



**Evaluation of York University's Academic
Initiative Fund Program, 2011-2016**

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Introduction

This report is designed to provide an overall evaluation of the Academic Initiative Fund (AIF) Program at York University for the five year period from 2011-2016. This report has four main sections. The first section offers background about the AIF and how it operates. The second section reviews the evaluation questions and the research methodology. The third section presents the findings and discussion, organized thematically to align with the evaluation questions and the recommendations. The final section of the report makes recommendations for the AIF program going forward.

AIF Background and Implementation

The AIF was created at York University by the Provost in 2010 with the expressed purpose of encouraging innovation in teaching, learning, and the student experience. The vehicle for realizing this purpose were individual projects funded through seed grants from the fund. The underlying thinking was that faculty and staff have innovative ideas for advancing institutional priorities and the AIF would support project proposals that reflected those innovative ideas. There have been two phases of the AIF. Phase I was from 2011-2014. Phase II is from 2015-2018.

The first funded AIF projects began in 2011. The AIF has current commitments to fund projects until 2019. Two principal types of projects are funded by the AIF. The bulk of the funding (95%) has gone to larger, Category 1 projects. Table 1 provides an overview of Category 1 projects.

Table 1: Larger Category 1 AIF Project Summary

| AIF Phase I & II | Teaching and Learning Strategy | Total Amount Awarded | Category | Total Number of Projects | Total Amount Awarded |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| | eLearning | \$ 3,539,397.68 | I | 23 | \$ 3,539,397.68 |
| | Experiential Education | \$ 3,780,485.33 | I | 41 | \$ 3,780,485.33 |
| | Internationalization | \$ 117,532.00 | I | 3 | \$ 117,532.00 |
| | Student Experience | \$ 2,274,705.00 | I | 27 | \$ 2,274,705.00 |
| TOTAL PHASE I & II | | \$ 9,712,120.01 | | 94 | \$ 9,712,120.01 |

Smaller Category 2 projects received funding only beginning in 2015. Many of the Category 2 projects addressed more than one priority area. Table 2 provides an overview of Category 2 projects.

Table 2: Smaller Category 2 AIF Project Summary

| AIF Phase | Teaching and Learning Strategy | Category | Total Number of Projects | Total Amount Awarded |
|------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| | eLearning, Experiential Education, Internationalization, Student Experience | 2 | 91 | \$ 521,000 |

| | | | | |
|--------------|--|--|-----------|-------------------|
| TOTAL | | | 91 | \$ 521,000 |
|--------------|--|--|-----------|-------------------|

The overall total amount of AIF funding for projects has been \$ 10,233,120.01. Although there have been roughly the same number of Category 1 projects (94) as there have been Category 2 projects (91), Category 2 projects account for 5.1% of the total funding.

Governance

Initially, from 2010 until 2012, the Provost directly oversaw the AIF program. In 2012, the Associate Vice-President Teaching and Learning assumed primary responsibility, with support from Teaching and Learning Officer, for the governance and operation of the AIF program. Ultimately, however, decisions about AIF funding are made by the Provost.

The principal governance body is the Academic Innovation Fund Steering Committee, which is responsible for the oversight of the funding process, reviews applications and makes recommendations to the Provost, who will make final decisions. In addition, the Committee reviews project interim & final reports and provide feedback to Project Leads. Members are appointed by the AVP Teaching and Learning in collaboration with the Provost, Deans and Associate Deans to insure appropriate representation. At present, there are eleven members of the AIF Steering Committee, including the AVP Teaching and Learning. The majority of the Committee are not faculty members but rather Senior staff who lead resource units that support the AIF priorities.

Operations

The AIF Program operates through a periodic call for project proposals. All faculty-based proposals are reviewed, approved and ranked separately by the Office of the Dean before being submitted electronically to the Office of the AVP Teaching and Learning. Proposals from units like the Division of Students are submitted directly to the AVP Teaching and Learning.

Proposals are reviewed by the AIF Steering Committee, which makes recommendations about which proposals to fund. Decisions about funded projects are made public through Y-File as well as on the AIF website.

The AIF Program offers resources and support to successful applicants that are calibrated to the particular nature of the project. The resources are drawn primarily from the Teaching Common, The Career Centre, University Information Technology, York University Libraries, Learning Technology Services, and YU Experience Hub. ,

All project leads also receive coaching support from Talent Acquisition and Development (TAD) during the first year of Phase 2. TAD provides on campus services in the following areas: Workforce and Organizational Planning; Sourcing; Talent, Acquisition and Onboarding; Talent Development and Competency Management; and Succession and Transition Management. The TAD coach conducts regular check ins with the project lead and connects them to resources on campus.

AIF Phase I

There have been two phases of the AIF. In Phase I, from 2011-2014, the institutional priorities were eLearning, Experience Education, and the Student Experience. These priorities aligned with the 2010 Provostial White Paper and the 2010-2015 University Academic Plan. The

Provostial White Paper, titled *Building a More Engaged University: Strategic Directions for York University 2010-2020*, identified among its specific priorities an enhanced first year program for undergraduate students, a significant increase in the opportunities for students to participate in an experiential education activity, and improved accessibility for students through the expansion of the online delivery of courses and programs. Successful proposals for AIF funding all fit broadly into one of these priority areas.

In Phase I, there were three Categories for proposals, which are clearly summarized in Table 3.

Table 3: AIF Project Categories for Phase I: 2011-14

| Category | Description | Funding Available |
|--------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Category I | <i>Pan-University proposals:</i> Initiatives intended to have an impact across the University and/or that are a collaborative effort by two or more Faculties | Up to \$200,000 per year |
| Category II | <i>Faculty-based proposals:</i> Initiatives which apply wholly or primarily within a particular Faculty | Up to \$100,000 per year |
| Category III | <i>Individual or group proposals:</i> Initiatives submitted by faculty, staff, or students individually or in groups | Up to \$10,000 per year |

During Phase I, fifty-three projects were funded for a total of \$5,848,082. Forty percent of the projects were focused on Experiential Education, forty percent on the Student Experience, and twenty percent on eLearning.

Table 4: Project Types and Funding in AIF Phase 1

| AIF Phase | Teaching and Learning Strategy | Total Amount Awarded | Category | Total Number of Projects | Total Amount Awarded |
|----------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| I (2011-2014) | | | | | |
| | eLearning | \$ 1,934,966.00 | I | 11 | \$ 1,934,966.00 |
| | Experiential Education | \$ 2,123,282.00 | I | 22 | \$ 2,123,282.00 |
| | Student Experience | \$ 1,789,834.00 | I | 20 | \$ 1,789,834.00 |
| TOTAL PHASE I | | \$ 5,848,082.00 | | 53 | \$ 5,848,082.00 |

The project leads were typically faculty members but sometimes staff. In some cases, the project leads were faculty holding decanal appointments.

AIF Phase II

In Phase II, the priority areas were expanded to include internationalization. This fourth priority area aligns with the new University Academic Plan. The categories for applications was reduced from three to two, which is summarized in Table 5.

Table 5: AIF Categories for Phase II: 2015-18

| Category | Description | Funding Available |
|-----------------|--------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Category I | <i>Academic Innovation Projects:</i> Proposals will be | Up to \$100,000 |

| | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Open to full-time faculty members | <p>considered that are curricular in nature and will assist with the embedding of eLearning, EE, and/or internationalization strategies in degree programs.</p> <p>Highest priority will be given to proposals that demonstrate that they are sustainable, scalable and affordable. High priority will be given to grant requests from schools, departments or Faculties that have documented EE, and eLearning plans.</p> | per year |
| Category II Open to full-time and contract faculty members | <p><i>Curricular Innovation Grants:</i> Faculty members will be invited to submit proposals for redesigned courses using eLearning, EE, and/or internationalization strategies.</p> <p><i>Grants for eLearning will support course redesign incorporating blended learning, fully online learning or the flipped classroom. Grants for EE will support the embedding of three (3) EE Strategies: Community Service Learning, Community Based Research and Placements. Grants for Internationalization will support the embedding of international perspectives/opportunities.</i></p> <p>High priority will be given to grant requests from schools, departments or Faculties that have documented EE and/or eLearning plans, which identify priorities for embedding strategies within degree programs.</p> | \$5,000 per course |

During Phase II, AIF has provided 132 projects with funding. There are 41 projects of a comparable scale to the fifty-three funded in Phase I. The total amount of funding was \$4,385,038. The smaller Category II projects – projects focused only on course development—accounted for just over 10% of the total funding. The breakdown of the Category 1 is Experiential Education (46% of projects), eLearning (29% of projects), First Year Experience (17% of projects) and Internationalization (7% of projects).

Table 6: Project Types and Funding in AIF Phase II

| | | | | | |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|----|-----|-----------------|
| AIF Phase II (2015-2018) | eLearning | \$ 1,604,431.68 | I | 12 | \$ 1,604,431.68 |
| | Experiential Education | \$ 1,657,203.33 | I | 19 | \$ 1,657,203.33 |
| | First Year Experience within the Curriculum | \$ 484,871.00 | I | 7 | \$ 484,871.00 |
| | Internationalization | \$ 117,532.00 | I | 3 | \$ 117,532.00 |
| | | | | | |
| | eLearning | \$ 400,000.00 | II | 68 | \$ 400,000.00 |
| | eLearning & Experiential Education | \$ 68,000.00 | II | 13 | \$ 68,000.00 |
| | eLearning, Experiential Education & Internationalization | \$ 20,000.00 | II | 4 | \$ 20,000.00 |
| | eLearning & Internationalization | \$ 5,000.00 | II | 1 | \$ 5,000.00 |
| | Experiential Education | \$ 28,000.00 | II | 5 | \$ 28,000.00 |
| TOTAL PHASE II | | \$ 4,385,038.01 | | 132 | \$ 4,385,038.01 |

Evaluation Questions and Research Design

The broad purpose of this evaluation is to reflect on the value of the Academic Initiative Fund Program at York University and make recommendations about how to strengthen the program in light of the University Academic Plan, 2015-2020. This evaluation was guided by three general questions:

Does the Academic Initiative Fund program result in meaningful innovations that lead to enhanced student experience and instructor satisfaction?

Are those innovations resulting in sustainable change across the institution?

What are the opportunities for improvement in program delivery?

The scope of the evaluation covered the period from 2010 to 2016. The evaluation issues were aligned with the general evaluation questions and the rationale for the Academic Initiative Fund program at York University. This is a summative evaluation in the sense that it has been undertaken at a pivotal point in the existence of the AIF program with a view to determining the effectiveness of the program.

Data Sources

There were five main sources of data: (i) archival AIF documentation, which include program summaries, individual project reports and evaluations, financial summaries, and governance documents; (ii) surveys of project leads on larger AIF projects; and (iii) informal interviews with a senior contact in the Office of the Dean or Principal for all faculties; (iv) unstructured interviews with some project leads, initiated by those project leads following their

completion of the survey; and (v) unstructured conversations with the AVP Teaching and Learning and the Teaching and Learning Officer. All reporting in this evaluation is anonymous.

Survey Design and Response Rate

Three web-based survey instruments were used for project leads to reflect the different priority areas of Experiential Education, eLearning, and Student Experience. The surveys reflected a mixed methods approach, involving questions that provided for open-ended answers, questions that required short written answers, and questions with scaled answers or ordinal rankings. The content of the survey was designed to address the general evaluation questions. The data generated is both qualitative and quantitative.

Many AIF project leads on larger projects have lead more than one AIF project since 2011. Sixty-four project leads were invited to complete one of the surveys. Overall, forty-six project leads completed the survey. The response rate was 71.8%. In terms of specific priority areas, the survey for Experiential Education projects was completed by twenty-seven participants, for Student Experience projects fourteen participants, and for eLearning five participants. There was an even distribution of projects from the five years that constituted the time period for the evaluation.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection started in September 2016 and concluded in June 2017. Data was analyzed by triangulating information gathered from the different sources identified above. The use of multiple lines of evidence and triangulation were intended to increase the reliability and credibility of the evaluation findings and conclusions.

Findings and Discussion

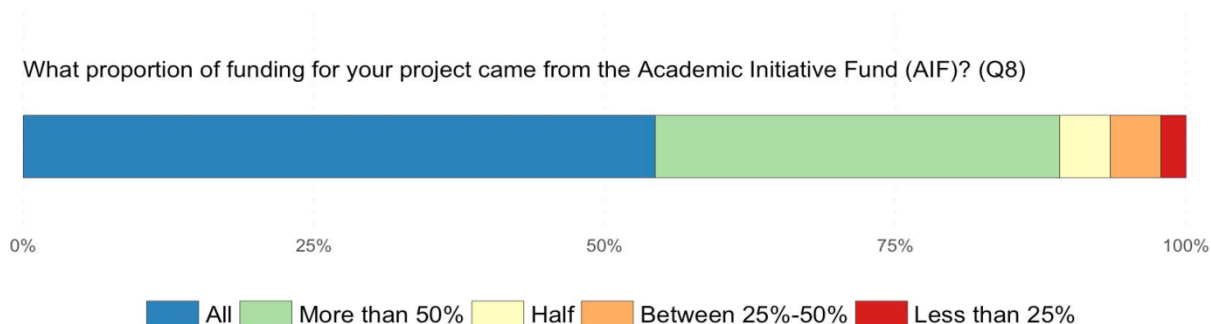
The findings and discussion are organized thematically to reflect the evaluation questions and to align with the recommendations. The feedback from almost all of the participants was very strong support for the AIF program and the view that the program should continue at York University.

The Uniqueness of AIF Funding

The establishment of the AIF at York University in 2010 represented a new way to support projects focused on teaching and learning. Deans and Associate Deans from small faculties emphasized that there were some projects that would not have happened without the AIF grant. In some cases, the projects were viewed as important but not essential. But at least two participants stressed that the projects were essential in their Faculty but they would not have been pursued without an AIF grant. In these Faculties, projects were ranked by the Dean's Office based on their strategic importance, and not necessarily the objective strength of the application. Others stressed that the AIF made it easier to pursue the projects earlier rather than later. Some Deans report forwarding all proposals to the AVP Teaching and Learning, others report selecting only some proposals to be forwarded.

The importance of AIF funding to individual projects is clear from Graph 1, which shows that for almost 90% of the projects, AIF accounted for most of the funding.

Share of AIF Project Funding from AIF



Graph 1: AIF Funds as Share of Overall Individual Project Funding

It was notable that not a single large AIF project was identified by any of the participants as not worthwhile and at least one Dean described all of their AIF projects as useful. However, there was more skepticism about the course-focused small grants. A common point made was that some of the projects were really just part of the professional responsibility of course directors and should not require extra funding. Others stressed that because the course-focused AIF grants involved small amounts of money, they believed that those funds could be obtained elsewhere and that there was a weak case for AIF funding.

The Priority Areas

The AIF Phase I priority areas were Experiential Education, eLearning and Student Experience. In Phase II, the priority areas were Experiential Education, eLearning, the First Year Experience, and internationalization. Although there was not any evident resistance to the significance of these priority areas, there were serious questioning about the emphasis on innovation in these areas. One project lead commented, “I don't really know what innovation means. I think projects that improve teaching and learning and the student experience should be

funded. Who would decide what "meaningful innovation" means? Innovation might very well do nothing to improve teaching and learning.”

Planners such as Deans and Associate Deans seemed much more aware that the priorities were aligned with the UAP and the Strategic Mandate Agreement. One Dean recommended strongly that the priorities should also include Improving Academic Quality. The underlying idea that the university could improve Academic Quality through innovation along the lines the AIF program seeks to support.

Other Associate Deans think that the AIF priorities should be supporting more concrete priorities in the faculties that are proving hard to realize without AIF nudging. Three examples were stressed: curriculum mapping, integration of EE into the current curriculum, and better integration of the Teaching Commons and the YU Experience Hub into courses. Although there are some AIF projects that have already done these things, it was evident that the relevant Associate Deans did not know about those projects, which arguably reflects a communication breakdown on the part of the AIF program and the importance of better strategic integration of resource units.

AIF Funding Allocation by Faculty

An evident trend in project funding is that the largest faculties viewed themselves as far less reliant on the AIF program than smaller faculties. Indeed, it should be noted that the largest faculty – Liberal Arts & Professional Studies – has a much smaller share of AIF projects than would be expected, given that LA&PS teaches almost fifty percent of all undergraduates at the university. AIF projects in these larger faculties appear as one-offs and often did not involve any coordination with the Dean’s Office.

Table 7: Project Allocation by Faculty in Phase 1

| AIF Phase One Category I Grants Summary by Faculty | | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| Faculty | Number of Projects | Total Amount |
| Education | 2 | \$150,560.00 |
| Environmental Studies | 3 | \$273,282.00 |
| Environmental Studies + Office of the President | 1 | \$150,490.00 |
| Fine Arts | 4 | \$456,500.00 |
| Glendon | 4 | \$175,328.00 |
| Health | 6 | \$1,160,280.00 |
| Health+LA&PS | 1 | \$400,000.00 |
| LA&PS | 14 | \$712,214.00 |
| LA&PS + Science | 2 | \$63,200.00 |
| Libraries | 2 | \$469,348.00 |
| Osgoode | 1 | \$175,000.00 |
| Schulich | 1 | \$68,000.00 |
| Science & Engineering | 5 | \$505,699.00 |
| Science + SC&LD | 1 | \$189,913.00 |
| SC&LD | 1 | \$78,000.00 |
| Sport & Recreation | 1 | \$20,000.00 |
| TD CEC | 1 | \$171,968.00 |
| York International | 1 | \$169,300.00 |
| ACMAPS | 1 | \$19,000.00 |
| YU Start | 1 | \$440,000.00 |
| Total | 53 | \$5,848,082.00 |
| Learning and Organizational Development | 1 | \$34,000.00 |

It is also evident from the Faculty of Graduate Studies is absent from the list of AIF funding during Phase 1. This is a surprising oversight on the part of the AIF Steering Committee, given not only the importance of graduate teaching in the university at the time but also given the emphasis on increasing graduate enrollments in the Strategic Mandate Agreement. Table 6 shows that there was some funding for a project at the Faculty of Graduate Studies in Phase 2 but that LA&PS saw a decline in their share of funding.

Table 8: Project Allocation by Faculty in Phase 2

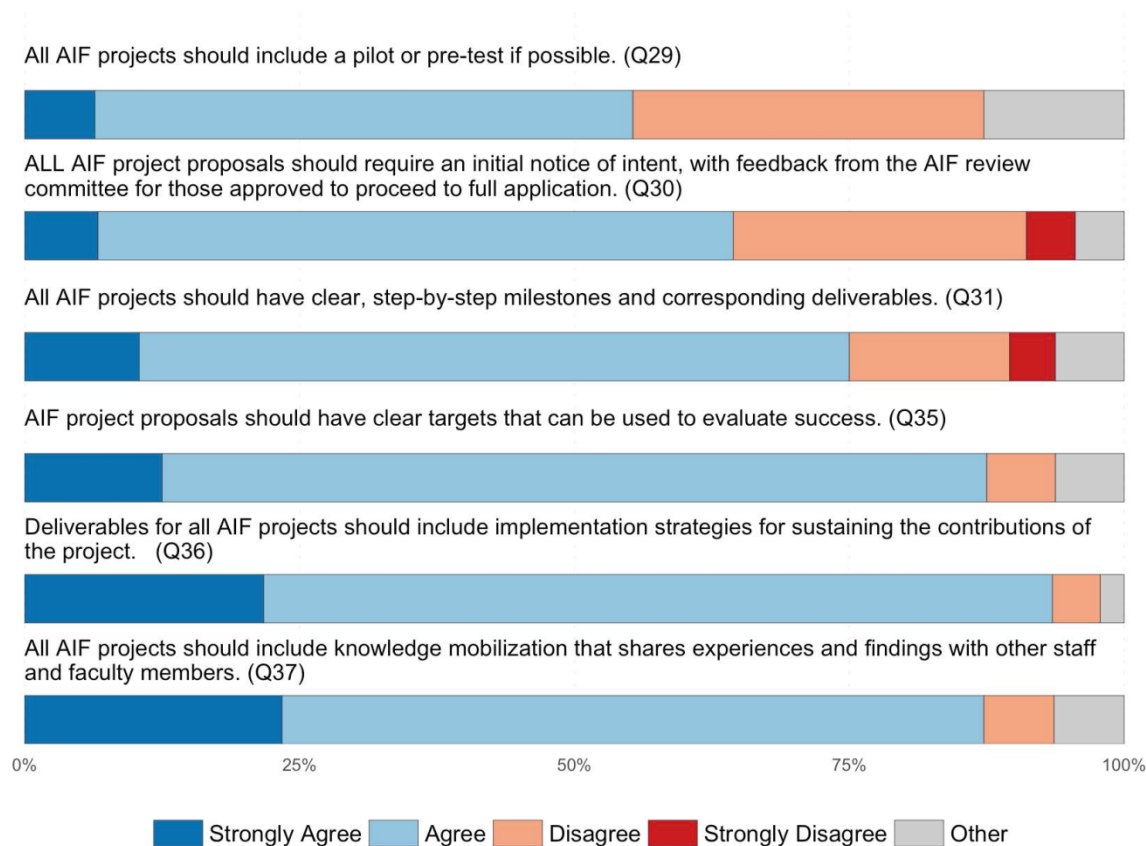
| AIF Phase Two Category I Grants Summary by Faculty | | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| Faculty | Number of Projects | Total Amount |
| AMPD | 3 | \$366,910.00 |
| Education | 1 | \$99,410.00 |
| Environmental Studies | 4 | \$303,359.00 |
| Glendon | 6 | \$530,673.53 |
| Graduate Studies + Research | 1 | \$100,000.00 |
| Health | 5 | \$315,951.50 |
| Health+LA&PS | 1 | \$100,000.00 |
| LA&PS | 4 | \$397,250.00 |
| Lassonde | 6 | \$401,987.00 |
| Osgoode | 1 | \$150,000.00 |
| Schulich | 3 | \$206,168.00 |
| Science | 4 | \$571,100.00 |
| Libraries | 1 | \$248,228.98 |
| Vice-Provost Academic | 1 | \$73,000.00 |
| Total | 41 | \$3,864,038.01 |

AIF Application Process

Project leads were in general very supportive of adapting the application process to better serve the objectives of the AIF program. Graph 2 shows their responses on a range of possibilities that could be integrated into the application. It is notable that support is strongest for proposals being required to better address knowledge mobilization and sustainability.

Graph 2: Support for Changes to the AIF Project Application

Survey Questions on AIF Project Proposal Content



Many project leads and representatives from Dean’s offices highlighted that they think it is important to expand the pool of individuals who can and should submit an application. There was strong support for encouraging Contract Faculty to be better integrated into AIF projects and enable them to be leads on Category 1 projects. One Dean stressed that it makes sense in particular to provide opportunities for Alternative Stream Faculty to take a central role in AIF projects since they have profiles as strong teachers.

Associate Deans and Deans as a group stressed the importance of better aligning the evaluation of project proposals with strategic plans and the University Academic Plan, 2015-2020. As one Associate Dean said, “success requires good guidance from the Dean’s Office.”

Most were sensitive, however, to the pragmatic consideration that innovation is an organic process and that faculty members must take ownership of the project. It also was clear that for some projects, even though the faculty member might be the token project lead, in practice it is a staff member who is driving the project.

Some project leads identified problems with the AIF award decisions. One EE project lead stated bluntly, “the process is not transparent.” Another EE project lead said, “it was not made clear how funding was awarded (e.g. committee membership, process, evaluation criteria).” Another project lead linked these issues to the AIF Steering Committee:

a major issue I see with process, is that it involves few to no experts as far as I know. I believe the decision committees (certainly true of the advisory board) contain a lot of staff and administrators - few or none are in the classroom at all. Why they are making decisions on what constitutes teaching innovation is not clear to me. I think a process closer to peer review, with expert teachers, makes far more sense. This point fits well with the observation from one of the Deans, noted above, that the AIF program should try to better integrate award winning teachers and Alternative Stream faculty members into both the decision making by the AIF Steering Committee and the projects themselves.

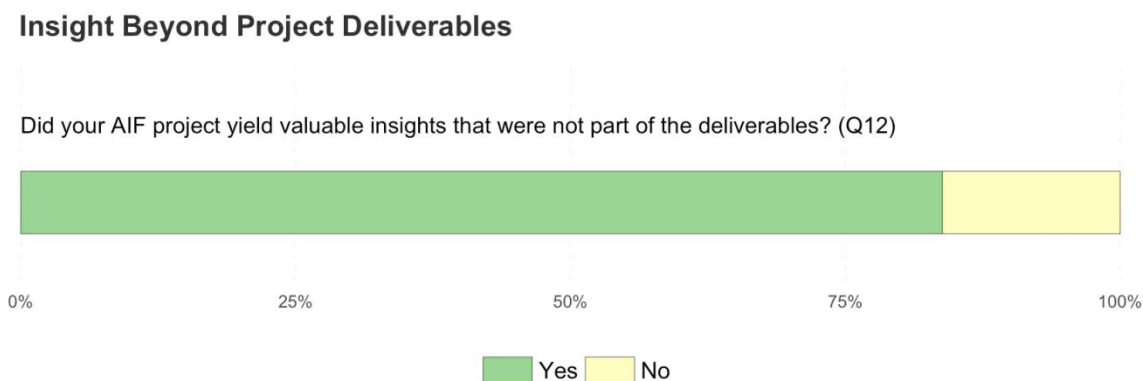
Flexibility and Emergent Design of the Projects

An important concern that was raised by many participants is that the AIF projects have flexibility in order to facilitate experimentation and innovation, as opposed to being too rigid. As one Dean described the AIF vision, it should be constituted as “an experimental kick-start.” An Associate Dean stressed that it was important for projects leads and indeed the AIF Steering Committee to take risks, recognizing that there are lessons to be learned from failures and that

this is risk-taking is a catalyst for innovation and change. One of the project leads similarly emphasized that some projects should have an aspect of “emergent design”, unfolding as the project evolves. More than fifty percent of project leads report that their project involved some sort of pilot.

There is already considerable evidence that this is already occurring in AIF projects. One EE project lead noted, “our project resulted in many publications, performances, academic presentations and collaborations that we didn't even foresee when it started.” As Graph 3 shows, more than eighty percent of project leads reported insights that went beyond the project.

Graph 3: Insights beyond the Deliverables of the AIF Project

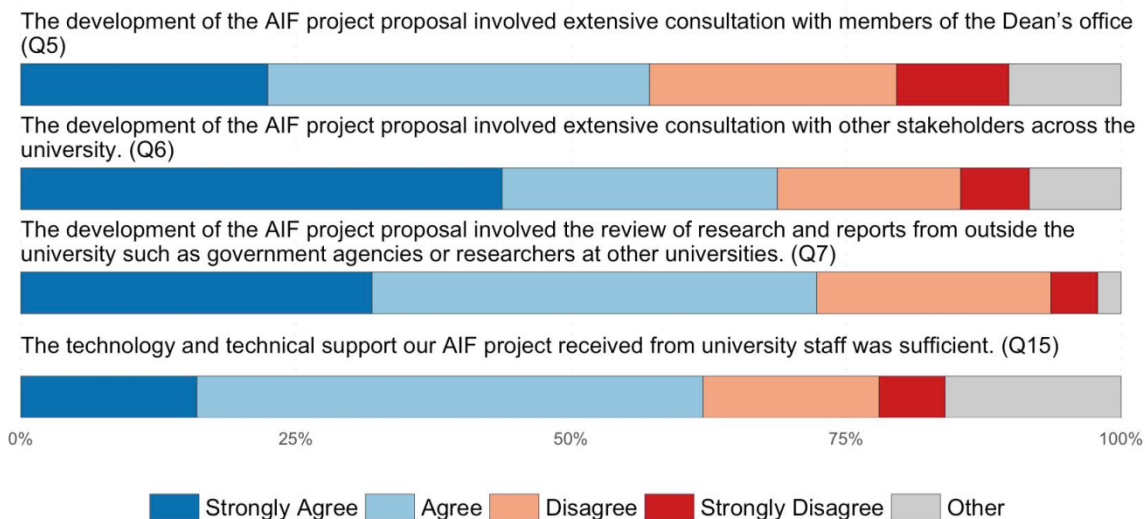


Two important concerns arose about the AIF program on this issue. The one is the difficulty of measuring or anticipating some sort of measurement or indicator that respects the value of flexibility. The other practical concern is that rigid expectations from the AIF program may hinder flexibility. As one project lead expressed it, “It is also true that in their current format, AIF grants involve numerous meetings and lots of reporting on deliverables; there is a danger of best energies being diverted into reporting rather than in to realization of the projects.”

Project Consultation and Research

A useful way to AIF projects to externally funded research projects is to determine the extent of collaboration, consultation, and research literature review was conducted as part of the project. Some projects clearly grew out of a network of faculty members across the university. Some projects were collaborations between Associate Deans in different faculties. Some project leads reported no initial consultation or collaboration. One wrote, “We did not consult on the proposal. But once funds were awarded we held many focus groups and consulted at that time.” Staff were also often consulted. One project lead notes, “For my project, I also consulted with staff in various research and teaching service units in addition to faculty members.” Another project lead states, “We did extensive research in the area of transition pedagogy and did a scan to learn what was happening at other universities.” Graph 3 shows that the majority of project leads did engage in considerable consultation and some degree of review of the research literature.

Survey Questions on AIF Project Development

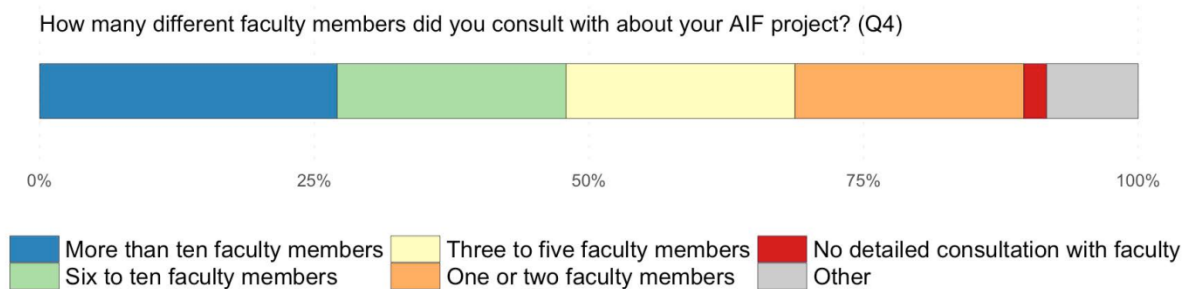


Graph 3: Consultation and Research Literature Review

There was in the course of carrying out the project a very high level of involvement of faculty. Graph 4 shows that a majority of projects involved at least six faculty members.

Graph 4: Faculty Consultations by AIF Project Leads

Faculty Consultation for AIF Projects



The importance of involving faculty members reflects that the projects are in teaching and learning. One project lead explained, “Consulting with faculty members was absolutely key for

our project, given that we are preparing...to raise awareness of our student demographic and of resources at York and to highlight key aspects of transition pedagogy.”

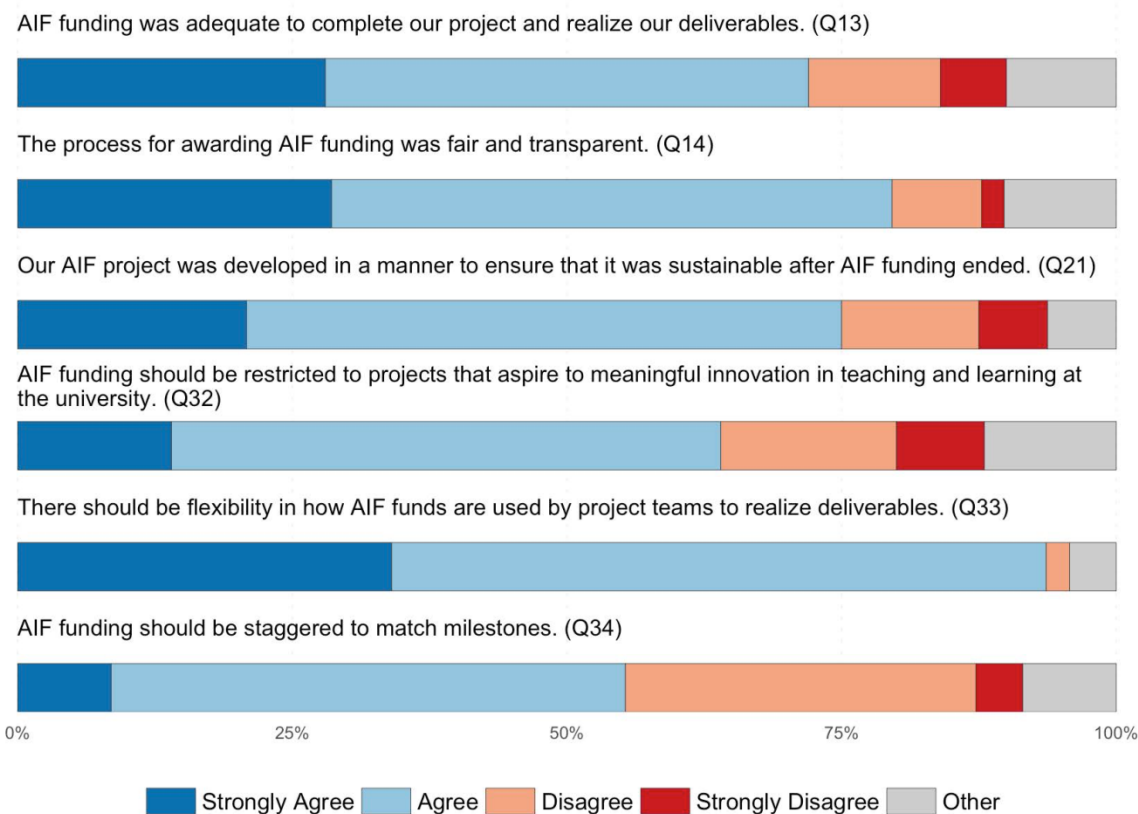
Project Support and funding

In its initial design, support to help make the projects a success was built in. It is clear that project leads were very positive about this support. One EE project lead stated, “The LTS unit should be given an award!” Another says, “Staff were supportive.” There was some criticism that there was less support for sustaining the project’s achievements. A project lead laments, “Our work in [the] community...was pioneering and has grown, but without the support of the University.”

Graph 5 provides a good overview of satisfaction of project leads with the actual level of AIF funding their project received.

Graph 5: The Views of Project Leads on their AIF Funding

Survey Questions on AIF Project Funding



Some project leads were in general satisfied with the funding. One commented, “After funding was approved, we revised the technology to a superior to the one budgeted and we covered the shortfall from other faculty project. we are grateful that we were awarded the amount we budgeted in the proposal.” Another project lead was very critical of the administration of the funds, observing,

This hold back process is insulting to the project leads - treats us like children. Keep in mind there is no workload release for holding these awards, and thus the considerable work to the project lead and others involved is done on a volunteer basis. It is unusual in normal funding to require so much reporting and to have hold backs in funding, and is an

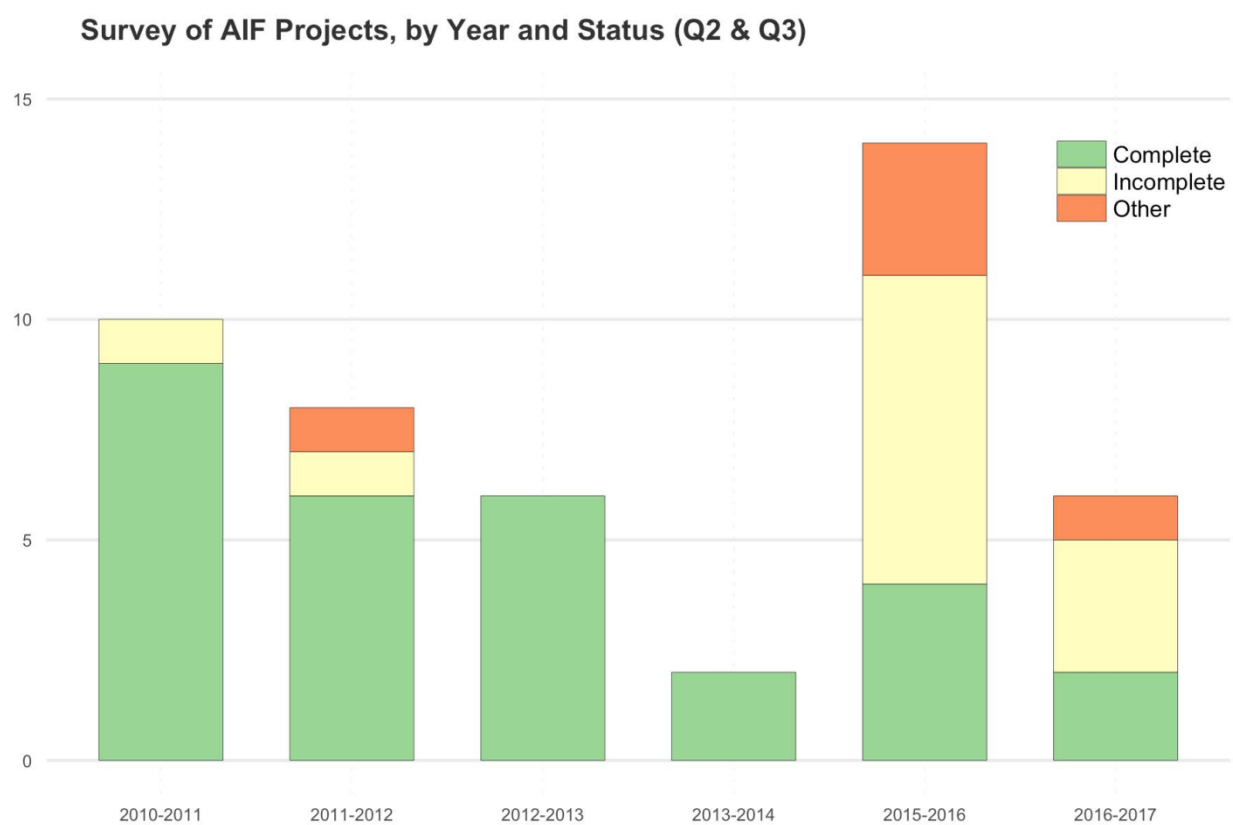
irritant. I suggest funding be modelled on other research funding models such as NSERC/SSHRC. Annual report, annual funding.

It should be noted that in Phase II, a much more streamlined accountability process was implemented. Someone else leading a project on student experiences said, “additional funding to provide incentives to contract faculty would have been useful. “

Project Outputs

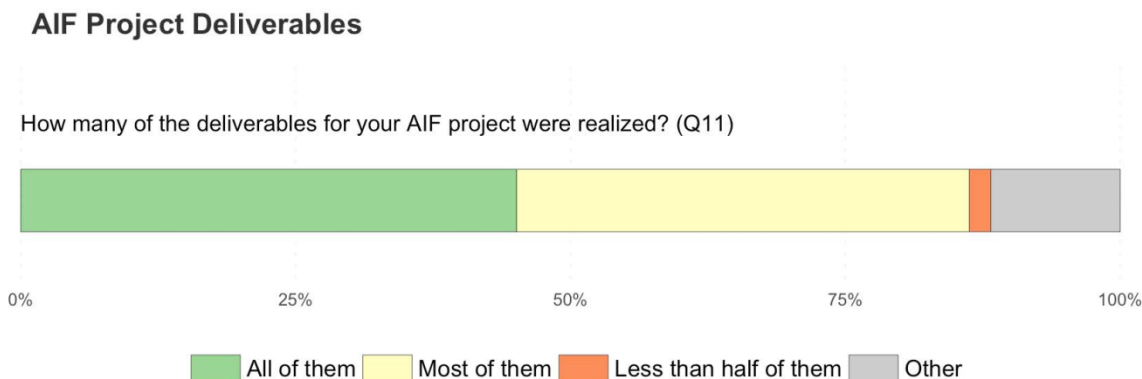
AIF projects have an excellent completion rate, as is evident from Graph 6.

Graph 6: Completion Status of AIF Projects



High completion rates translated into the successful delivery of promised outputs. Almost ninety percent of projects realized most of their deliverables.

Graph 7: AIF Project Deliverables



Deans and Associate Deans generally reported that in their view the deliverables were excellent. One Dean said, “AIF deliverables are very high quality, definitely elevating the quality of teaching and learning.” This is well reflected in a statement from one project lead:

We ended up publishing an academic article co-authored with graduate and undergraduate students on the experience and one student made a film about her experience and presented at an academic conference. Also, many of the projects developed in the course by students went on to get funding through University awards and arts funding from the government to develop further. Also, our guest artists created an award winning film while in residence with us and we were listed in the credits.

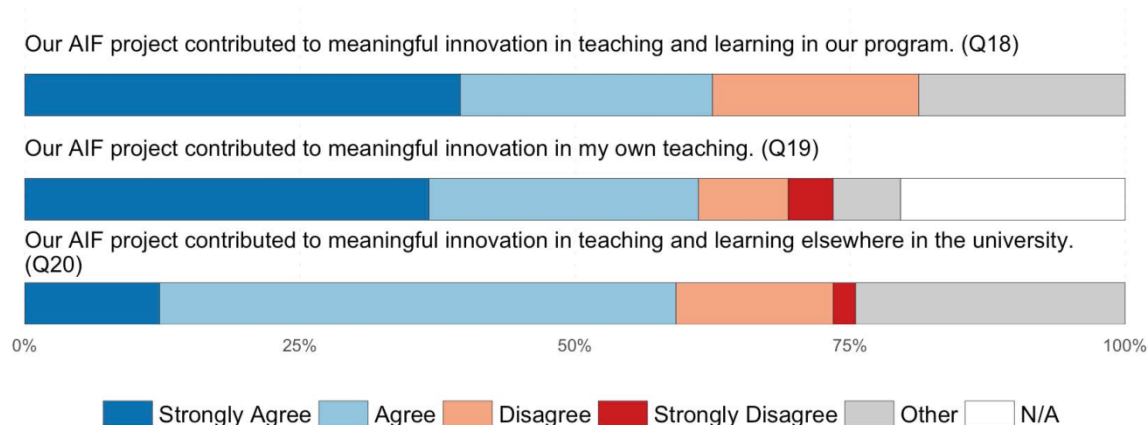
There was, however, some frustration on the part of some project leads with the lack of willingness by other faculty members to engage with the valuable deliverables from their projects.

Impact on Teaching and Student Experiences

Project leads generally believe that their projects have had positive impact on teaching and student experiences. These views are summarized in Graph 8:

Graph 8: Contributions to Teaching

Survey Questions on AIF Projects and Teaching



An EE project lead commented, “the students who were involved in the development of the AIF project have all commented on how important the project was for their understanding of community-based research and digital storytelling.” Another said of her project, “Interest in developing further field experiences during other times of the year, and to iterate student exchanges with Costa Rican students.” A different project lead commented, “We involved four

Faculties in the development of a new first-year course to exemplify transdisciplinarity, experiential learning.” One of the Associate Deans highlighted how some of AIF projects have been especially valuable opportunities for graduate students at the university.

But there is also some evidence that project leads think that the full potential of the projects has not been realized. One charged, “I do think we were ahead of our time, and it is hard to say what came out of this aborted initiative.” Another EE project lead points to significant impact but maintains that it occurred “without much university support.”

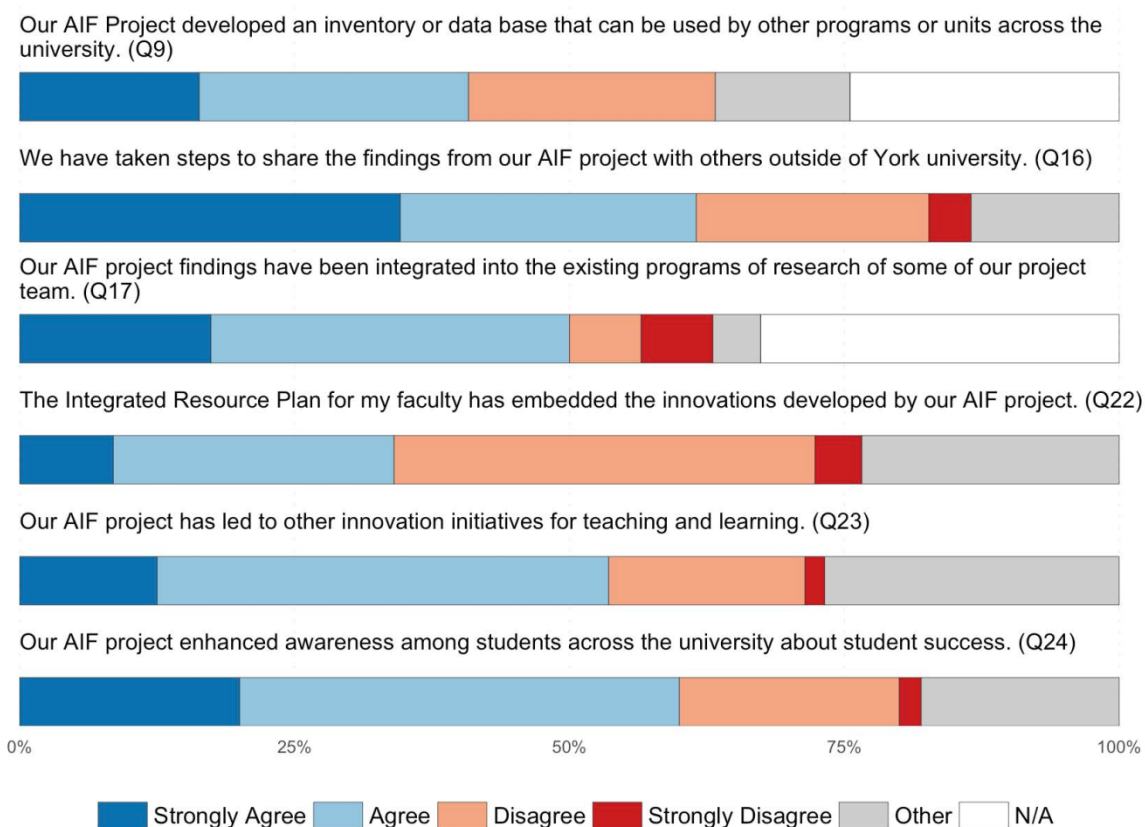
Institutional Impact of AIF Projects

The institutional impacts of AIF projects are tied closely to whether other funding exists to sustain them, the extent to which the projects have been a catalyst for new thinking in university planning, and knowledge mobilization. One Dean characterized the general challenge to be the translation – conceptually and financially – of a project into a faculty or pan-university initiative. Another Dean stressed that the AIF Program needs to harness communication vehicles like Y-File to celebrate and coordinate successes. Many think it is too early to gauge the legacy impact of AIF projects in a university as complex as York.

There is a broad sense from the information in Graph 9 that the deliverables from the AIF have the potential to be impactful.

Graph 9: The Impacts of AIF Projects

Survey Questions on AIF Project Outcomes



Some project leads clearly see their contributions are innovative. One project lead working on student success asserted, “This project is unique at York and perhaps superior to others at other universities.” The lead of one of the student success projects pointed to very tangible achievements: “professional development and preparation for license - offering courses across Ontario (for now) and shortly across Canada - we have requests for grad course delivery abroad. we are planning to offer courses in the new Markham Campus in a virtual classroom environment with live audio/video participation of remote participants - true ‘flip classroom’” Another observes that their project has had a scaffolding effect, “This project has led to a new AIF project on a pan university scale.”

There is a common theme that the AIF needs a better communication strategy. Both a Dean and an Associate Dean suggested that there should be regular reporting to Senate about the successful AIF projects. Others pointed to the drawn out process at the university of undertaking official launches of new tools or platforms that have been nurtured through the AIF. Many project leads appear to have a come-and-get-it approach to their achievements. One project lead said along these lines of thinking that their project, “has not been proliferated yet to the rest of the university, but we are open for demos and sharing our experiences.”

Few participants in evaluation saw themselves as controlling the extent to which AIF projects are sustainable after the AIF funding ends. Some recognized that what is important is that their projects need to be integrated into planning documents, especially given the context of the new SHARP budgeting. Others emphasized that sustainability requires building bridges and sharing resources across faculties. One Associate Dean expressed the view that the key is “buy-in and sustainability by key resource units like Teaching Commons or Careers Office.”

Conclusion and Recommendations

It is generally evident that the AIF Program has been highly effective at funding projects that have delivered what they promised and that those projects are well aligned with an important set of university priorities with regard to teaching and learning. Nonetheless, it is also clear that there is considerable room for the AIF Program to improve on realizing its mission of supporting innovation in teaching and learning at York University.

| Recommendations | Implementation Strategies |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Review the membership of the Academic Initiative Fund Steering Committee | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the number of faculty members • Involve Alternative Stream Faculty and those who have received teaching awards |
| 2. Review the AIF priorities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add a focus on Academic Quality • Strengthen the Internationalization theme |
| 3. Establish a project stream that aligns with the differentiation themes in the Strategic Mandate Agreement 2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consult with university planners about where there is a need for innovation • |
| 4. Improved outreach to possible applicants, including perhaps some funding restricted to first-time applicants or junior faculty | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restrict some funding to first-time applicants or junior faculty • Encourage Alternative Stream faculty members to apply • Support projects that integrate Unit 2 faculty |
| 5. Review categories for AIF Projects | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Close the competition for Category 2 course-focused projects • Consider introducing a category for projects focused on research in teaching and learning at the post-secondary level |
| 6. Review the project allocations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage project proposals with |

| | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>to the Faculty of Liberal Arts & Professional Studies and the Faculty of Graduate Studies</p> | <p>faculty leads from LA&PS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify some of the particular needs of these two faculties that fit within the AIF priorities |
| <p>7. Allow for flexibility in project design</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fund some “big ideas” projects • Embrace “emergent design” |
| <p>8. Improve pan-university awareness of on-going and completed AIF projects</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater investment in the communications strategy, e.g. Y-File, website, fact sheets • Regular reports to Senate and its committees |
| <p>9. Establish awards for successful AIF projects</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Most Innovative” award • “Best Community Engagement” award |
| <p>10. Strengthen end of project reporting and assessment</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop online reporting and assessment instruments • Devote staff resources to ensure project leads submit end of project reports |