



# **BramptonU Business Sector Stakeholder Engagement Final Report**

**Jaipaul Massey-Singh  
Katharine Partridge**

**Stakeholder Research Associates Canada  
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**Contact:**

Katharine Partridge  
Stakeholder Research Associates Canada  
kpartridge@stakeholderresearch.com  
905 344 0033

## Executive Summary

In late summer 2020, Stakeholder Research Associates Canada (SRA) was retained by the City of Brampton to undertake stakeholder engagement activities within Brampton's business community to 1) build awareness of the City's BramptonU initiative, 2) better understand perceptions of the proposal, and 3) determine ways in which local businesses might become more fully involved in the development of the university.

To solicit feedback from businesses, SRA coordinated a series of workshops held between December 2020 and early February 2021. Workshops were conducted virtually due to COVID-19 social distancing restrictions. Sixty-five businesses across a variety of sectors, including healthcare, advanced manufacturing, logistics, technology and food were invited to participate. SRA consulted with City of Brampton staff and collaborated with the Economic Development Office to identify key businesses to invite based on such criteria as being a significant employer or past expression of interest in post-secondary development in Brampton.

In total 28 individuals representing 19 organizations participated, representing a cross-section of sectors and size (Appendix 1). In *Section 3.0 Workshop Outcomes*, we provide an overview of the diverse and insightful perspectives shared across nine themes:

- |   |                                  |
|---|----------------------------------|
| 1. Readiness of Graduates                   | 5. Work-Integrated Learning      |
| 2. Gaps in Skills                           | 6. Virtual vs. In-Class Learning |
| 3. Local Options                            | 7. The Value of Partnerships     |
| 4. Opportunity for Immigrants and Newcomers | 8. The Future of Work            |
|   | 9. Additional Observations       |

In *Section 4.0 Recommendations*, we provide recommended next step based on the insights gained from the business community through the workshops:

- **Continue Stakeholder Engagement**, to draw perspectives from a larger pool of businesses that are vital to the Brampton economy, through, for example, deeper dives into subject-matter expertise; across a broader catchment area; using quantitative business engagement surveys
- **Develop a Communication Plan**, to build awareness through regular, targeted updates to the business community
- **Conduct a Labour Market Analysis**, to understand the implications of the larger trends in the economy and society that may shape the business and education landscape in Brampton's future.

## 1.0 Introduction: Brampton U Business Engagement Overview

In late summer 2020, Stakeholder Research Associates Canada (SRA) was retained by the City of Brampton to undertake stakeholder engagement activities within Brampton's business community to 1) build awareness of the City's BramptonU initiative, 2) better understand perceptions of the proposal, and 3) determine ways in which local businesses might become more fully involved in the development of the university.

This engagement built on earlier efforts by the City of Brampton:

September 2019 - Brampton City Council directed staff to proceed with steps towards developing and establishing a university in the City (BramptonU). As part of this work City Council requested that expertise be retained to advocate for support for the establishment of a BramptonU at the provincial level and initiate work on potential university program offerings that reflect the types of identified and required skills in the future economy.

December 2019 - A telephone survey of 1,066 adults living in Peel Region by an independent firm found that 78% of Peel Region residents (79% among Brampton residents) wanted university options close to home and that 80% of Brampton residents want more online learning opportunities.

December 2019 - Mayor Patrick Brown and Brampton councillors along with local MPP's hosted a Tele-Town Hall in which over 14,000 Brampton residents participated. Polling during the event showed that 83% of participants felt it was very important that Brampton have its own university.

July 2020 - The City of Brampton made public the key strategic elements of its proposal to bring a full accredited university to Brampton by making the following documents available online at [www.bramptonu.ca](http://www.bramptonu.ca):

- Governance Model Green Paper
- Academic Model Green Paper
- Economic Strategy Green Paper

These papers highlight how the envisioned BramptonU align with Ontario's updated Major Capacity Expansion Policy Framework, which the Province uses as a guide for post-secondary education expansion.

## 2.0 Methodology

SRA undertook the stakeholder engagement project in two phases – the first, extending a broad reach to Brampton stakeholder groups and the second focusing on the Brampton business community.

### 2.1 Phase 1

In Phase 1, leaders from a broad range of organizations were engaged in one-on-one conversations, first to bring them up to date on the status of the BramptonU initiative and then to discuss their perceptions, levels of support and how they might become further involved in the development of a BramptonU. Stakeholders from four broad categories were engaged:

1. Post-secondary institutions
2. Educational partners
3. Community institutions
4. Employers and businesses

Based on observations in this phase, a second phase of engagement was undertaken to gain a deeper understanding of the perspectives of local employers, with the aim to help ensure the BramptonU strategy was in alignment with the needs of the business community.

### 2.2 Phase 2

To solicit feedback from businesses, SRA coordinated a series of workshops, which were conducted virtually due to COVID-19 social distancing restrictions. The objective of sessions was to provide the City of Brampton with key strategic insights from employers and business owners pertaining to post-secondary opportunities, as well as priorities for a BramptonU development.

In order to provide participants with multiple options to attend and to maximize registrations, workshops were organized on several dates in December 2020 and January/February, 2021 during and after business hours. Workshops were scheduled on the following dates:

December 2 <sup>nd</sup> , 2020	January 27 <sup>th</sup> , 2021
December 4 <sup>th</sup> , 2020	January 28 <sup>th</sup> , 2021
December 8 <sup>th</sup> , 2020	February 2 <sup>nd</sup> , 2021
December 9 <sup>th</sup> , 2020	February 3 <sup>rd</sup> , 2021

In addition to the workshops, conversations were scheduled with participants who could not attend a group session or with businesses that had multiple individuals taking part in the discussion.

### 2.2.1 Workshop Approach

Workshops were led by SRA to facilitate dialogue and moderate discussion. Presentation materials were prepared to guide the workshop discussions (Appendix 2). Participants were also advanced the City's BramptonU green papers for context and background.

The workshop conversations focused on three key themes:

- Readiness of new graduates to meet the needs of employers
- Perceived impact of BramptonU to the business community
- How BramptonU could help employers respond to 'future of work' needs

In addition to members of Brampton's business community, workshop participants included City of Brampton staff from the Economic Development Office and the Office of the CAO as observers.

All workshops were recorded with participant permission for reporting purposes.

### 2.2.2 Workshop Invitees

Sixty-five businesses across a variety of sectors including healthcare, advanced manufacturing, logistics, technology and food were invited to participate in workshops. SRA consulted with City of Brampton staff and collaborated with the Economic Development Office to identify key businesses to invite based on such criteria as being a significant employer or past expression of interest in post-secondary development in Brampton.

## 3.0 Workshop Outcomes

In total 28 individuals representing 19 organizations across a wide cross-section of sectors and size participated in the BramptonU workshops (Appendix 1). In this section, we provide an overview of the diverse and insightful perspectives shared across nine themes:

- |   |                                  |
|---|----------------------------------|
| 1. Readiness of Graduates                   | 5. Work-Integrated Learning      |
| 2. Gaps in Skills                           | 6. Virtual vs. In-Class Learning |
| 3. Local Options                            | 7. The Value of Partnerships     |
| 4. Opportunity for Immigrants and Newcomers | 8. The Future of Work            |
|   | 9. Additional Observations       |

### 3.1 Readiness of Graduates

Participants generally agreed that colleges and universities are equipping graduates with the technical skills to do the job but are not preparing them for the everyday realities of the workplace. Addressing this issue will be critical for BramptonU to support employer needs.

- *Graduates come out of programs fairly skilled with fresh eyes ready to take on the world but lack the business savvy: knowing how to address people, how to communicate in a business tone*
- *(Graduates lack) understanding of how a business is run and the internal workings of a business. Skillsets are good but business acumen is lacking.*
- *Finding graduates is not a problem – (the challenge is) making sure they have experience for some of our opportunities*
- *The biggest challenge is always that students have good fundamental knowledge but the ramp-up to execute in a business context can be quite challenging*

### 3.2 Gaps in Skills

Participants agreed that communications, teamwork experience, problem solving and project management are skills that most graduates lack when entering the workforce. While businesses understand the need to invest to train and develop new hires, they believed graduates should come equipped with these core skills. The lack of proficiency in these areas was cited as a cost to businesses in productivity and resources.

- *People skills that need to be integrated into the education process - you need to be able to work on a team*
- *Problem solving is important, (learning to) come together to work towards common goals*
- *Project management is a talent I think every graduate should have - had to go outside country to hire project management*
- *Soft skills are important for someone who is going to grow into the role – teamwork, leadership, empathy*

### 3.3 Local Options

Participants agreed that increasing post-secondary options in Brampton is critical for their business success, both to provide greater access to hiring pools of skilled individuals and also to ensure access to ongoing training and skill-development – a critical element in attracting and retaining employees.

- *A BramptonU could potentially mitigate the disadvantage of recruiting from outside the GTA: Students in co-op don't necessarily want to travel*
- *Having a university in our general area would help with the (recruiting) pipeline. We're currently recruiting from downtown Toronto, from Hamilton, etc. (It's) advantageous to recruit locally*
- *Access to talent pools – we take it for granted in the GTA that we'll have an hour commute. University towns attract businesses, and businesses attract students/talent pool, which can lead to entrepreneurs*
- *We have a lot of people in the industry who live and work local – it would be good to have a university nearby if they want to up-skill; our company loses a lot of people who up-skill elsewhere; a local university might lead to longer employee tenure*

### 3.4 Opportunity for Immigrants and Newcomers

Participants agreed that Brampton has an abundance of talent due to its immigrant and newcomer populations but isn't fully capitalizing on this resource due to a lack of education options for foreign-trained professionals. Business representatives across all sectors, and specifically in healthcare, see an opportunity for BramptonU to differentiate its offerings by addressing skill-shortages through programs that allow for skill upgrading and credential fast tracking.

- *We see accelerated degree program students – they come in with experience from another country. They apply to an accelerated program through various universities, and they do clinical placements with us. They move through the clinical programs quickly. It would be a great asset to have these accelerated programs locally*
- *(Foreign-trained professionals) have the background but they need the hands-on exposure to the Canadian healthcare system*
- *New immigrants may be technically proficient and well trained but specific upgrading of skills may still be necessary*
- *There are gaps in the system – we're hiring people with advanced degrees to do basic lab work because they don't have Canadian credentials*
- *(A BramptonU) has a huge opportunity to pioneer how we accelerate immigrants into the workforce*

### 3.5 Work-Integrated Learning

Participants were unanimous in their support for increasing work-integrated learning opportunities through a BramptonU, whether through co-op programs, internships or by bringing the workplace to the classroom. Benefits identified included improving readiness for the workplace and identifying top prospects for hiring.

- *Great if we could have students who we could bring on as co-op: A co-op program would help bring them up to speed over time while they are studying*
- *Every co-op student that does well pretty much gets hired*
- *Co-op programs are a recruitment tool – we invest in them. We are a stable company, pay pretty well, people are proud to work with us*
- *Had success with this because students are able to apply learning in a real setting and then go back to learn more and continue to apply that knowledge. Those grads in particular have a much better readiness to embrace work when they graduate*
- *We worked with [a local] college and had some of our experiences embedded in curriculum. Students tackle some of issues the organization is tackling. Students explore the larger, live environment through case studies, and tackle challenges of the organization – see things from another perspective*
- *Not having co-ops experience sets new hires behind when they're onboarded*

### 3.6 Virtual vs. In-Class Learning

Participants saw the benefits of both online and in-class modes of delivery and generally believed a blend of the two could be effective. In particular, online education was thought

effective for teaching technical skills whereas in-class was better suited for supporting the development of the interpersonal skills identified in Section 3.2 *Gaps in Skills*. Regardless of modality participants agreed that flexibility and class schedules that suit mature students and those that do shift work is critical.

- *In-person learning offers the advantage of interaction with fellow students, which can lead to entrepreneurial partnership, and other [skill-building] group activities such as working in team situations, group projects*
- *Flexibility is needed, especially with mature students who are looking for balance*
- *Programs need to take into account shift work in terms of availability of programs, certainly for healthcare and logistics industries*
- *A combination of in-person and online is probably best*
- *There's probably a sweet spot, a balance*

### 3.7 The Value of Partnerships

Participants recognized the value in developing partnerships with post-secondary institutions and are looking to BramptonU to work closely with industry to help businesses stay competitive. Many saw a further collaboration between university, industry and government as a means to open markets and develop new products.

- *Universities tend to miss who the customer is. Who is the customer? The students (and parents paying tuition) are the customers, but what are you getting them in the door for? Getting them ready for your other customer, the business folks*
- *For a symbiotic relationship, some kind of formal engagement with organizations in the community is necessary - having a board or advisory board. Plus keeping current with other institutions and making sure that BramptonU is not insular and reinventing the wheel*
- *To be current and stay current is to be aligned with employers – business competitiveness depends on talent; employers need to be engaged with the university in shaping or keeping the university current on how they adjust their curriculum – the university needs to be nimble. To think about not just the industries that are here, but of what can be – think about ways to innovate itself. Waterloo is a good model – need to have a good cadence with employers and to have its own insight into the future marketplace*
- *Step into the gaps that have been left behind by lack of government funding on an ongoing basis. Also, the notion of access to tools in post-secondary institution or space, access all resources there from brains to classrooms in order to build better partnerships between industries and universities*
- *We align the needs of our innovation pipeline with the schools' specialties – e.g., UofT on autonomous vehicle movement*
- *Sandbox learning would be well subscribed by employers – there is a famous sandbox in Chicago where manufacturers can go and try new things and have access to students, technicians and professors; can test, fail fast, adapt and bring ideas back to shop floor*
- *Universities are a valuable resource: Businesses will pay – there's a business opportunity for BramptonU. It's a two-way street*



### 3.8 Future of Work

When asked to think about the future of work, employers agreed that technology would be the engine that drives their businesses forward and would like BramptonU to include it as an area of concentration.

- *Green technologies are a big focus. As utilities focus on green technologies, they're going to need software – energy sharing, distributive energy sharing programs, more of a demand on infrastructure. There's definitely going to be some changes there. In terms of energy demand just from electric cars: "It's almost like having another house for every house." Just as the pandemic lockdown has shifted the use of electricity to the home*
- *Today a lot around sustainability, entrepreneurship and technology – how do we capitalize on those?*
- *Looking to the future, five to 10 years down the road, the backbone of the health system will have a technology backbone*
- *No matter what sector, technology will be important*

### 3.9 Additional Observations

Participants were enthusiastic about sharing their perspectives on the value of a new BramptonU and the attributes that might determine its success.

- *Additional skills from courses outside of (one's) major: make you more well rounded, more interesting, brings more perspectives, brings other passions. Also helps with work-life balance, helps to avoid burnout*
- *The more regional (post-secondary schools) the better*
- *There are 16 colleges and universities along the Brampton-Waterloo 401 corridor. So something unique is required*
- *To bring value to businesses, look at existing slate of institutions and in partnership with new institutions, look at how you can ramp up faster but leverage what we have. "The need is now."*
- *We haven't leveraged the Town and Gown part, the community part of the relationship yet; it's important to give back from a business into the community and students through mentoring, helping students develop their network, sharing your learning; helping students prepare for the workforce. BramptonU needs to create the process to leverage this*
- *Retention and attraction at my company is excellent because new recruits can further develop within the company. If a university could help create similar opportunities, other companies in the area would also be able to benefit by attracting and retaining talent*
- *An investment in a university is an investment in a community resource beyond just the school – liveability, space for arts and culture, support for restaurants and amenities*

## 4.0 Recommendations

Based on the insights gained through our workshops with Brampton businesses, we recommend the following next steps:

### 4.1 Continue Stakeholder Engagement

The workshops conducted through this engagement captured a diverse selection of employers and organizations in Brampton. Based on the enthusiastic participation, we recommend that additional business engagement activities be undertaken to continue to draw perspectives from a larger pool of businesses that are vital to the Brampton economy. Among the approaches to consider:

- a) Develop 'sub-committees' of participants to provide subject-matter expertise on specific action items associated with the development of BramptonU, such as learning models, sector-level insights (e.g. healthcare, manufacturing), and diversity and inclusivity
- b) Expand the catchment area for participants to neighbouring communities (e.g. Mississauga, Vaughn) where businesses may benefit from BramptonU or might consider expanding to Brampton because of a BramptonU
- c) Engage businesses through surveys to capture quantitative data and efficiently increase the number of businesses engaged

### 4.2 Develop a Communication Plan

Many participants commented on a lack of awareness of the BramptonU initiative or of the other recent commitments the City of Brampton has made in the area of post-secondary education, such as the expansion of Algoma University's footprint in the downtown and the partnerships with Ryerson to establish a Cybersecurity Catalyst and a business incubator in the City. We recommend that the City capitalize on the willingness of the business sector to be engaged and meaningfully contribute to the development of BramptonU by targeting regular (perhaps quarterly) communication updates on progress and opportunities to provide input.

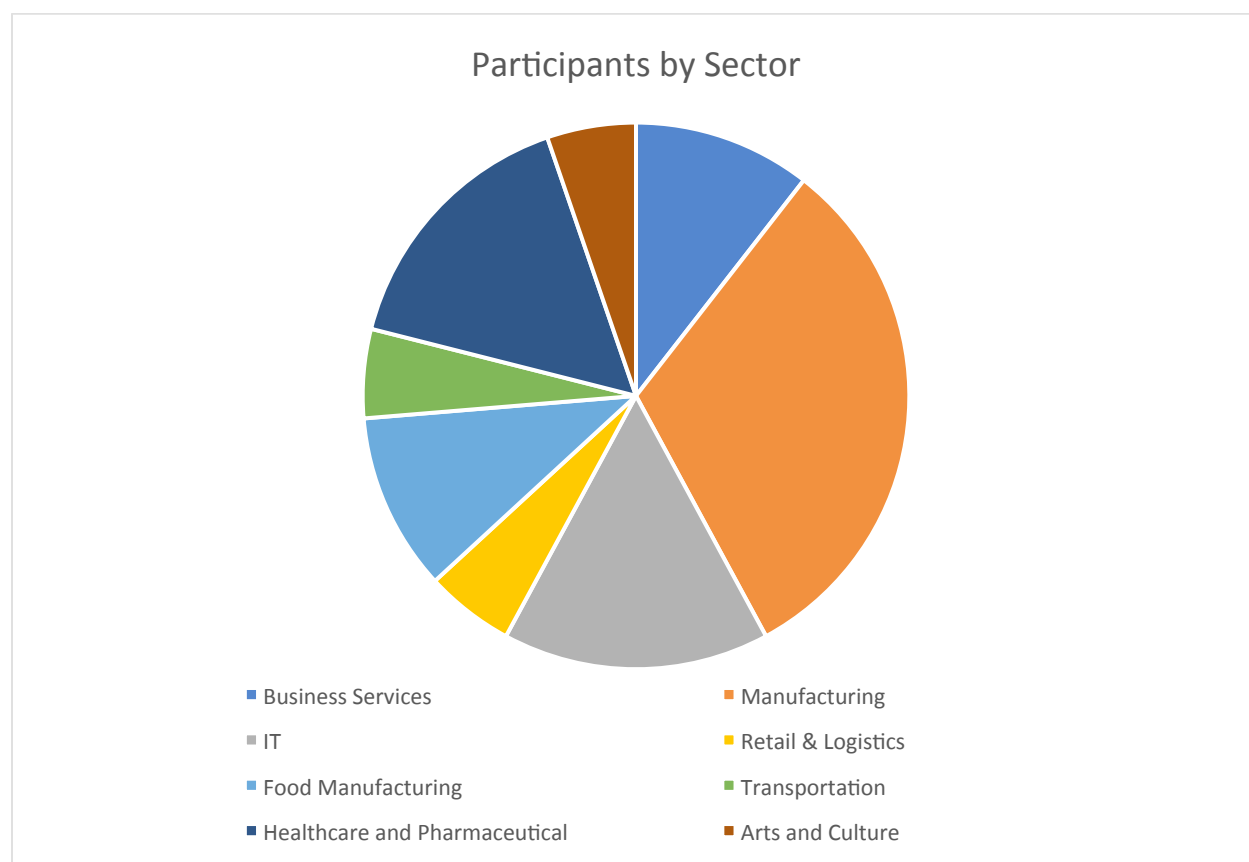
### 4.3 Conduct a Labour Market Analysis

Workshop participants provided valuable insights into the impact a BramptonU could have to their organizations or sectors. There is also value in analyzing larger trends in economy and society that may shape the business and education landscape in Brampton's future. A third-party labour market analysis, considering global and national economic forecasts, workforce demand and technology trends may provide important context for the local perspectives being obtained.

## APPENDIX 1 – Participants

The following businesses and employers participated in the discussions that formed this report:

ABB Robotics	EMC Canada	Peel Halton Workforce Dev.
Almag Aluminum	Fiat Chrysler	Rose Orchestra
Brampton Board of Trade	Give and Go Prepared Foods	Survalent
Brampton Engineering	IT Weapons	Taro Pharmaceuticals
Canadian Tire	MDA Robotics	Toronto Pearson
Coca-Cola Bottling	NGen	William Osler Health Services
Dynacare		



## APPENDIX 2 – Presentation

The following presentation was used to guide discussions during workshops.

### BramptonU Workshop

#### Workshop Agenda

For today's discussion:

- Introductions and Objectives
- BramptonU Update
- Conversations
  - Readiness of graduates
  - Impact of a University
  - Future of work
- Wrap-Up and Next Steps

Our objective is for you to leave feeling informed about BramptonU and for us to be informed on your views



## BramptonU - Background

Timeline	Activity
September 2019	Brampton City Council directed staff to proceed towards developing and establishing a University
October 2019	Expertise secured to explore partnerships, advocacy and policy
November 2019	BramptonU movement launched
December 2019	Tele-town Hall hosted by Mayor Brown, Councillors and local MPPs had 14,000 participants Telephone survey conducted by Mainstreet Research – survey revealed 79% of Brampton Residents wanted a University close to home
January 2020	Two Town Halls were held to provide an update to the public and receive feedback on the project
February 2020	Initial business community engagement and information session held to engage developers
March 2020	Delay in submitting the proposal to the Province due to COVID-19 Pandemic
April 2020	Continued discussions with the Province showed that there was encouragement for the City to continue with its proposal to the Province
July 2020	City released a preview of key strategic elements of its proposal which highlighted alignment with the Provinces updated Major Capacity Expansion Policy Framework



## BramptonU - Next Steps

- Continued advocacy to the Province
- Continued engagement with world renowned academic institutions for potential partnerships
- Continued stakeholder engagement with local businesses



## Breakout Session 1

### Readiness of Graduates

In your breakout groups consider the following:

- How well are current graduates meeting your company needs?
  - Are they ready to work?
  - Do they have the right skills?
  - What have the impacts in readiness/not being ready been?
- In what ways could graduates be better prepared to meet your company needs?
  - What skills could be improved?
  - What do you as an employer have to invest?



## Breakout Session 2

### Impact of BramptonU

In your breakout groups consider the following:

- What impacts would BramptonU mean to your business?
  - Access to talent pools
  - Entrepreneurship and start-ups
  - Ongoing education and training
- What models make sense for you?
  - Traditional classroom vs. online
  - Degree programs vs. other credentials
  - Day/Night/Experiential



## Breakout Session 3

### Future of Work

In your breakout groups consider the following:

- What are your emerging needs?
  - How can BramptonU support the future of your company or industry?
  - What would you like to be able to do that BramptonU could support?
- How would you like to be engaged?
  - What role do you see for business in a University?
  - What types or partnerships or other relationships would your company like to have with a BramptonU?



## Wrap-Up and Next Steps

Additional Comments – What didn't we capture?

Sharing the learnings

Next steps in the process and keeping engaged

