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Item for the Action of the Regional Watershed Alliance

TO: Chair and Members of the Regional Watershed Alliance
Wednesday, May 31, 2023 Meeting

FROM: Darryl Gray, Director, Education and Training

**RE: INTRODUCTION AND UPDATE ON PROFESSIONAL ACCESS INTO
EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM (PAIE)**
Introduction and update on PAIE

KEY ISSUE

To share information about the Professional Access into Employment (PAIE) Program, and how the Regional Watershed Alliance (RWA) members can get involved, support and promote the program.

RECOMMENDATION:

WHEREAS the PAIE Program is recruiting newcomer environmental professional program participants for the 2023/24 cohorts;

WHEREAS members of the Regional Watershed Alliance are part of organizations and networks that may offer mentorship opportunities to PAIE program participants;

IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT a presentation by PAIE staff about the program, and recruitment and intake timelines for remaining 2023/24 cohorts be received;

AND THAT RWA members be asked to circulate information about the PAIE Program to their networks and to relevant staff in their respective organizations;

AND FURTHER THAT RWA members consider whether their organizations can offer mentorship opportunities as part of the PAIE Program.

BACKGROUND

PAIE is an innovative Ontario Bridge Training Program led by Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) and funded in part by the Government of Canada and the Government of Ontario. The program has been running since 2006 and operates out of TRCA's Education and Training division.

The PAIE Program is designed to help internationally educated environmental professionals (the participants) launch their careers in Engineering, Geoscience, Environmental Science and Planning in Ontario. The main goals of the PAIE program are employment, licensure or certification and organizational change.

PAIE Coordinators meet with the participants to equip them with an understanding of the local labour market and to support them as they seek to secure employment, gain local experience in their fields, and pursue professional licensing and certification. Central to our work is the goal of encouraging organizational change through the promotion of diversity

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and equity within our own organization and within our partner organizations; and to promote the hiring of internationally educated professionals in the local labour market.

PAIE program components include:

- Ongoing individual job search and employment counselling
- Job search workshops targeted to specific professions
- Canadian Corporate Culture and Communication workshops
- Technical and software workshops targeted to specific professions
- Field excursions
- Mentoring support
- Job matching and employer outreach
- Employment retention support
- Professional licensing and certification support

Funding for the current PAIE Program began in October 2021 and will end in September 2024. The intake target for this funding cycle is 120 program participants over 3 cohorts.

Cohort 1: Mar – Dec 2022, 40 participants

Cohort 2: Feb – Nov 2023, 40 participants

Cohort 3: Jan – Sep 2024, 40 participants

RATIONALE

The PAIE program was initially developed in response to strong interest from many newcomers who contacted TRCA about volunteer opportunities to gain exposure to local environmental work. As a large and well-known employer in the environmental field with connections to industry and government, an extensive professional network and a robust technical staff base eager to share their expertise, TRCA has been well-positioned to assist newcomer environmental professionals.

Since its inception, PAIE has benefited from an incredible amount of support from TRCA staff. Individuals from across the organization have provided mentoring, occupation specific training, volunteer, internship, and employment opportunities; and connections to employers and other industry contacts to help participants grow their local professional networks.

Number of TRCA staff engaged as PAIE mentors since 2014: **67**

Number of TRCA staff engaged as instructors since 2014: **32**

Number of work experience opportunities provided at TRCA since 2014: **53**

This has contributed greatly to the Program's success in helping participants launch their careers in Ontario. Employment success rates have remained consistently strong with 80% or more participants in each cohort obtaining employment in their fields and reporting an average 300% salary increase post program.

Internal staff collaboration with PAIE has been a win-win situation for all involved. Below are testimonials from some of our current TRCA mentors, instructors, internship supervisors, hiring managers and program advisors.

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“Since 2010, I have provided a profession specific workshop on the topic of Environmental

Assessment legislation and regulation to each PAIE cohort and I will continue to offer it to 2020-2025 PAIE participants. I offer up to 12 volunteer placements for PAIE participants each year, whereby my staff mentor and inform newcomers of Canadian standards and Practices as well as provide participants with the technical requirements and communication skills necessary to succeed in the Canadian workplace.

I have assisted participants in gaining meaningful employment in the industry, and sourced Planning candidates for employment in my department. In turn, PAIE participants have enriched TRCA's diversity. In particular, PAIE candidates have made a substantial impression on staff in my department, where we also learn about international environmental planning from this very talented pool of internationally trained individuals.”

~ Beth Williston, Associate Director, Infrastructure Planning and Permits

“My team at Property, Asset, and Risk Management Department has been a long-term supporter and contributor to the PAIE Program led by TRCA. Our support included participation in PAIE events, training sessions and information/mentoring meetings. We organized and led field trips for PAIE program participants and developed internships for Environmental Technicians and Construction Specialists. More than 15 participants have been interviewed and 6 have been hired into various internships and employment with the PARM team.”

~ Aaron D’Souza, Senior Manager, Contract Services & Asset Maintenance, Property Assets and Risk Management

“As the Senior Manager, Hydrogeology and Drinking Water Source Protection at the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA), I have been a long-time supporter and contributor to the PAIE Program led by TRCA. Since PAIE's inception in 2006, I have facilitated individual and group information sessions to provide technical instruction, interview support, mentoring and consultation; and have provided Hydrogeology Internships for PAIE clients with my team.

Having mentored many PAIE participants in the past, I can confirm the quality of the candidates and helpfulness of PAIE staff in ensuring a positive experience. The coaching, screening, and matching services offered by program staff are highly targeted and helpful in minimizing the workload involved in recruiting and mentoring talent.”

~ Don Ford, Senior Manager, Hydrogeology and Drinking Water Source Protection, Engineering Services

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“As a graduate of the 2010 PAIE Program, I have been delighted to support the success of Internationally Trained Individuals in the local environment sector through my contributions as a PAIE Program Mentor, Hiring Manager, and Instructor for current and previous installments of the PAIE Program.

As a Mentor, I meet with individual or groups of participants to share my knowledge of local water resources engineering principles and practices, advising on matters pertaining to technical knowledge gaps and training needs, and connecting participants to contacts within TRCA and my external professional network to help identify opportunities in the field.

I have hired and directly supervised PAIE Program Participants and was very satisfied with their work. This has further solidified my impression of PAIE Program Participants as highly capable, knowledgeable, and dedicated professionals.”

~ Dilnesaw Chekol (PhD), Senior Engineer, Water Resources Engineering, Engineering Services

“Since 2015, I have mentored over 20 PAIE program participants in various settings and participated in two employer panel events organized by the PAIE team. Most of my mentees have successfully transitioned to full-time salaried employment. I also helped the PAIE team develop one volunteering and one short-term employment position in my team, which helped newcomer professionals learn Canadian corporate culture and understand requirements of GIS job in a conservation authority. Under my supervision, the GIS team has delivered numerous technical workshops and demonstrations on GIS topics to PAIE clients.”

~ Dan Clayton, Manager, Geospatial Services, Information Technology & Records Management

Due to COVID restrictions since March of 2020 community, employment and settlement services shifted to virtual service delivery. This change to virtual service delivery made it initially more difficult for TRCA to connect with eligible participants and meet our intake targets. To mitigate this, the PAIE team have been conducting outreach using a variety of online methods including social media channels, website and digital newsletter ads, email campaigns, weekly virtual information sessions and participation in virtual job fairs. Despite our virtual outreach efforts, telephone correspondence and more recently - in person site visits to referring agencies and attendance at relevant in person events now that the sector has reopened for in person service delivery, it has remained difficult for us to reach our intake goals.

The PAIE Program would benefit from increased awareness of this valuable training and mentorship opportunity across all of TRCA's organizations and from circulation through RWA member networks and organizations. Similarly, given the considerable environmental sector expertise represented within the RWA membership, staff would welcome interest from RWA members, their organizations, or networks in offering mentoring to PAIE participants. Mentoring can include single in-person or virtual informational interviews with

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an individual or small group of participants, as well as ongoing in person or virtual mentoring of an individual or small group of participants for a specified term or job shadowing.

RWA Committee members or members of their networks are encouraged to reach out to their respective Human Resource professionals such as their Chief Human Resource Officer or relevant hiring managers to apprise them of the PAIE program and opportunity.

If there is interest that exists on behalf of the organization, the following TRCA staff indicated below should be contacted so as to ensure prompt follow up on any potential interest:

Michelle Benford, Supervisor, Community Outreach & Education
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(416) 509-1052

Peter Dudka, Coordinator, Community Outreach & Education
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It is hoped that the above approach will help to increase uptake in support of the PAIE program objectives.

Relationship to TRCA's 2022-2034 Strategic Plan

This report supports the following Pillar and Outcomes set forth in TRCA's 2023-2034 Strategic Plan:

Pillar 3 Community Prosperity:

3.3 Informed citizens are conservation champions

Pillar 3 Community Prosperity:

3.4 Inspired communities take environmental action

FINANCIAL DETAILS

The PAIE Program is an Employment Ontario Program funded in part by the Government of Canada and the Government of Ontario through the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development.

DETAILS OF WORK TO BE DONE

As a result of low intake during the first cohort of this funding cycle, PAIE will need to recruit another 79 eligible participants into the program between April 2023 and January 2024.

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Date: March 16, 2023