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SYSTEM INNOVATIONS STREAM

The System Innovations Stream supports collaboratives that are strengthening the quality and responsiveness of systems, so they work better for youth facing systemic barriers. In this stream, collaboratives will deepen their understanding of how specific systems work and will implement strategies that lead to system-wide changes that go beyond any single organization or isolated program.

Priority Outcomes and Populations

What are the changes YOF is investing in?

The System Innovations Stream invests in the work of collaboratives who are designing and/or implementing systems change strategies to address the most pressing issues facing young people today.

Check out the six Priority Outcomes that drive YOF System Innovations projects across Ontario.

- Creating safe spaces for Indigenous and/or Black youth to build strong community and cultural connections
- Addressing racism and its impacts on youth in urban, rural and/or Northern communities
- Supporting Indigenous, Black, and/or newcomer youth to enter the labour market and transition to sustainable career pathways
- Supporting youth who are not connected to education programs, employment programs, and training programs (i.e. NEET) to exit poverty and social assistance
- Empowering girls and young women to lead, including women's economic empowerment initiatives
- Providing mentorship opportunities for youth in and leaving care and/or youth involved in the justice system

TAKE NOTE! All projects funded through the System Innovations Stream must align with one of the six Priority Outcomes. The chosen outcome must be advanced through the systems change work that the collaborative is leading.

Who's leading the change?

The System Innovations Stream invests in systems change work that is led by collaboratives. YOF believes that grassroots leadership is critical to ensuring that the redesign of systems will result in sustainable benefits for those most impacted by the system in focus. Changing a system to better serve youth facing barriers requires the strategic and active participation from many stakeholders, including young people with lived experience. Additional information on collaboratives can be found in the "Who can Apply" section.

Who benefits?

The system change work, led by collaboratives will ultimately benefit youth, aged 12 to 25 years, who face barriers to full participation in community life. While each Priority Outcome specifies a primary beneficiary population, YOF recognizes the broad diversity that exists within each of these communities. YOF

understands that a person's identity has many dimensions. As different parts of one's identity come together in everyday life, oppressions can intersect, and barriers can grow.

Recognizing that many youth are underserved or not served by existing systems and services, the System Innovations Stream is an opportunity to redesign these systems, so they work better for those living on the margins, including:

- Indigenous youth (i.e., First Nations, Métis and/or Inuit)
- Black youth
- Racialized youth
- Newcomer youth
- Francophone youth
- Two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (2SLGBTQ+) youth
- Youth living with disabilities or special needs between the ages of 12 to 29
- Youth living in rural, remote and/or Northern communities
- Youth in conflict or at risk of being in conflict with the law
- Youth in care or leaving care
- Youth in low-income situations or from low-income families
- Youth who are homeless or at risk of being homeless
- Youth at-risk of dropping out or have dropped out

Here are some examples of systems change strategies that align with a Priority Outcome for a YOF priority population.

- A collaborative has chosen the outcome that focuses on mentorship opportunities for youth leaving care. Their systems change work is focused on designing and testing a mentorship model that is culturally anchored and responsive to the interests and needs of Black youth transitioning from care. After testing and refining the model, the collaborative will design a strategy to rollout and embed it in at least 10 partner organizations across the GTA. The collaborative's goal is also to build a GTA wide network of Black mentors for Black youth transitioning from care.

- A collaborative has chosen the outcome that focuses on creating safe spaces for community and cultural connections. Their systems change work is focused on building a holistic and culturally relevant community-based support network for Indigenous youth from remote First Nations attending high school in Thunder Bay.

About the System Innovations Stream

Grant Amount: Up to \$250,000 per year

Grant Term: 2 to 6 years

Collaboratives can use the System Innovations grant for both groundwork and implementation work.

A maximum of two years can be spent on groundwork activities that allow the collaborative to prepare for systems change work. Groundwork activities can include, but are not limited to:

- Solidifying collaborative partners and meaningful inclusion of youth leaders
- Building a governance model
- Mapping the system with Youth Opportunities Fund (YOF) priority populations
- Designing a theory of change
- Building a strategic framework and plan for doing systems change work

Implementation involves putting research, theories of change, and plans into action with collaborative members and other key stakeholders.

TAKE NOTE! YOF System Innovations Stream funds systems change work led by collaboratives and does not fund new projects, the expansion of existing projects, or program/service delivery or capital projects (including renovations, repairs and/or new buildings). For these types of initiatives, see the Ontario Trillium Foundation [**Investment Strategy \(/node/140\)**](#).

More about groundwork and implementation work

Systems change takes time, trust and a deep understanding of how a system functions in serving youth. We know that collaboratives may be in different stages of readiness to implement strategies for system change.

Some collaboratives may be starting with groundwork, while others may be ready to implement strategies for change. Collaboratives can apply to do groundwork only, or both groundwork and implementation within the same grant.

Laying the groundwork looks like...

- Forming or solidifying partnerships and inclusion of key stakeholders
- Planning for systems change and ensuring the essential information, knowledge, and actors are identified and gathered in order to inform an effective and sustainable system change strategy
- Undertaking groundwork activities

The following are examples of groundwork activities for a System Innovations project focused on addressing the impacts of racism experienced by urban Indigenous youth accessing the mental health system:

- Deepen understanding of how the mental health system is structured, accessed and experienced by urban Indigenous youth through system or journey maps.
- Strengthen the collaborative so it is equipped to do this work. Ensure those most affected by the system are leading the way. Ensure Indigenous organizations, grassroots groups and youth are leading the work of reimagining what mental health supports look like and how they are delivered.

- Craft a theory of change for system improvement and strengthening using culturally anchored programming and practices.
- Build a strategy framework that identifies purpose, values, goals, objectives, and tactics for strengthening the mental health system for urban Indigenous youth.
- Draft an action plan.

Implementing systems change looks like...

- An engaged group of partners that have experience working together towards a shared vision
- Putting into action the collaborative's governance model, theory of change, strategic framework, and action plan
- Implementing strategies for systems change

The following are examples of what implementation work can look like in a project focused on improving a system of supports (e.g. housing, employment, education, etc.) for Black youth leaving care:

- Draft and implement a set of shared policies and procedures to ensure Black youth leaving care can find and access a consistent and caring adult who will help them to navigate and access housing, employment and education supports across a number of agencies
- Create conditions within partner organizations for changes in policy and practice for young people leaving care (e.g. hiring frontline service providers who share identities with the youth being served)
- Establish an advisory group composed of Black youth with experience in the child welfare system to guide policy implementation and provide regular feedback on service improvements
- Design and implement a shared intake process that would be employed by all partners working in the various support systems in order to

improve system coordination and service navigation for youth leaving care

- Ensure all parts of the system are working in a coordinated manner by strategically testing new ideas and assessing effectiveness
- Regularly convene service providers to strengthen their equity practice and culturally anchored programming through on-going training and development of an equity audit

TAKE NOTE! The System Innovations Stream funds collaboratives engaging in systems change work and is not intended to fund new or existing programs or service delivery. YOF recognizes the importance of rapid prototyping and demonstration projects to test a range of solutions, to learn through practice, and to refine the strategy in real time. Expenses related to rapid prototyping or demonstration projects are eligible, however, they should be time limited and serve to strengthen the overall system.

Who can apply to the System Innovations Stream?

Changing a system to better serve youth facing systemic barriers requires the strategic and active participation from many stakeholders, including young people with lived experience. The System Innovations Stream invests in systems change work that is led by collaboratives.

Collaboratives eligible to apply to the System Innovations Stream:

- Reflect the communities and populations served (required)
- Are newly formed or have been working together for some time
- Include partners from diverse sectors and backgrounds
- Have the capacity to lead culturally responsive youth-centred systems change
- Have defined roles, responsibilities, and accountabilities

Collaboratives should include partners from diverse sectors and backgrounds including, but not limited to:

- Youth leaders and change-makers
- Indigenous-led and Black-led organizations and groups
- Organizations led by and serving specific communities
- Grassroots groups, including youth-led groups
- System partners (education, child welfare, justice etc.)
- Band councils
- Community councils/networks
- Municipalities
- Universities and colleges

We prioritize investments in system change projects led by **Indigenous collaboratives and Black collaboratives** (</yof/system-innovations-stream-definitions>).

Who can act as the collaborative lead?

Each collaborative will select one organization to be the lead. The lead organization accepts responsibility for the funded project and plays a key role in bringing key stakeholders to the collaborative table.

The lead must bring community connections, a strong reputation, and the respect of community stakeholders as prerequisites to implementing system changes that are strategic, community focused, and culturally anchored. We invite Indigenous and Black organizations that meet Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF) eligibility criteria to assume the role of lead in the collaboratives that are working to improve systems for Indigenous and Black youth in Ontario.

An eligible lead organization can be:

- A charitable organization or foundation registered as a charity with the Canada Revenue Agency
- An organization incorporated as a non-profit corporation without share capital in a Canadian jurisdiction
- A First Nation
- A Métis, Inuit or other Indigenous community

Lead organizations must be **eligible to receive funds directly from OTF (pdf)** and must be based in Ontario.

How to apply to the System Innovations Stream

1. Book a required pre-application coaching call

- Sign up for a **webinar (<https://otf.ca/node/6164>)** and learn more
- Book **online (<https://outlook.office365.com/owa/calendar/OTFYouthOpportunit>)** or contact the YOF team at 1 800 263-2887 or **yof@otf.ca (mailto:yof@otf.ca)**
- Once you have completed this step, the YOF Team will reach out to guide you

2. Lead organization registers to OTF by September 16, 2022

- Lead **registers (<https://services1.otf.ca/files/450884/f105537/Begin>)** organization if they are new to the Foundation
- If the lead is already registered with OTF, reach out to **yof@otf.ca (mailto:yof@otf.ca)** to see if you need to update any information in your organizational profile
- YOF team will verify the organization's eligibility to apply for a grant
- The lead will not have access to the online System Innovations Grant Application as eligible to apply to OTF and after they have participated in a pre-application **Application Tool (pdf)** to prepare your responses.

3. Complete the online Grant Application by 5 p.m. ET on October 15, 2020

- Complete and submit your grant application. All applicants will receive notification by email on **April 2021**.

Learn more about the Youth Opportunities Fund's [other funding streams \(/yof\)](#), or visit the [YOF Resources \(/node/69\)](#) page for more information.