

#LETSGETDIGITAL: PREPARING YOUTH FOR THE INNOVATION ECONOMY

*New pilot will build a community-based model for delivering digital skills training to youth
across Ontario*

TORONTO, April 9, 2018 – The Brookfield Institute for Innovation + Entrepreneurship (BII+E) unveiled a new digital literacy and coding pilot program designed to prepare youth for the digital economy. This new pilot program builds upon existing community infrastructure, such as libraries and community organizations, to develop a model that has the potential to scale across Canada.

The pilot is being jointly funded by the Ontario government, which is matching a \$1-million donation from Janice Fukakusa, Greg Belbeck and family.

“We are thrilled to be able to lift our research off the pages and test a model with our community partners, only made possible through the generous donation of Janice Fukakusa, Greg Belbeck and family, and the matching funds from the Ontario government,” said Sean Mullin, Executive Director, BII+E. “We see this as an opportunity to help build an innovation economy that works for everyone.”

The pilot is giving participants, aged 12 - 15, access to digital skills training to join a rapidly changing labour market and successfully participate in an increasingly digital economy. Additionally, it is reaching youth who are from backgrounds traditionally underrepresented in the STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) fields.

“I hope to get more computer skills and learn to work with code,” said YMCA Academy student Evan Laird.

“Investing in digital skills training for young people—women and visible minorities, in particular—not only gives them the exposure and experience they might not otherwise get, but it also improves their chances at success in their future endeavours and strengthens our shifting economy,” said Janice Fukakusa.

The two-year project was designed by a diverse range of experts in digital literacy programming, youth engagement, community development and education policy. The program will be evaluated regularly in order to generate key insights and recommendations for policy makers in education and digital skills training.

“There’s nothing like watching a kid pick up a new piece of tech and just get it. That’s why our government is partnering on a project that takes an important step toward a digitally inclusive province—one that will nurture curiosity, build a love of learning for young people and help prepare them for new job opportunities,” added Eleanor McMahon, Minister Responsible for Digital Government.

The pilot will take place across six sites in five cities: Toronto Public Library Centennial Branch, YMCA Academy at Toronto Central YMCA, the Boys and Girls Club of London, the Boys and Girls Club of Hamilton, the Belleville Public Library, and Sudbury YMCA.

“The digital literacy + coding pilot will go a long way in helping young people develop the skills they’ll need to succeed in the workforce for years to come,” said Mitzie Hunter, Minister of Advanced Education and Skills Development. “Our government understands that today’s in-demand skills are shifting—it’s why we made a commitment to increase Ontario’s STEM graduates by 25 per cent over the next five years. By supporting this program, we’re making sure Ontario’s workforce stays competitive and adaptable in the new digital economy.”

BII+E is partnering with Actua, Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada, the Information and Communications Technology Council, Canada Learning Code, RBC Capital Markets, Shopify, Toronto Public Library, YMCA, and United Way Greater Toronto.

“Digital skills have quickly become a new literacy. It is critical that we invest in engaging underrepresented youth in ensuring they have opportunities to build these skills for their future success and employability. Actua is a proud partner in the Digital Literacy + Coding Pilot,” says Jennifer Flanagan, CEO of Actua.

“Toronto Public Library is proud to partner with the Brookfield Institute to host their pilot program at one of our Youth Hub locations,” said Pam Ryan, Director, Service Development and Innovation, Toronto Public Library “Enabling digital inclusion for Toronto youth and providing them with opportunities to build digital literacy skills is a priority for the library and this wonderful collaboration with Brookfield enables the library to do more.”

Key facts from our research:

- + Young people, aged 15 - 24, made up nearly 20 per cent of jobs at a high risk of automation in 2011.
- + Youth are facing higher skill and experience requirements as more entry-level positions are being impacted by automation.
- + Digital literacy and coding is one of the ways to prepare young people for the changing nature of work.
- + Canada is the fifth most represented country for developer talent globally, with Canadians accounting for 4.4 per cent of web developers.
- + Canada’s developer industry still lacks diversity; the vast majority (83 per cent) of Canadian developers are white, and less than 10 per cent are female.

The Brookfield Institute for Innovation + Entrepreneurship (BII+E) is a new, independent and nonpartisan institute, housed within Ryerson University, that is dedicated to making Canada the best country in the world to be an innovator or an entrepreneur. BII+E supports this mission in three ways: insightful research and analysis; testing, piloting and prototyping projects; enlivened by policy innovation. For more information, visit brookfieldinstitute.ca.

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MEDIA CONTACT:

Coralie D'Souza

Director of Communications, Events + Community Relations

Brookfield Institute for Innovation + Entrepreneurship | Ryerson University

coralie.dsouza@ryerson.ca | Office: 647-390-3178