OTF Coding Connections FAQs

OTF Coding Connections is a professional development initiative of the Ontario Teachers' Federation, funded by the Government of Canada as part of Code to Learn. *OTF Coding Connections* provides an opportunity for teachers to become involved in collaborative learning, research and leadership with a focus on computational thinking and coding. All projects are developed through an inquiry approach and culminate in a resource/product/presentation that can be shared with other teachers in Ontario and online. *OTF Coding Connections* consists of teams of two or more educators who collaboratively develop a project based on a self-assessment of their professional learning goals to enhance teaching practice.

How are the *OTF Coding Connections* teams created?

Teachers choose the people with whom they wish to work. The *OTF Coding Connections* team leader will take the initiative to seek out others who might share a similar interest, work effectively with others and bring diversity of perspective to the question(s) at hand.

The *OTF Coding Connections* team members can be from the same school/department or from various schools/boards. The team should collaborate to complete the application form.

What is the deadline for applying?

Your application is due **on or before Friday, February 14, 2020 @ 5:00 pm.**

What is the budget for each *OTF Coding Connections* project?

Each *OTF Coding Connections* team must submit a preliminary budget with their application. The budget must not exceed $5,000 per team. This money can be used for release time, professional development, resources, materials or any other reasonable, related expenses which the team deems appropriate. Note that funds **cannot** be used to purchase hardware for your project, so you will need to use existing technology to participate.

How will the *OTF Coding Connections* teams be chosen?

A Steering Committee will consider all submitted applications in late February 2020. The Steering Committee will make decisions based on the quality of the proposal and will also consider several demographic variables in order to finalize selection, with preference given to those in rural, remote and Francophone school settings.

How will we know if our team is selected?

Successful teams will be notified **no later than March 6, 2020** that their projects have been approved.

How will the money be allocated?

The Steering Committee will determine the amount of money to be allocated to each team on the basis of the budget submitted in the application. The maximum budget allocation granted will be $5,000 per team. The first payment of approximately 60% will be paid shortly after the Steering Committee has approved the team project. After satisfactory completion of the team's interim report (due on or before November 30, 2020), the second installment of 30% of the funding will be paid. The final 10% will be paid when the project is completed and the final report is submitted to OTF **on or before Monday, March 15, 2021**.

Do we have to have a lot of prior knowledge about coding or computational thinking?

No! Your project is about your learning as educators and we are ready to support teams on any part of that journey—prior knowledge about coding and computational thinking is not required.

What kind of technology do we need in order to participate fully?

Lynx software will be made available to you for free! It works well with students from Grades 3 to 12 who have access to Chromebooks and/or computers, as it works within a web browser. iPads can be used for viewing Lynx projects but not for creating projects.

Is Lynx a required element of the project?

Yes! Lynx and/or MicroWorlds JR are required. The funding is designated for distribution and implementation of this Canadian-made software. Lynx and MicroWorlds JR are provided in both Canadian English, Canadian French and several Indigenous languages. MicroWorlds JR is currently available in Ojibwe and James Bay Cree. Lynx is currently in translation for Indigenous languages.

MicroWorlds JR can be used for students in Kindergarten to Grade 3. Note: MicroWorlds JR runs only on Windows or Macintosh computers (pre Catalina - MacOS 10.15). It cannot be run on iPads, other tablets, or Chromebooks.

Can robotics be part of the project (using products we currently have)?

Lynx and/or MicroWorlds JR do not drive physical computing devices (including micro:bits). However, since learning that micro:bits is part of our Code to Learn funding, we can provide professional learning as part of your project, as long as you provide the micro:bits. Please feel free to add that in the project proposal. We can definitely support your learning about micro:bits at both the kick-off learning event and throughout your project as required.

Can you help us with any details that need to be explained to our IT Department in order to participate?

Yes! Access to the browser-based Lynx software is compatible with the single sign-on procedures that exist in Ontario districts, and we can provide additional details to help you, if needed. If you are requesting to use MicroWorlds JR, we can provide support to help your IT Dept understand the importance of being able to install the software on your school computers and support the IT Dept to facilitate the process in the easiest way possible. Making sure that your school administrators support your project at the outset will help with these details as well.

Can we use the funding to purchase technology?

No. As mentioned above, you will need to use existing technology to participate and your funding can be used for release time, professional development, resources, materials or any other reasonable, related expenses which the team deems appropriate.

Are there any planned meetings for all of the *OTF Coding Connections* teams to come together?

Yes! A face-to-face training session will be held for the team leader of each approved project. The training session will take place in Toronto on the **evening of Friday, April 3 and through the day on Saturday, April 4, 2020.** At least one representative from your team (preferably the team leader) must attend this face-to-face event. An additional team member may attend the training session at their own cost.

Participation in at least three online meetings—two in 2020 (May and October) and one in 2021 (February)—will also be required.

Finally, after all final reports have been submitted, an online summit will be held in April 2021, where all teams will have an opportunity to share their learnings.

What is the final product expected to be?

The final product will be a demonstration of your learning related to your project learning goals, and something that can be shared digitally as a learning resource for other educators.

What is to be presented and shared at the summit?

At the summit, teams will have an opportunity to share their coding/computational thinking resources related to Lynx/MicroWorlds JR. They will also share their reflections on learning (both student and/or teacher).

What about meetings of our own team members?

Ongoing communication and sharing are essential to the process of collaborative inquiry and OTF encourages the use of release time to accommodate busy teacher schedules to allow this to happen. It is up to your team to determine frequency and duration of your team meetings as may be possible within the budget provided. Each board has its own practice and it will be necessary for your team to become familiar with the requirements for accessing release time at the local level.

If you are meeting face-to-face, then you will need to arrange release time for each team member. Since the budget is limited, teams can interact through means that are cost efficient, such as teleconferencing and online communication. Use of free software such as SKYPE, Google Hangouts, ZOOM, Adobe Connect or others, which may be available through your board, may also allow for additional meetings at little cost.

Sometimes the board may require official requests for release time to come directly from OTF. This can be arranged specifically for each team or team member by completing our Request for Release Time Form which will be made available to *OTF Coding Connections* team members.

It is always a good idea to inform the school administration from the start of your involvement in such a project. This will help to ensure co-operation and support at the school level for the teachers who are on an *OTF Coding Connections* team.

How will we work with other teams as a networked learning community?

Access to a specially designed and designated, online space for project communication and collaboration will be provided to all *OTF Coding Connections* teams. This interactive online environment will be explained and demonstrated at the training session on April 3–4, 2020.

There will be three online meetings arranged for all teams— two in 2020 (May and October) and one in 2021 (February).

Finally, an online *Sharing the Learning Summit* will be held in April 2021, allowing all teams to share their learning voyage with each other.

What support do we have between meetings?

OTF will provide support for any concerns and questions you may have through this email account: coding.connections@ otffeo.on.ca.

Are there any reporting requirements?

Yes. Each *OTF Coding Connections* team is expected to provide a short **interim report by November 30, 2020,** telling us how their project is progressing. You are also expected to provide a **final report by March 15, 2021**, with some reflections on how the project went and what you have learned. These reports will not be onerous for you, and neither of them will be longer than a page or two. A reporting template for each of the reports will be provided by OTF ahead of time.

What happens to any resources or materials that were purchased for the project?

After project completion, the resources and materials from the project remain in the school where the project was carried out. Where there is more than one school involved, the *OTF Coding Connections* team will determine where these resources ultimately land. However, if the educator(s) involved in the project move to another school or worksite, at the request of the *OTF Coding Connections* team, the board (school administration) can make a determination as to whether or not the items should follow the educator(s).

Important dates for the *OTF Coding Connections* Program

February 14, 2020	Proposal applications due through email to coding.connections@ otffeo.on.ca
Late February 2020	Steering Committee begins to consider *OTF Coding Connections* proposals
March 6, 2020	Successful applicants are informed
April 3-4, 2020	Face-to-face training session in Toronto
April 6-10, 2020	First funding allocation to successful teams
May 2020 (exact date TBD)	First online all-teams meeting
October 2020 (exact date TBD)	Second online all-teams meeting
November 30, 2020	Interim Report due – second funding allocation (30%)
February 2021 (exact date TBD)	Third online all-teams meeting
March 15, 2021	Final Report due – final funding allocation (10%)
April 2021 (exact date TBD)	Online *Sharing the Learning Summit*