



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ROI builds capacity for data availability in Ontario through two-year post graduate Mitacs partnership training program.

GUELPH, ON, June 2, 2026 – The Rural Ontario Institute (ROI) is pleased to announce the launch of a two-year post graduate partnership intern training program with [Mitacs](#) and [University of Guelph's School of Environmental Design and Rural Development's \(SEDRD\)](#) Director and Professor Ryan Gibson.

“Delivering high-quality, relevant data to community stakeholders is central to ROI’s work. Through our long-standing partnership with the University of Guelph, the Mitacs supported placement of master’s and PhD students at ROI was a natural extension of our shared focus on applied research and supporting rural Ontario through evidence-based solutions,” said Dan Borowec, ROI Chair.

“This initiative reflects the importance of connecting academic research with the practical needs of rural communities. By improving access to data and leadership development opportunities, we can help communities make stronger, evidence-based decisions. Graduate students involved in this partnership will gain valuable applied experience while contributing research that can strengthen planning, housing, and community wellbeing outcomes across rural Ontario,” said Professor Ryan Gibson, Director of the School of Environmental Design and Rural Development.

“Mitacs helps connect organizations with the research talent and expertise needed to address real-world challenges. This partnership with the Rural Ontario Institute and the University of Guelph will give graduate students hands-on experience while supporting data-driven decision-making and innovation in rural Ontario communities,” said Emily Gordon, Senior Advisor, Business Development, Mitacs.

“This research collaboration will examine how increased access to relevant data and leadership development affect evidence-based decision making in rural Ontario communities under 10,000 residents. Investigating two linked questions: how improved data availability influences municipal planning, and how leadership development contributes to social and economic outcomes,” said Kezia Cowtan, ROI Data Manager.

The University of Guelph’s SEDRD brings together major academic fields concerned with creating strong communities, in Canada and around the world. The school has six programs in the fields of Landscape Architecture, Rural Planning and Development, Capacity Development

and Extension, and Rural Studies. SEDRD reflects the imperatives in building authentic communities where planners, leaders, communicators, landscape architects, the citizens, and politicians all play important interdependent roles in community strength.

“100% of AALP participants surveyed said that they gained the skills and knowledge needed to lead in the agriculture and food sector. We are excited to better understand the social and economic value of this program, going strong for more than 40 years,” said Peggy Brekveld, ROI Leadership Programs Director and AALP Class 12 Alumni.

Six paid internships will be offered each year to Ontario Masters graduate and PhD students to assist with rural data availability, knowledge sharing, and evaluation within ROI's Data Team collaborating on the [Rural Housing Information System \(RHIS\)](#), centralizing housing data for rural and all of Northern Ontario's municipalities, the [Rural Community Wellbeing \(RCWB\) Data Dashboard](#), centralizing indicators for rural community wellbeing, services, and sustainability in all of Ontario and with ROI's [Advanced Agriculture Leadership Program \(AALP\)](#) to evaluate the impact of rural agriculture sector leadership training over the past 40 years.

ABOUT

The Rural Ontario Institute (ROI) is a charitable 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 create meaningful change with communities. We provide data research and analysis on rural priorities, sharing information and equipping communities with tools through our Rural Community Wellbeing Dashboard and accompanying factsheets, and Rural Housing Information System - addressing the housing and homelessness crisis faced by thousands of Canadians.

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