

# Innovate BC

## Innovator Skills Initiative

### Program Guidelines

# Innovate BC

## Innovator Skills Initiative

### Key Goals and Objectives

The Innovator Skills Initiative Program is designed to increase diversity in the tech sector and help B.C.-based businesses fill talent shortages and grow. The Innovator Skills Initiative program provides grants to employers that are hiring for tech or tech-related roles.

The Innovator Skills Initiative program aims to help more under-represented people get their first job in the tech sector by ensuring placements for under-represented people are available in the tech sector. A key priority of the program will be supporting more Indigenous placements.

### The Program:

Employers can apply for an Innovator Skills Initiative hiring grant valued at up to \$10,000 to supplement a new employee's salary.

Employers offer valuable paid work experience to individuals that can prepare them for ongoing employment with the employer and the tech sector.

Innovate BC will provide Innovator Skills Initiative employers with links to resources to support them in recruiting, retaining and developing employees who self-identify as under-represented.

### Grant Value:

- Up to \$10,000 reimbursed at the end of the work placement.

### Eligibility

#### Employer Eligibility

#### Geographic Location

- The company must be legally registered and headquartered in British Columbia (BC).
- The primary operations and hiring must occur within BC.

#### Type of business

Must be one of the following:

- A technology business/organization hiring for a business role or tech role\*
- A non-tech business/organization, including public body and Indigenous community, hiring for a tech role\*

*\*A tech role is one that is enabled with technology. A business role is one that requires knowledge of business functions and processes. Both roles must require a level of education, certification or micro credential to perform.*

### **Business Stage**

- The company must be actively pursuing growth through hiring, fundraising, product expansion, or new market entry AND have at least one of the following:
  - A minimum of 5 full-time employees at the time of application; OR
  - Demonstrated revenue growth, user growth, or market expansion over the past 12 months; OR
  - Have secured investment (seed, angel or VC)

### **Employer Requirements:**

#### **The Employer must:**

- Meet all eligibility criteria below on the date of application submission.
- Offer valuable, paid work experience to the candidate that can prepare them for ongoing employment within your company or within the sector more generally.
- Agree to hire the candidate for a period of at least four months with the intent of offering that person a permanent position if the quality of work and suitability are a match with the company and there is mutual interest from the candidate.
- Hire the candidate as a regular employee on payroll, not as an independent [contractor](#).
- Complete a brief survey after the placement.
- Submit pay records for the approved employee.
- Comply to all laws and all employer requirements under [B.C.'s Employment Standards Act](#).
- Be in good standing with WorkSafeBC and CRA.
- Not require the employee to pay for training.
- Not hire an employee who has worked for a related company\* or organization in the past 6 months before the placement start date.

*\*Innovate BC may decline applications from related companies.*

## Employee Eligibility

### The Employee:

- Must meet all eligibility criteria below on the date of employee form submission or placement start date, whichever is earlier.
- Self-identify as under-represented, as provided in the list of groups below:
  - Categories:
    - Women
    - Indigenous
    - Visible Minority
    - Youth (<30)
    - LGBTQ2S+
    - New Immigrant (Moved to Canada within the past five years)
    - Person living with a visible or invisible disability
    - Other
- Must be living in B.C. and be eligible to work in B.C., including:
  - A Canadian citizen or permanent resident of Canada or authorized in writing to work in Canada under the federal *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*.
  - 16-years of age or older as per B.C.'s *Employment Standards Act*.
- Must be a new hire on or after April 1, 2025. A new hire is defined as an individual who has not worked for the employer or related companies in the last 6 months before the placement start date.
- Must have completed their training or education, whether at a post-secondary institution or through other recognized pathways on or after December 1, 2022 and before the placement start date.
  - Other recognized pathways, such as micro-credentials, are eligible if the content is meaningful (minimum 15 hours to complete) and, in the opinion of the employer, has prepared the candidate for effective employment.
- Can be a student, including co-op students and international students, enrolled in an [accredited post-secondary institution in B.C.](#)
- Is not a relative or family member of the employer and/or principal shareholder.
- Agrees to complete a brief survey during the placement.

## Placement Eligibility

### Placements:

- Must be at minimum a 4-month period.
- Must start no earlier than April 1, 2025 and end no later than December 31, 2025.
- May be retroactive (an application may be submitted and approved after the hire date).
- Must be at minimum an average of 15 hours per week, for a total minimum of 240 hours during the 4-month placement.
- Must not be a role involved with directly generating profit, such as sales.

### Eligible Grant Use:

- Supplement employee salary (see Eligible Expenses section for full detail).
- May be used with other grants (“stacking”) up to 100% of the employee’s salary during the placement.
- Employers may receive up to 10 (ten) Innovator Skills Initiative grants through Innovate BC for 10 (ten) different employees per program year.
- Maximum one grant per candidate per employer.
- Employers may not receive more than one Innovator Skills Initiative grant for the same candidate through Innovate BC or Innovator Skills Initiative program partners such as: The Information Communications Technology Council (ICTC), Mitacs, First Nations Technology Council, or the BC Tech Association.

## Eligible Expenses

Only **costs incurred and paid during the term of placement** are eligible for reimbursement. Any costs after this will not be considered. Supporting documents must accompany each expense on the completed claim form.

Claims are due 5 business days after the placement end date.

## Salary and Claimable Costs

Eligible costs are gross wages or salaries and claimable costs earned by the employee to a maximum of \$10,000 for work that can be specifically identified and measured as having been performed during the work placement and which is identified and measured consistently by the employer's cost accounting system. Applicant organizations must offer fair and competitive salaries that are aligned with market.

The payroll rate to be used is the actual gross pay rate for each employee (normal periodic remuneration before deductions) during the work placement. The payroll rate is exclusively for salary and excludes all premiums (e.g., overtime), shift differentials and any reimbursement or benefit conferred in lieu of salaries or wages. Funds claimed in lieu of benefits must be consistent with the current level of benefits paid in B.C. (e.g., 4% for vacation paid out) and will be limited to a maximum of 20% of employee salaries. Note that benefits claimed must be incurred during the work placement.

Eligible Costs	Ineligible Costs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Salary or hourly wages</li><li>• Statutory holiday pay</li><li>• Employer portion of CPP</li><li>• Employer portion of EI</li><li>• WCB premiums</li><li>• Employer Health Tax</li><li>• Vacation paid out</li><li>• Termination Pay*</li><li>• Sick days paid out</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Bonuses</li><li>• Commission</li><li>• Overtime pay</li><li>• Shift differential pay (ex. Additional pay for working night shift)</li><li>• Allowances (ex. For business use of personal cellphone)</li><li>• Expense reimbursements</li></ul>

*\*Once the termination of placement is reported and approved, termination pay is eligible for reimbursement up to a certain amount as defined by the [B.C.'s Employment Standards Act](#).*

### Acceptable Supporting Documents:

Employee pay stubs or other related documents to support salary rates used. If you are paying for employer portions of CPP & EI, WCB, or EHT, please provide supporting documentation and calculations for these amounts.

**All submitted wage statements (paystubs) must meet the minimum requirements laid out by the [B.C.'s Employment Standards Act](#). Please review the minimum requirements [here](#).**

For all options above, if the documentation does NOT show proof of payment, please submit a bank statement, or copy of cashed cheque deposit.

## Grant Application & Intern Placement Process

1. Interested organizations can [apply online](#) for a grant through Innovate BC.

2. Innovate BC reviews the Employer's application. Employers who are found to be eligible to move to next steps are notified to identify a potential employee for hiring. Once a candidate is identified, the Employer must submit the remaining forms.

Please note, the purpose of initial eligibility notification from Innovate BC is not an indication of guaranteed funding; it is only to inform the Employer of their eligibility and to continue with the remaining steps of the application. A grant will NOT be reserved for the Employer at this stage. The Employer will still need to complete all remaining steps of the application and put forth an eligible candidate who must be approved by Innovate BC prior receiving approval for funding.

3. If an Employer has not yet hired, they must post the job through channels of their own.
4. Once Employers have hired, they will be required to complete an Employee Confirmation Form with the Employee's information.
5. Upon completion of the Employee Confirmation Form, Innovate BC will prompt the Employee to complete the Employee Intake which requires the Employee to provide information to establish eligibility. The Employer will be notified when the Employee has completed the Employee Intake.
6. Innovate BC reviews the Employer's full application and provides approval based on Employer and Employee eligibility and subject to available funding.
7. Innovate BC will prompt the Employer to complete a brief Progress Form midway through the placement.
8. Innovate BC may book an onsite visit and individual video check-ins with the Employer and/or Employees.
9. Innovate BC will prompt the Employer to invite the Employee to complete an Employee Survey.
10. The Employer submits a claim for reimbursement **at the end of the placement**.

The final claim stage will include a satisfaction survey for the Employer, so that Innovate BC can evaluate the results and impact of the Innovator Skills Initiative. Upon completion and review of the Employer survey and claim, the grant funds will be issued within 4-6 weeks.

## Changes and Termination

Any substantial changes or termination of the placement must be reported to Innovate BC via email to [programs@innovatebc.ca](mailto:programs@innovatebc.ca) immediately, including the reason for termination and the placement end date.

## FAQ

### **How long does it take to process an application?**

Each individual step (Employer Application, Employee Confirmation and Employee Intake) in the application process takes up to 30 calendar days to process. The Employer will be notified of their application status via email shortly after review.

### **Can I apply to the program before I hire an Employee?**

Yes. Note that the grant is disbursed after placement has been completed.

### **Can I apply after the work term has already started?**

Employers can apply for a grant retroactively for work terms that started in the past, with a start date no earlier than April 1, 2025.

**Are we eligible for a grant if we received other funding for the employee?**

Yes, grant stacking is permitted as long as the combined value of all grant funding does not exceed the employee's salary. Limitations apply: Grants supported by Innovator Skills Initiative funds through our partners (i.e. ICTC, Mitacs, First Nations Technology Council and BC Tech Association) are not eligible for the same employee.

**Are international students on work permits/visas eligible for the program?**

Yes, if they are authorized in writing to work in Canada under the federal *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*.

**If the candidate worked for me as a co-op in the past and I am now hiring them as a regular employee, are they an eligible new hire?**

Yes, a non-co-op student or a recent graduate who completed their co-op placement will be considered as a new hire.

**What are the examples of accepted proof of education?**

Examples of accepted proof of education include, but are not limited to:

- Proof of enrollment in a post-secondary program or completion of at least one year of post-secondary programming
- Proof of completion of a technology-related
  - training certification developed by a major tech company, such as Microsoft, AWS, Salesforce, IBM, Unity or Google
  - training program provided by a recognized post-secondary institution
  - program by a training provider that is certified by a Canadian province
  - program by an industry-recognized international university or private training provider

**Can I submit a claim before the placement term is completed?**

Requests will be considered on a case-by-case basis. If you have reached \$10,000 in salary payments and a minimum of 3 months has passed, contact us to inquire about submitting for early claim.

**What is the deadline to apply?**

Applications close November 20, 2025.

**How to Apply | Contact Information**

To apply, click [HERE](#).

For more information about the application process, contact us at [programs@innovatebc.ca](mailto:programs@innovatebc.ca).



## **EVENTS OF DEFAULT**

Any of the following events will constitute an Event of Default whether any such event be voluntary, involuntary or result from the operation of law or any judgment or order of any court or administrative or government body:

- a) any information, statement, document or report submitted by the Employer to Innovate BC pursuant to the grant application is untrue or incorrect;
- b) conduct on the part of the Employer, or any of its representatives, agents or employees, which in the sole opinion of Innovate BC is of such a serious and substantial nature that it would injure the reputation of Innovate BC if the Employer continued to receive the grant from Innovate BC.

## **REMEDIES**

Upon the occurrence of any Event of Default and at any time thereafter Innovate BC may in its sole discretion, notwithstanding any other provision of the program, by written notice from Innovate BC to the Employer exercise one or more of the following remedies, in addition to any remedy available at law:

- a) cease paying any further Disbursements to the Awardee under the grant application;
- b) require the Awardee to repay to Innovate BC any portion of the grant made to the Employer, and that such amount will be immediately due and payable by the Employer to Innovate BC without presentment, demand, protest or other notice of any kind to the Employer, all of which are hereby expressly waived by the Employer; and
- c) terminate the grant and grant application effective immediately.

## **REMEDIES NON-EXCLUSIVE**

The rights, powers and remedies conferred on Innovate BC under this Agreement or any statute or law are not intended to be exclusive and each remedy shall be cumulative and in addition to and not in substitution for every other remedy existing or available to Innovate BC.

The exercise of any one or more remedies will not preclude the simultaneous or later exercise by Innovate BC of any other right, power or remedy.