# Online Initiative

**Request for Proposals: Online Course and Module Development Projects Shared Online Course Fund 2015-16**

**2015-16 Shared Online Course Fund – University Proposal Guidelines**

The Council of Ontario Universities (COU) is administering the 2015-16 call for proposals and distribution of funding provided by the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) as part of its Ontario Online initiative. The Ministry’s goals in this initiative include: leveraging existing online strengths in the sector and developing new opportunities for collaboration; improving institutional productivity and the efficient use of resources; providing high-quality online learning opportunities for students; and enhancing student access and mobility. In pursuing these goals, the Ministry seeks to enhance the national and international profile of Ontario as a leader in online education.

# Background

The Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities has provided $4.75M in 2015-16 for Ontario universities through the Shared Online Course Fund, including a minimum of

$250,000 in funding for French-language projects.

Resources available through the Shared Online Course Fund are directed at online course development or redesign, and the development of reusable content (modules).

The description below outlines the process and criteria for selecting online course development/redesign or module projects to grow and enhance high-quality online learning opportunities for students.

# These criteria have been approved by the Ontario University Online Steering Committee (which has been established by the Ontario Council of Academic Vice- Presidents), to apply the Ministry’s guidelines more specifically and clearly to the university sector.

These guidelines were also developed in consultation with eCampus Ontario (the new Ontario Online Learning Consortium).

# Description of Goals and Process

As described in the MTCU Shared Online Course Fund Guidelines, a Ministry objective is to support the development of high-quality online courses and learning modules that are broadly available for sharing across multiple institutions. A total of $4.75M has been provided in the university sector to support these projects (one-time funding).

For the 2015-16 round of course funding, the development of collaborations among and within Ontario universities (and/or across the sector) is encouraged. The Ministry’s objective is that, with increased opportunities for collaboration, Ontario universities can enhance online and technology-enabled course development and offerings, improve student access to a variety of course and program types, and realize efficiency gains.

Collaborations may be developed at the course or program level.

# Course/Module Project Budgets

The maximum total budget for each approved project is $75,000, including direct and indirect costs. If a proposal is accepted for funding, only 80% of the submitted budget will be funded by the Shared Online Course Fund. The university will provide the remaining 20% of the submitted budget.

# Funding Categories

Courses and instructional modules must be recognizable for credit in degree programs, or graduate diploma programs. Courses and instructional modules that are intended as part of a credit transfer pathway leading to a degree program are also eligible.

Projects eligible for funding fall into two categories:

1. Online course development or redesign; or
2. Learning module development or redesign.

Proposals may be submitted for courses or modules delivered in English or in French. Proposals may be submitted for graduate- or undergraduate-level courses or modules. These categories are further described below:

*Online courses:*

Online courses eligible for funding may be:

* 1. Courses designed for high enrolments, including introductory or foundational courses;
  2. Courses developed to improve sustainability of a low-enrolment program across more than one institution. These include low-enrolment upper-level, or graduate-level, courses; or
  3. Online courses to facilitate the development of fully online degree programs.

The Ministry’s emphasis is on funding for online introductory or foundational courses.   
The Ministry’s guidelines also acknowledge that funds can be directed to other categories of courses.

*Learning modules:*

Learning modules are self-contained instructional units that focus on particular topics, and which students may complete online. Module proposals will be accepted in two categories:

1. Instructional content modules: These have the potential to be used as learning objects for multiple courses, and may be used in fully online, blended or flipped classes. Modules may also be applicable to courses/programs recognized for degree credit, or may serve as bridging units between online courses and those recognized for credit at individual institutions; or
2. Learning supports for students (for example, modules focused on critical thinking or study skills).

Learning modules supported through the Shared Online Course Fund are required to be made available without charge and in an inter-operable format to other publicly-assisted colleges and universities under an appropriate agreement (for example, a Creative Commons license) that allows, at a minimum, use in their own courses. Inter-operability means that these modules must be developed using methodologies and technologies that enable re-use across multiple learning environments (i.e., no learning platform dependencies). Intellectual property rights for modules will remain as outlined through existing institutional agreements applying to their creators.

The University Online Steering Committee encourages high-quality proposals in all categories of courses and modules in both French and English. While submissions for introductory or foundational courses will take precedence, there is no notional or required allocation of funding among the course/module categories.

A minimum of $250,000 in funding will be allocated for French-language projects (across categories). French-language proposals may include courses that are not highly scalable but are necessary to bring a wide range of online courses to students across the province.

# Evaluation Process and Criteria

A panel of online learning experts from outside Ontario will assess each development or redesign proposal and determine a score. Please note the following:

* Criteria related to creating a high-quality learning experience for students will be most heavily weighted in the evaluation process
* Collaborative design and/or delivery in projects focused on low-enrolment courses and/or programs is encouraged.
* With respect to instructional modules, proposals that comprise a higher proportion of course content, or content that is applicable across more course subjects, will be scored more highly.

o Proposals including a set of modules (more than one) appropriate for a single course are encouraged.

* The university must commit to having the course or module ready for online delivery by the 2016-17 academic year.
* Institutions must agree to make learning modules available without charge and in an interoperable format to other publicly-assisted colleges and universities under an appropriate licensing agreement.
* All submissions must be approved by the submitting university’s Provost.

# Budget evaluation

Proposal budgets will be reviewed in the evaluation process:

* Proposed budgets should identify all costs (including direct and indirect costs, such as staff/faculty time).
* Proposed budgets for modules should be commensurate with the proportion of course content provided.
* Proposals will be evaluated for budget detail and reasonableness.
* The maximum total budget for each approved project is $75,000. Only 80% of the submitted budget will be funded by the Shared Online Course Fund. The remaining 20% of the submitted budget will be funded by the university.

If proposals for courses or modules that would be substantively the same are received, only one proposal will be funded (if it meets the criteria of the call). There is a preliminary call deadline in order to give universities an opportunity to work together on a proposal should they wish to do so (see below).

Proposals which duplicate courses/modules funded in 2013-14 or 2014-15 will not be considered for funding.

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# Tasks and Timeline for University of Toronto Applicants

Applicants are required to make two submissions.

The first submission is a **Preliminary Statement of Intent**, indicating, for each proposal, the category of the proposal (type of course or module[s]), subject area, level and a one-paragraph description. If submitted prior to **Thursday, October 1, 2015**, this Preliminary Statement of Intent will be forwarded to the COU who will post for review by all universities. The purpose of this step is to help universities find potential partners, and to avoid potential duplication. Submission to the Office of the Vice Provost Innovations in Undergraduate Education [vp.iue@utoronto*.*ca] by the October 1 deadline is strongly encouraged but not mandatory.

The second submission is a **Statement of Design Intent** for each course or module. For collaborative projects, there must be one lead university that submits the proposal.   
Full proposal submissions must be received by the Office of the Vice Provost Innovation in Undergraduate Education by **Friday, November 6, 2015**.

Funding allocation decisions will be communicated to universities by early 2016. Courses and modules must be available for online delivery by the 2016-17 academic year.

Please note: successful applicants will be required to complete course/module and financial reporting requirements as established by the Ministry.

If you are interested in pursuing this funding, please contact Laurie Harrison, Director of Online Learning Strategies at [laurie.harrison@utoronto.ca](mailto:laurie.harrison@utoronto.ca) or 416-978-1703 for more detailed information.