

### **York University and Treefrog Inc. have delivered tangible outcomes supporting innovation across York Region**

York University and Treefrog Inc. have already delivered notable results supporting innovation and entrepreneurship through these programs.

Since 2020, ELLA has supported 350 women entrepreneurs who have collectively generated over \$15.9 million in revenue. This program has established a record of supporting underrepresented entrepreneurs and providing support to women who have not traditionally had access to entrepreneurship support services. 66% of ELLA participants have indicated involvement in these programs is the first time they received support from an entrepreneurship and accelerator program.

In 2021, Treefrog's accelerator program (originally called Accelerate Newmarket) was launched through a partnership between York University and Treefrog Inc. To date, 300 participants and 187 start-ups have graduated from programs offered through this partnership.

Since its launch in 2021, YSpace Georgina has assisted over 300 residents based in northern York Region, with women accounting for approximately 69% of participants and 81% belonging to a visible minority. This demand for services and the mixture of participants highlights a necessity for local access points for education, mentorship and programming to meet the needs of underrepresented groups in York Region's northern six municipalities.

### **Project JumpSTART leverages financial support from several levels of government and takes advantage of existing programs**

York University and Treefrog Inc. have successfully developed and delivered multiple education, training and entrepreneurial programs. Project JumpSTART leverages support already received from, or committed by, other levels of government including:

- \$5.1 million (in disbursements of [\\$2.1 million](#) and [\\$3 million](#)) in grant funding under the Federal Government's Women Entrepreneurship Strategy Fund to establish the YSpace [Entrepreneurial Leadership and Learning Alliance \(ELLA\)](#) Accelerator and community
- \$3.6 million from the Province of Ontario's [Skills Development Fund](#) to support development of the Treefrog Accelerator
- \$300,000 from the [Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs' Rural Economic Development \(RED\) Program](#) to establish the YSpace Georgina hub
- \$475,000 in municipal support from the Towns of Newmarket, Georgina and East Gwillimbury

Project JumpSTART will also capitalize on Treefrog Inc's [Start-up Visa](#) license, which enables entrepreneurs the opportunity to immigrate to Canada to establish their businesses. To support further skill development, York University's Schulich School of Business will offer top-ranked Start-up Visa participants the opportunity to pursue specialized credentials at no cost. This initiative will leverage York University's global footprint as a source for participants, specifically its [campus in Hyderabad, India](#).

### **Project JumpSTART enables job creation by supporting tech entrepreneurs and helps to grow innovation capacity in northern York Region**

Project JumpSTART targets the needs of two specific groups: internationally based tech entrepreneurs and female tech entrepreneurs.

For internationally based tech entrepreneurs, Project JumpSTART will expand [Treefrog Inc's International Startup Visa Program](#), which enables opportunities and enhanced support for entrepreneurs looking to relocate to Canada. This initiative creates opportunities for networking, generating investment, peer support and developing essential skills for doing business in Canada.

Treefrog Inc., in partnership with York University, has facilitated three international cohorts with participants from Sri Lanka, India, United States, United Arab Emirates, Iran, China and other countries. These programs have validated the demand and importance of effective business upscaling programs for entrepreneurs looking to relocate to Canada. It is anticipated Project JumpSTART will provide support to 150 international tech entrepreneurs and generate 210 jobs over three years.

According to [Canada's Women Entrepreneurship Strategy](#), only 17% of Canadian small to medium-sized businesses are owned by women, despite accounting for just over half of the population. For female-identifying tech entrepreneurs, addressing this gap is particularly important as there are systemic barriers in fundraising and other resources that enable the development of future business leaders.

Through this proposed initiative, YSpace will introduce a new membership program designed to better support women tech entrepreneurs. While this specialized support for women

entrepreneurs will have a primary focus on northern York Region it will be accessible to female entrepreneurs from across the Region.

This initiative will enhance capacity for innovation, business development and growth, and local job creation among entrepreneurs who have traditionally faced barriers to success. Participants will be equipped with the tools needed to start and expand businesses. It is projected Project JumpSTART will provide specialized support to 60 female-identifying tech entrepreneurs and generate 90 jobs over three years.

In summary, it is anticipated Project JumpSTART will generate 300 jobs over a three-year period. Of this, 210 jobs will be generated through the support of international tech entrepreneurs and 90 will be developed via the program stream that supports female-identifying tech entrepreneurs.

### **Project JumpSTART aligns with Vision, Strategic Plan 2023-2027, and the Economic Development Action Plan 2020-2023**

[Vision: Strong, Caring, Safe Communities](#) states Economic Vitality is an area of focus for the well-being of our communities. Similarly, [Strategic Plan 2023-2027](#) indicates fostering Economic Prosperity is a key priority and lists the following as a key objective: Attract and retain businesses, grow employment opportunities and attract a skilled workforce.

[Economic Development Action Plan 2020-2023](#) is founded on the pillars of Business, Innovation and Talent. Under the Innovation pillar, business incubators and accelerators are identified as playing an important role in supporting innovative businesses in the Region. Foreign investment attraction is also included as a key action under the Business pillar.

Project JumpSTART aligns with the goals of these strategic plans. It also conforms to the principles of the IIF, which was developed in recognition of the need to invest in innovation-supportive infrastructure and initiatives to support, grow and transform the York Region economy.

## **5. Financial Considerations**

In [February 2019](#), Council approved an annual IIF contribution to support transformational projects of Regional significance. Principles of the fund were established and presented in the EDAP 2020-2023 in [November 2019](#). To date, there have been two commitments from the IIF: [\\$500,000](#) in 2020 for small business COVID-19 relief and up to [\\$1.5 million](#) in 2022 to support expansion of ventureLAB's [Hardware Catalyst Initiative](#).

At the end of 2023, after accounting for planned future draws to meet existing commitments, there will be approximately \$2.1 million available in the IIF, with another \$1.8 million to be added to the fund reserve through 2026. If approved by Council, this request would draw approximately \$1.1 million over three years from 2024 through 2026. Funds available in reserve are sufficient to support this proposal.

## 6. Local Impact

Public and private sector service delivery to support tech entrepreneurs and economic development activities have a transformative impact on York Region's economy. With program offices in Newmarket and Georgina, Project JumpSTART will offer an opportunity to increase innovation capacity and support entrepreneurship across York Region's northern six municipalities, while enabling creation of 300 new jobs across York Region.

## 7. Conclusion

Project JumpSTART will contribute to York Region's reputation as a community that recognizes contributions to economic and social prosperity by new Canadians and women entrepreneurs. This proposal aligns with principles of the IIF and staff recommends Council authorize leveraging the fund to support Project JumpSTART. Staff also recommends the Commissioner of Corporate Services be authorized to execute the funding agreements and any future extensions or amendments that may be required.

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

Recommended by:



**Paul Freeman, MCIP, RPP**  
Chief Planner



**Dino Basso**  
Commissioner of Corporate Services



Approved for Submission: **Erin Mahoney**  
Chief Administrative Officer

December 7, 2023  
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Appendix A – Innovation Investment Fund Principles  
Appendix B – Project JumpSTART Proposal overview

**York Region Innovation Investment Fund Principles**

**Purpose:**

To drive innovation in the community and to attract investment in major transformational projects of regional, provincial or national significance.

**Eligible Projects:**

- new post-secondary training and research facilities
- new research institutes
- new centres of excellence
- infrastructure projects directly related to development and utilization of new technologies
- other projects as deemed appropriate by Council

**Eligible Proponents/Partnerships:**

Eligible Proponents/partners include:

- local municipalities in York Region
- universities, colleges, school boards, and hospitals
- research institutes and centres of excellence
- private and non-profit corporations in partnership with any of the above eligible proponents

The Regional Municipality of York may be a lead proponent and seek partners from the above list of eligible partners to advance projects.

Proposals must include at least one partner that is not a private corporation. Proposals with multiple eligible partners are encouraged.

**Evaluation Criteria:**

Projects will be evaluated using the following criteria:

- Regional impacts, including:
  - economic (e.g. amount invested, businesses supported, jobs created)
  - community/social (e.g. supporting local learning and employment, improving quality-of-life in the community and environment)
  - geographic distribution of these impacts
- Support for and involvement of the following key economic clusters in the Region:
  - information and communications technology
  - healthcare and life sciences
  - finance and business services
  - environmental technology
  - agriculture and agri-food
- Partnership development within the Region (e.g. engaging existing Regional partners and attracting new public and/or private investors)
- Significant leveraging of proponent/partner/investment at least matching or commensurate with the Regional investment.
- Preference will be given to larger investments and those that leverage a larger share of investment from parties other than the Region.

**Application Process:**

All funding applications will be subject to the following four-step application process:

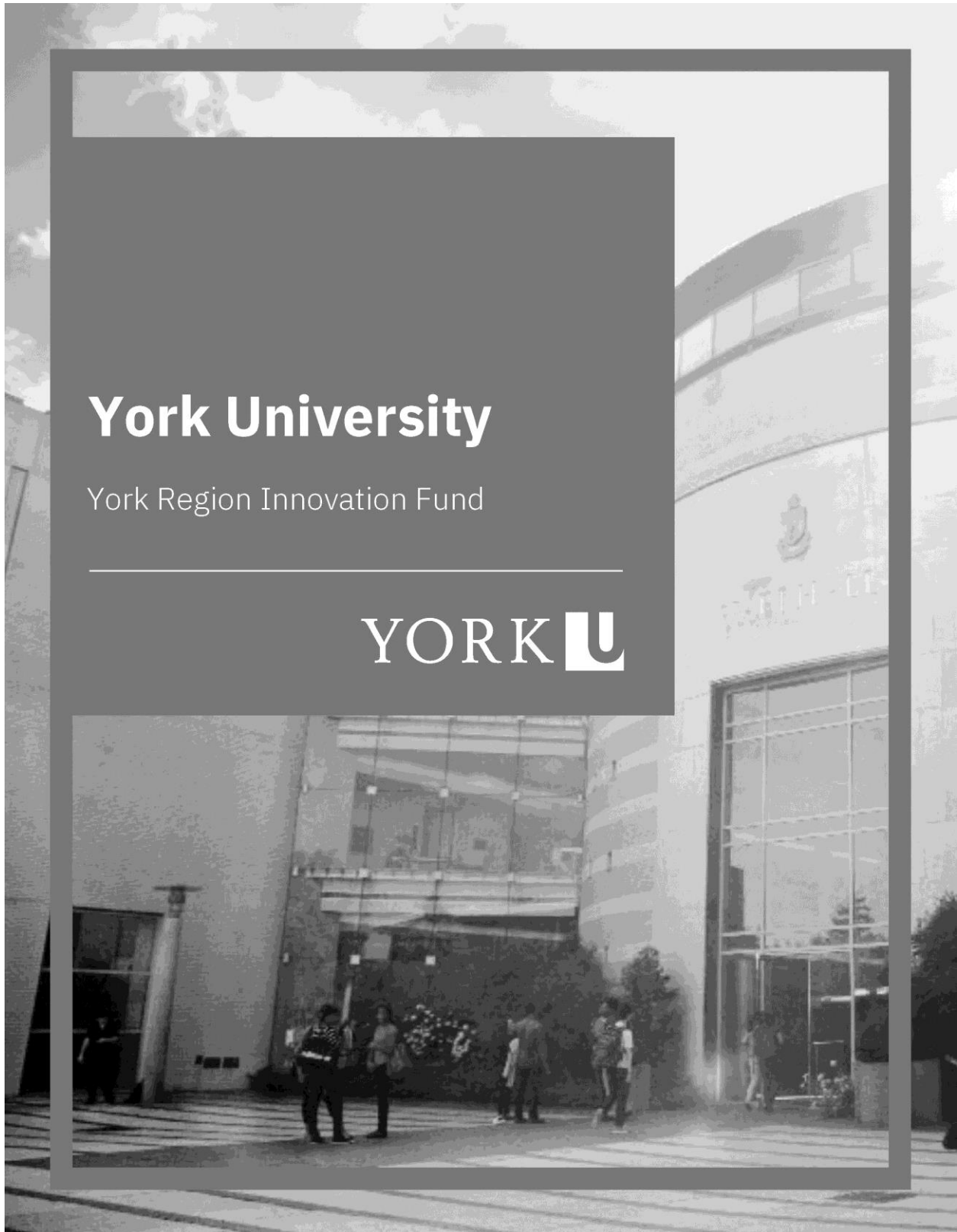
1. Pre-consultation with York Region staff
2. Letter of Intent detailing project, partners and intended outcomes
3. Funding Application – to be reviewed by a panel of York Region staff and external experts
4. Regional Council review of funding applications recommended by the Application Review Panel. Council at its discretion can allocate all, some or none of the requested funding

**NOTE:** The Manager of Strategic Economic Initiatives is the primary contact for all applications



# York University

York Region Innovation Fund



## Executive Summary

York University's Schulich School of Business, in collaboration with YSpace, Treefrog Accelerator, and the Town of Georgina, present Project JumpSTART, an 'international entrepreneurs accelerator' with specialized support for women tech founders, attracting Foreign Direct Investment and supporting women entrepreneurship.

**Program Statement:** In the Canadian innovation ecosystem, many resources and opportunities are not designed with international or women entrepreneurs in mind. Most grants and resources are not available to international entrepreneurs due to the eligibility criteria and women make up only 16% of Canadian businesses although it is 50% of the population. With York Region being home to one of the fastest growing municipalities in East Gwillimbury, there is an opportunity to position York Region as the place to build and grow your business as an international or women entrepreneurs.

**Project JumpSTART:** JumpSTART aims to be a leading accelerator program for international and women entrepreneurs situated in the northern six with physical hubs in Newmarket and Georgina. The project uniquely combines Foreign Direct Investment attraction and supporting women in technology to drive economic development opportunities for York Region while positioning it as a leader in supporting international and women entrepreneurs. Below are breakdowns of the program components.

- **Soft-Landing Support:** A program supporting 150 international tech entrepreneurs, fostering network-building, investment opportunities, and essential business skills for Canadian operations.
- **Addressing Gender Gap** A virtual membership program aiding 60 women, featuring content, mentorship, peer-to-peer support, and access to physical hubs.
- **Program Components:** Six-month support offering education, co-working space, mentorship, and access to resources for settlement in York Region.
- **Success Metrics:** Partners have already supported 66 international startups and 300+ women entrepreneurs. Aims to create 300 new jobs over three years.

**Budget Requested (Part A & B):** \$1,080,600 for 2024-2026.

### Next Steps:

When selected, all partners are ready to mobilize on the project as Treefrog and ELLA are actively recruiting for its respective projects. The physical hubs in Newmarket and Georgina are already set up for co-working with educational programming. This funding will create a hyper local focus on York Region and the collective parties will gather to discuss how to better engage the local community as well as position York Region as an ideal destination for their business by working closely with the economic development offices throughout the region.



## **Project JumpSTART**

Application Lead: York University  
(Schulich School of Business & YSpace)  
Partners: Treefrog and Town of Georgina  
Date: August 29<sup>th</sup>, 2023

### **Overview: About Our Proposal**

York University's Schulich School of Business and YSpace, in partnership with the Treefrog Accelerator and the Town of Georgina, are pleased to submit our joint application (Project JumpSTART) to the York Region Innovation Fund.

Together, we believe we have something powerful to offer - an opportunity to expand our group's unique (and now proven) model for startup acceleration in new and exciting ways that will vastly benefit York Region in the years and decades to follow.

JumpSTART will give York Region its very own 'International Entrepreneurs Accelerator' (including a dedicated cohort designed specifically for International Female Tech Founders) and is built to attract new Foreign Direct Investment. Although the Treefrog Accelerator and YSpace serve all of York Region, their proximity to the northern six municipalities offer an unique advantage to promote the advantages and economic development of the northern six to our participants.

The Treefrog headoffice is located in Newmarket and YSpace Georgina services both the Town of Georgina as well as the Town of East Gwillimbury. These two physical hubs act as a resource centre and connectivity point for entrepreneurs in the northern six to connect through various workshops and networking events. The physical hubs will be central to creating a connected network throughout York Region by anchoring the most northern and the most southern part of the northern six.

JumpSTART will also add to the growing wave of entrepreneurship across the Northern Six; by establishing program offices in both Georgina and Newmarket (providing additional support to local Female Founders as part of our partnership with ELLA and Treefrog).

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The program model is one our group has been perfecting over the past two years, in teaming up to create 'Accelerate Newmarket' (combining the power of York Region's top private innovation accelerator with the academic depth and global brand recognition of York/Schulich and supporting over 300 business founders).

There has been significant investment in this partnership through the Skills Development Fund (SDF) Round one and two. With a well-established and demonstrated foundation, we have garnered rave reviews from participants. This model combines the strengths of the public-private relationship, bringing together deep foundational learning with experiential real-world pathways.

It's a fantastic opportunity to bring both national and global attention to York Region in both of these crucial areas of economic growth and also:

- Leverages the success/brand of York University's YSpace & Entrepreneurial Leadership & Learning Alliance (ELLA) Programs. ELLA has secured over \$5.1 million in funding from the Women Entrepreneurship Strategy Fund to create wrap around support for women-led businesses.
- Lines-up 100% with your Innovation/Tech Focus.
- Capitalizes on the Treefrog Accelerator being awarded its Startup Visa Licence as of June 2022.
- Leverages existing Provincial/Federal funding support (per your program requirements) secured by our consortium partnership.
- Benefits from Schulich's global footprint and deep ties into India's startup/innovation ecosystem (including its campus in India).

*Of important note:* there is no other program in the wider ecosystem with a combined focus on Foreign Direct Investment Attraction and Women in Technology; making this program /announcement yet another clear differentiator in York Region's growing reputation as an innovation leader and a community that recognizes the crucial contributions of both New Canadians and Women to our economic and social prosperity.