

CIT

Future Ready (FR) Program

Program Guidelines

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Program Information and Eligibility Requirements

Program Overview and Benefits

The Future Ready (FR) program provides support for Ontario-based SMEs working in CIT’s four key sectors (Advanced Manufacturing, Construction, Agri-food and Mining) to upskill/reskill current employees on Critical Technologies (5G and advanced networks, AI, Blockchain, Cybersecurity, Quantum, and Robotics) to support the company’s adoption of Critical Technologies and commercialization of new products and services. Under this program eligible SMEs receive support to hire an external third-party consultant to train their employees in the adoption and implementation of these Critical Technologies.

The CIT-FT program contributes up to a maximum of \$10,000 in reimbursement funds. SME’s must provide at least a 1:1 funding match.

The Future Ready Program is part of the Critical Industrial Technologies Initiative (CIT) delivered by OCI (Ontario Centre of Innovation) on behalf of the Ontario Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade.

Benefits to Companies	Benefits to Employees
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the knowledge and expertise of your staff to enhance the competitiveness of your products and services. • Optimize or accelerate adoption of new Critical Technologies to support company growth. • Create solutions to current industry challenges, leading to increased productivity, cost savings, revenue, and job creation. • Develop and retain top talent in Ontario 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gain valuable, new skills and experience. • Use knowledge and innovative ideas to help solve company challenges. • Establish relationships with industry and within OCI’s networks

How Funding Works

OCI Contribution	Reimbursement of 50% of total eligible project costs, up to a maximum of \$10,000.
Matching Requirement	50 per cent (minimum) of total eligible project costs (i.e., minimum 1:1 match to CIT contribution)
Example	Total Eligible Project Costs: \$20,000 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximum OCI Contribution: \$10,000 • Minimum private sector contribution: \$10,000
Funding Recipient	SME Applicant Company

Eligibility Requirements

Applicant

- A small- and medium- sized enterprise (SME) with fewer than 500 global full-time employees.
- Must have registered operations (R&D, manufacturing, product management, etc.) in Ontario and a valid CRA business number.
- Applicants who have received over \$500,000 of funding from OCI administered programs in their lifetime (excluding TalentEdge) are required to obtain OCI approval before a new application for funding is initiated. Your Business Development Manager can guide you through the process.
- Companies must demonstrate a genuine need for training in one or more of the following critical technologies: 5G, AI, Robotics, Quantum Computing, Cybersecurity, and Blockchain. Companies must outline a clear plan for how the training will benefit their employees and contribute to the overall growth and development of the organization.
- Have the capability to implement and internally sustain new Critical Technologies.
- Have a change management culture and structure that values growth and innovation, willingness to review/adopt new technologies to support scaling.
- Has the intent and potential to apply, exploit and/or commercialize the results of the project for the economic benefit of Ontario.
- Has the necessary expertise and resources to put the project into effect within an appropriate time frame.
- In good financial and reporting standing with OCI.
- Adoption of critical technologies is part of their long-term product roadmap.

Project

- Defined project with clear activities, milestones, and outcomes, to be executed within the duration of the project.
- Demonstrated genuine need for training in one or more of the following critical technologies: 5G, AI, Robotics, Quantum Computing, Cybersecurity, and Blockchain.
- Companies must outline a clear plan for how the training will benefit their employees and contribute to the overall growth and development of the organization. Have the capability to implement and internally sustain new Critical Technologies.
- The parties are bound by the IP terms of the company for the duration of the training. Participants MUST enter into an agreement with OCI and cooperate in providing project outcomes and metrics, annually at a minimum.
- Project activities are carried out in Ontario.
- Minimum 1:1 contribution match by Applicants and/or industry Partners.

How to Apply

Program Status: [Open for applications \(accepted on a rolling basis\)](#)

Application Process

1. Applications MUST be initiated in AccessOCI by a [OCI Business Development Manager \(BDM\) or CIT Sector Manager \(SM\)](#).

Companies that wish to be connected with an OCI Business Development Manager or Sector Manager should submit an [OCI Company Intake Form](#).

Please note completion of this form does not constitute an application for funding. A BDM/SM will contact you within two business days to discuss the opportunity. If you are already working with a BDM/SM, please indicate this in the form.

2. Once the BDM/SM confirms that the opportunity is suitable for the program, the Applicant will receive login information to OCI's online application system, AccessOCI, to begin completing the application.
3. Complete the online application form and upload the required supporting documents.
 - Company Profile submitted by the applicant company/industry partner, including valid nine-digit CRA business number, incorporation date and number of employees (globally and in Ontario).
 - Letter of support from consultant providing the training.
4. All submitted applications will undergo an initial internal review for eligibility, completeness, and financial compliance. A list of any deficiencies will be sent to the applicant for revision.

5. When the application is endorsed as eligible and complete by OCI's internal team, the application will be sent for review to the external committee comprising of subject matter experts as well as the CIT Review Committee.
6. Applicants will be notified by OCI and provided an outline of conditions and additional information necessary to activate the project. Applicants who are not selected will be notified by OCI. Feedback on the decision can be provided by their BD.

Reference Documents

- Eligible Expenditures Guide
- OCI Funding Agreement
- Proposal Questions - (Note: this sample application template is for informational purposes only. Applications are only accepted through OCI's online system where full application requirements are listed).

Assessment Process and Criteria

The CIT-FR program is a discretionary, non-entitlement program with limited funding. OCI will fund qualified projects with the potential for the greatest economic benefits and contribution relative to the set FR program objectives. Not all eligible applications can be funded.

All eligible projects are assessed on their merit and undergo a review process against program objectives and assessment criteria.

Applications are internally reviewed for eligibility, completeness, and financial compliance, prior to evaluation by independent external reviewers with domain and sector expertise. All reviewers are bound by Non-Disclosure Agreements (NDAs). The final funding decision is made by OCI.

Evaluation Criteria

Applications will be evaluated against assessment criteria including but not limited to:

- Clarity of the need for training in Critical Technologies and how adoption of such technologies will contribute to their long-term growth.
- Significance of the opportunity, expected growth potential and economic benefit to the SME and Ontario (e.g., job creation/retention, new revenues, new customers, follow on investment and productivity increases)
- Capacity for and prioritization of investing in adoption of Critical Technologies, including the SMEs readiness of their workforce to undergo training, available resources and infrastructure, and commitment of leadership to invest resources
- Evidence of next steps, and clear strategy and capacity to bring the results and/or implement the plan.

- Expertise and experience of the team members along with clarity of roles and responsibilities
- Clarity, feasibility and appropriateness of the project plan and budget
- Overall quality and completeness of the application

Project Activation, Funds and Reporting

Project Activation

The Applicant must execute the OCI Funding Agreement, within 30 days of the announcement of award.

The executable agreement with schedules specific to the approved proposal will be generated through our online management system and sent to all contracting parties.

Flow of Funds

- OCI funds flow only to the Applicant.
- Funding will be released directly to the SME following a reimbursement model, the SME will be responsible for payment of the consultant.
- Reimbursements are triggered by the submission and approval of claims and reports, which includes submission of invoice/documentation from the consultant undertaking the training.
- Reimbursement claims from the Applicant to OCI are made when submitting interim and final reports and paid following approval.

Use of Funds

OCI funds can only be used for eligible expenses per the [eligible project expenditures document](#).

Project Reporting

Reporting instructions and templates will be sent to successful parties at the time of reporting. Reports must be received and approved by OCI prior to release of funds for eligible claims.

Please note that to receive funding from OCI, the applicant MUST complete all required reports as a contractual obligation.

Note: Applicants MUST retain all proof of purchase, receipts, and other relevant documentation relating to eligible expenses. These should be included in the Final Report.

The following project reports will be required.

Final Reports

A final report, including a progress report, proof of expenditures, financial attestation, and a request for reimbursement, will be required at the end of the project. Forty-five (45) days prior to the scheduled completion date, the applicant will receive an email notification of the project end date from the AccessOCI system, with a link to the Final Progress and Claim Report should the applicant wish to begin

entering data.

- Applicants are required to report on project milestones, success stories, financials, productivity, commercialization, and economic outputs.
- If a project extension is required, the applicant MUST request it using the Project Administration tab in their AccessOCI project file. Extension requests must be made before the project end date and be approved by OCI.
- On the scheduled project completion date, the applicant will receive another notification and a link to complete the Final Project Progress and Claim Report from OCI's AccessOCI system.
- All required final reports from the applicant must be submitted within 30 days of project completion in order to be reimbursed for eligible expenses and maintain good financial standing with OCI.
- If early reporting is required, the applicant MAY request it by emailing OCI.

Retrospective Survey

At one, two and three years after project completion, the company will be sent a link to complete a retrospective survey to collect data on commercial outcomes from the project. This information is required by OCI for assessment of program impact and continuous improvement.

Project Changes

If required, Applicants MUST request project extensions, milestone variances, intern changes and/or variances to the project scope of work using the Project Change Request form in the Project Administration tab in their AccessOCI project file. Such requests must be made at the earliest possible opportunity and approved before any planned changes are implemented. Failure to do so can result in a loss of funding.

Contacts

For further questions regarding program guidelines, eligibility, and submitting the online application, please contact your [OCI Business Development Manager or CIT Sector Manager](#).

For other inquiries, please contact:

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