

Applications for the 2026 RCM program open April 1, 2026 and close July 1, 2026, with the selection process commencing in July 2026 when up to 45 motivated young adults will be invited to join the experience in September. These leaders will participate in a transformative series of developmental training sessions, come together for experiential gatherings, complete critical assessments, lead planning committees, and action leadership plans for rural community economic development.

“The Rural Change Maker program freely equips emerging leaders with practical skills to act on complex priorities in their lives and communities. It offers incredible benefit for young adults and communities by ensuring emerging leaders are agile, connected, skilled and ready to lead the future of communities,” said **Melanie Bidiuk**, ROI Communications and Program Manager.

“Over 80 graduates to date are building meaningful outcomes in more than 60 rural regions in Ontario. They are advancing their careers, investing in energy equity, and deepening our understanding of important societal realities. Many are building life stability and businesses, leading community initiatives, organizations and holding leadership roles in municipalities and First Nations. Young leaders are critical to the future of rural Ontario,” said **Kimberly Earls**, ROI Executive Director.

“The Town of Hanover is proud to partner with the Rural Change Makers program to provide this meaningful opportunity for our local youth,” said **April Marshall**, Economic Development Manager. “Youth retention is a priority for our community, and we are committed to listening to young people and investing in them in ways that truly matter. Through training and support, the program equips participants with valuable tools to develop their leadership skills, share their voices, and help shape our rural community's future. This partnership reinforces that Hanover is a place where young people are valued and supported to return, build their lives, and lead meaningful change.”

“The Rural Change Maker program centers young people’s experiences and voices to inform how they can be better supported in creating equitable futures in rural communities,” said **Sharada Srinivasan**, People’s Archive of Rural Ontario. “The Program’s goals align with the vision of the People’s Archive of Rural Ontario (PARO) in the role and mentoring of emerging leaders as co-creators in shaping research, knowledge, and policy on rural Ontario.”

Support for the Rural Change Makers program has been generously provided in part by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness, RBC Foundation the Gloria Baylis Foundation, J.P. Bickell Foundation, Kawartha Credit Union, Farm Credit Canada, Northern Credit Union, Ontario Mutual Insurance Association and the Four County Labour Market Planning Board.

“RBC Foundation helps people enter, grow, and reskill for the changing world of work,” said **Kerstin Beavis**, Regional Vice President, Central Shores, RBC. “The Rural Change Makers Program delivers real results: more than 91% of participants say it has increased their employability or advanced career and future goals, and 86% plan to stay in their community. It’s a catalyst for youth employment and community retention.”



ABOUT ROI

The Rural Ontario Institute (ROI) is a non-profit organization committed to developing leaders, informing decision makers and connecting communities. ROI delivers the renowned Advanced Agricultural Leadership Program (AALP) and the Rural Change Makers (RCM) program, a leadership and rural development program working to creating meaningful change with communities. We provide data research and analysis, sharing information and equipping communities with tools through our Rural Community Wellbeing factsheets and dashboards, and Rural Housing Information System - addressing the housing and homelessness crisis faced by thousands of Canadians. RCM is supported by the Province of Ontario.

ASSOCIATED LINKS

- [Rural Change Makers](#)
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- [Opiikapawiin Services LP](#)
- [Four County Labour Market Planning Board](#)
- [Metis Nation of Ontario Women's Council](#)
- [Community Futures Huron](#)
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- [Town of Hanover](#)
- [People's Archive of Rural Ontario](#)

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