

CONTRACT RESEARCH OPPORTUNITY

Remote Work – Urban Panacea or Curse?

September 12, 2023

Purpose

The purpose of this project is to investigate the facts behind the rhetoric associated with remote work. Everyone seems to have an opinion, but what do we really know?

Questions to be probed include:

- Under what conditions does remote work increase labour productivity and reduce productivity?
- To what extent does the ability to work from home facilitate labour force participation for people with household care responsibilities, newcomers, persons with disabilities and other equity-seeking groups?
- What is the impact of enabling continued remote work on congestion reduction and the need for transportation investment (both road and transit), office vacancy rates, commercial property values and the downtown service economy (retail, restaurants, etc.)?
- Is there a longer-term potential to repurpose office buildings and downtown spaces?
- What are the emerging best practices in implementing hybrid in-person and remote work blends?

Background

COVID-19 lock downs instigated a global experiment in relocating many categories of jobs from dedicated places of work to the homes of employees. Traffic congestion fell by 45% in Toronto during COVID -19 related lockdowns¹ and global carbon dioxide emissions fell as much as 17%. ² As lockdowns eased, “return to office” policies and approaches reignited an ongoing remote work debate across the country and around the world. Time and money saved by not commuting leave many questioning the need to return to dedicated workplaces while others lament the impact of continued remote work on the vibrancy of our downtowns, health of downtown economies and real estate, and negative impacts on company productivity, employee development and the social fabric of our communities.

¹ Rider, David. (Sept 7, 2021) [City of Toronto working to cut congestion as traffic returns to pre-pandemic levels \(thestar.com\)](https://www.thestar.com/news/ontario/2021/09/07/city-of-toronto-working-to-cut-congestion-as-traffic-returns-to-pre-pandemic-levels.html)

² Cockburn, Haley. (June 14, 2021). [End of lockdown could trigger ‘extreme’ congestion and worse air quality as commuters swap public transport for cars | The Independent | The Independent](https://www.theindependent.com/news/2021/06/14/end-of-lockdown-could-trigger-extreme-congestion-and-worse-air-quality-as-commuters-swap-public-transport-for-cars/)

The Intergovernmental Committee of Economic and Labour Force Development (ICE) is commissioning this research project to assemble evidence about the impact continued remote work is having, the opportunities it offers and the associated drawbacks and challenges. Factors and conditions contributing to the positive and negative impacts of remote work are of particular interest.

Since ICE focuses on economic and labour force development in Toronto, it is intended that Toronto be the focus of the work's conclusions and recommendations. However, it is recognized that experiences in other jurisdictions are relevant to the knowledge base and that the research geography undoubtedly will extend beyond Toronto boundaries.

Scope of Work

The specific responsibilities and key activities of the successful proponent will include:

1. Developing a **project work plan** that incorporates the research approach and methodology and sources of information and data and outlines how the project will be completed within the timeframe set out below;
2. Conducting a **literature review** of existing research and data on the impact of remote work that addresses the five questions listed in the "Purpose" statement above as well as any other considerations the proponent thinks are relevant;
3. **Undertaking interviews/focus groups** with key informants who have expertise and insights about the different aspects of remote work's effects and implications;
4. Summarizing **key findings** on the evidence and "unknowns" associated with the different aspects of remote work impacts; and
5. Providing **conclusions and recommendations** that focus on the relevance and implications of the findings for the Toronto context. For example, how can the opportunities associated with remote work best be realized? How can the negative consequences best be avoided? What (if any) critical questions warrant further investigation?

Deliverables

The deliverables for this assignment will include:

- Development of detailed project work plan;
- Detailed report in a form suitable for public distribution and publication on the ICE Committee website. The report should summarize the work undertaken, findings from the literature review and interviews and recommendations;
- Presentation of report at an ICE Committee meeting for internal discussion; and
- Participation in a report launch event beyond the completion of the report. The ICE Committee will determine whether this event will be an in-person discussion forum held in Toronto or a webinar.

Budget

The maximum budget for this contract research project is **\$25,000** including applicable taxes.

Timeline

The anticipated project timeline start date is November 1, 2023, with a draft report due in early March 2024 and a final report due March 31, 2024. The successful applicant(s) should be available for the launch event of the report beyond completion of the report.

Application Process

To apply, email a three- to four-page submission to info@icecommittee.org with the subject line “ICE Contract – “Remote Work: Urban Panacea or Curse?”.

Your submission should:

- Outline how you propose to carry out the work related to this project.
- Demonstrate the requisite experience and capacity to carry out the project in the allotted timeframe, including your ability to do the required research.
- In addition to the three- to four-page submission, include a short resume or CV.

Application deadline: Midnight (ET) Tuesday October 3, 2023

We will accept joint applications from groups of individuals or organizations. We encourage applications from current graduate students and graduates with relevant degrees. Credentials and professional experience earned either in Canada or internationally will be recognized. Preference will be given to organizations/individuals with leaders self-identifying as women, newcomers, immigrants, racialized groups, and/ or Indigenous Peoples.

Selection schedule (subject to change):

- All applicants will be notified of receipt of their submission when received. If you do not receive acknowledgement of receipt within 24 hours, please check back to ensure receipt.
- Short listed candidates may be interviewed. It is anticipated that interviews will take place by video conference during the second half of October.
- The project contract will be awarded by October 31, 2023.
- The project start date is November 1, 2023.

About the ICE Committee

The ICE Committee was established in 1997 by officials in the Government of Canada, the Province of Ontario, and the City of Toronto. The purpose of the committee is to coordinate the economic and labour force development activities of the three governments (and the various departments and ministries within each government) in Toronto.

The ICE Committee’s functions include commissioning and publishing research that can inform policy and program understanding and coherence in the areas of economic and labour force development in Toronto. It is in that context that the current Request for Proposals is issued.

The ultimate goal of the ICE Committee is to achieve the effective delivery of economic and labour force development programs in Toronto. ICE has played a key role in bringing together critical players to share information on their respective programs and projects. For more information about ICE, please visit www.icecommittee.org.