

Skills Development Program Guidelines

Department of Labour and
Advanced Education

Employment Nova Scotia

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IMPORTANT:

BEFORE YOU CONSIDER APPLYING TO THE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

The Skills Development Program is accessed by working closely with a Case Manager at a Nova Scotia Works Employment Services Centre. Information about a Centre near you can be found at novascotia.ca/works.

As this set of guidelines will tell you, the Skills Development Program is for individuals who cannot find work with their skills or experience. If you have interest in this program you are encouraged to contact Nova Scotia Works as soon as possible to explore your eligibility for the program; it is never too early to do so but it can be too late. In order to access the program individuals must develop a Return to Work Action Plan and make an intensive effort to look for work (job search) with their current skills and experience. Nova Scotia Works can help guide you through this process well in advance of making application to the program to ensure you take the right steps to find work. If you are unable to find work they will assist you to determine whether the Skills Development program will be the right program to assist you. Nova Scotia Works Centre submit your application to Employment Nova Scotia for assessment and decision regarding its approval.

About the Program

The Skills Development (SD) program is an employment program that provides financial assistance to Labour Market Development Agreement (LMDA) eligible participants to help them obtain the skills training they need to find employment. It is designed for those who need to learn additional basic to advanced skills to help them find sustainable employment.

NEW INFORMATION ABOUT LMDA ELIGIBILITY – UPDATED IN JUNE 2020

Individuals who have received payment under the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) are LMDA eligible. This means that those individuals are eligible to apply to the Skills Development program delivered by Employment Nova Scotia. All other Skills Development program eligibility criteria applies. The Participant Eligibility has been updated accordingly.

Eligible participants lack marketable skills and need new or additional occupational skills to improve their employment prospects but are otherwise job ready. Eligible participants are those who are unable to find and secure employment with their existing skills. Those requesting support through this program must attend training on a full-time basis. The training may be provided through public or private training providers.

Employment Nova Scotia is piloting a policy change to enable earlier access to the Skills Development Program in order to reduce barriers and promote opportunities for individuals underrepresented in Nova Scotia's labour market. The **Skills Development Program Labour Force Attachment Pilot for Individuals Underrepresented in the Labour Market** will be implemented in July 8, 2019 for new applicants to the program who self-identify as one or more of specified individuals underrepresented in the labour market. Under the new policy, in order to be eligible for the program, these individuals can be part of the labour force for 24 months throughout their employment history instead of 36 months.

See 'About Participant Eligibility' for more information.

About Participant Eligibility

ELIGIBLE PARTICIPANTS

- ▶ Must be unemployed
- ▶ Must be job ready but lack marketable skills and need additional occupational skills to improve their employment prospects – see note about marketable skills below
- ▶ Must be a Canadian citizens or permanent residents legally entitled to work in Canada
- ▶ Must be a resident of Nova Scotia at the time that their completed application for the SD program is received by Employment Nova Scotia (ENS)

- ▶ Must be LMDA eligible. To be LMDA eligible you must meet one of the following:
 - have a current Employment Insurance (EI) claim
 - have had an EI claim that ended within the last 60 months
 - have received benefits under the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB)
 - have been employed with gross insurable earnings of \$2,000 or higher annually, in at least 5 of the last 10 years.

Participants must meet the definition of insured person as defined by Section 58 of the EI Act
<http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/E-5.6/page-1.html>)
- ▶ Must be working with a Case Manager at a Nova Scotia Works Employment Services Centre and they must complete a Return to Work Action Plan (RTWAP) that identifies a need for new or additional skills to find employment.
- ▶ May be facing a required change in employment or career due to validated medical reasons.
- ▶ Must have a minimum of 36 months of Labour Force Attachment.

Skills Development Program Labour Force Attachment Pilot for Individuals Underrepresented in the Labour Market:

Eligible individuals underrepresented in Nova Scotia's labour market may participate with a minimum of 24 months of Labour Force Attachment. Persons who identify with one or more of the following may be eligible:

- ▶ Indigenous (including but not limited to Mi'kmaq)
- ▶ African Nova Scotians
- ▶ Visible minorities (including persons of African descent)
- ▶ Persons with disabilities (includes individuals living with a physical, cognitive or mental impairment)
- ▶ Recent immigrants (persons who entered Canada within the past five years and are eligible to work in Canada)

Marketable skills: Unemployed workers who have post-secondary education that resulted in a diploma, degree, or certificate are assessed as having marketable skills when obtained within the past five years. Applicants deemed to have marketable skills are not eligible for the program.

Labour Force Attachment (LFA): This means that an individual has been fully participating in the labour market for at least 36 months, or 24 months for those eligible under the **Skills Development Program Labour Force Attachment Pilot for Individuals Underrepresented in the Labour Market**. If an individual has been a student, they must have made a clear transition from school to the labour market.

To be attached to the labour force individuals must have been:

- ▶ actively seeking employment
- ▶ employed full-time
- ▶ maintaining part-time employment while actively seeking full-time employment
- ▶ self-employed

OR

- ▶ a combination of the above

Months of labour force attachment do not need to be continuous. Individuals can have breaks and still qualify if the total LFA time throughout their employment history meets the minimum requirement.

When calculating labour force attachment, do not include any time for which the individual voluntarily withdrew or removed themselves from the labour market as a result of one or more of the following:

- ▶ They were in receipt of EI Special Benefits – maternity, parental, sickness, compassionate care, or family caregiver benefit.
- ▶ They were not actively seeking employment while unemployed.
- ▶ They were enrolled in an educational institution full-time (including periods of summer employment or part-time employment while enrolled).

LMDA ELIGIBLE PARTICIPANTS WHO ARE SEASONALLY UNEMPLOYED

Most seasonally unemployed individuals are not eligible. They have employment that they will return to when seasonal layoffs are over. Employers have a responsibility to ensure that their employees have the necessary training to do their jobs and provide them with training.

The Skills Development program may be used to assist seasonally employed workers during a period of unemployment in extenuating circumstances only. The training must serve one of the following purposes:

- ▶ Lengthens the period of seasonal employment, thereby decreasing the layoff period
- ▶ Provides skills that lead to year-round employment
- ▶ Provides skills necessary to find alternate work in the off-season
- ▶ Prevents job loss in situations where the job normally held by the worker changes substantially while the worker is unemployed and they need new skills to secure a return to work

LMDA ELIGIBLE PARTICIPANTS ON A TEMPORARY LAY-OFF OR LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Individuals who are on a temporary lay-off or who have taken a leave of absence are not LMDA eligible as they have a return to work date, an attachment to their employer, and employment to return to after their leave period.

About Training Eligibility

Training that is eligible:

- ▶ Must be full time
- ▶ Must lead to a diploma, certificate, or degree –see “Additional Training Eligibility Information”
- ▶ Must link to employment, upon completion
- ▶ Must be linked to an industry with a labour market need in both Nova Scotia and the local area in which it is intended for the employment to take place
- ▶ Must be industry recognized
- ▶ Must be a minimum of five-days duration
- ▶ Must be a maximum of three-years duration
- ▶ Must be from a training institution that is a registered training institution in keeping with Private Career Colleges regulations and standards. Some training programs are not required to be registered or are exempt. Your Case Manager at Nova Scotia Works can assist you to determine whether the training program you are interested in is eligible.

Training that is NOT eligible:

- ▶ Language training for new immigrants to Canada
- ▶ Training programs that have the sole purpose of preparing an individual for an exam/test and do not provide any academic/skills upgrading or new knowledge
- ▶ Training for self-employment
- ▶ Training that does not meet a labour market need in Nova Scotia

ADDITIONAL TRAINING ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

University Training Programs

- ▶ Eligible programs are up to one year long and deliver occupation-specific training that leads to a degree, certificate, or diploma.
- ▶ Eligible applicants are unemployed workers who have previously made the transition from school to the work force, meet the minimum required Labour Force Attachment, and are not currently full-time students.

Training Outside of Nova Scotia

Out-of-province training is approved on an exceptional basis only:

- ▶ A detailed rationale must be submitted – for example, that the training is not offered in Nova Scotia.
- ▶ The training must be recognized in Nova Scotia.
- ▶ The training must meet the needs of the Nova Scotia labour market.
- ▶ Applicants to the Skills Development Program are required to attempt to access training in Nova Scotia when it is available. They must apply for the available training program in Nova Scotia even if there is a waitlist for the training program before out of province training can be considered.

Training Outside of Canada

Out-of-country training is approved on an exceptional basis only:

- ▶ A detailed rationale must be submitted – for example, that the training program is not offered in Canada or the work placement/practicum portion requires participants to be outside the country. An example of training that may be approved is a truck-driving training program where the routes are often north and south of the Canada–U.S. border.
- ▶ The training must be recognized in Canada.
- ▶ The training must meet the needs of the Canadian labour market.

Correspondence Courses, Distance Education, Internet-based Education

Correspondence programs, distance education and internet-based education are only approved on an exceptional basis and for applicants who would have significant difficulty attending in-person training due to barriers such as a disability or where training is not readily available (i.e. out of province). All other eligibility criteria must also apply (e.g. must be a full time studies program). The program must offer on-going assistance to the student and through that assistance they also must monitor the student's progress. The program must also have timelines for completion (i.e. self-directed programs are not eligible). Additional criteria applies and should be discussed with a Case Manager at a Nova Scotia Works Employment Assistance Service Centre and Employment Nova Scotia.

Application Requirements

The applicant must work with a Case Manager at a Nova Scotia Works Employment Services Centre to complete the application process. Find Nova Scotia Works locations: novascotia.ca/works/

STEPS FOR THE APPLICANT

- 1 Receive an employment needs assessment from their Nova Scotia Works Employment Services Centre Case Manager
- 2 Develop a Return to Work Action Plan with their Case Manager
- 3 Receive an assessment from their Case Manager that a skills development program is necessary to prepare them for employment and a determination of whether the applicant meets the eligibility criteria for the Skills Development program.
- 4 Complete a comprehensive job search and labour market research activities before applying for Skills Development:
 - ▶ A three-month (minimum) job search that is both comprehensive and documented is mandatory
 - This job search duration allows for a full job search including time to prepare an updated resume, apply to a variety of sources for openings, receive responses and follow-up and attend interviews with employers, while continuously seeking employment opportunities.
 - This job search must use all the transferable and marketable skills that the applicant has to make a diligent effort to find work.
 - The job search must be undertaken with an up to date and accurate resume.
 - As part of the job search the individual must use a variety of methods and sources to look for work for which they are qualified. Sources and methods include but should not be limited to responding to job postings in newspapers or online and approaching employers to discover employment opportunities that may not be posted.
 - The individual should apply for work with a variety of employers for relevant positions for which they would be qualified.
 - Case Managers support the applicant through their job search.

- ▶ Additional requirements include, but are not limited to:
 - Research the labour market to identify occupations where there is a good prospect of obtaining sustainable employment. Labour Market Interviews must be completed with prospective employers to identify if the proposed training will meet the requirements of the labour market.
 - Family size and financial information.
 - Acceptance letter from the educational institution
- 5 Make sure that their Case Manager has everything they need to complete an application well before the application deadline. Incomplete applications are returned and not assessed for funding.
- 6 Wait until their training is approved before starting the training or buying items that they hope to have reimbursed or hope to use as part of their student contribution
- 7 If approved, enter into a Contribution Agreement with Employment Nova Scotia

Speak with a Case Manager at your local Nova Scotia Works Employment Services Centre for detailed information on application requirements: novascotia.ca/works/

APPLICATION DEADLINE – at least 2 weeks before training start date

Applications for funding:

- ▶ Must be received at least two weeks before the scheduled training program start date, which is the first date indicated by the training institution’s acceptance letter or website of the institution to which the student is accepted.
- ▶ Must be submitted by the applicant’s Nova Scotia Works Case Manager via the Labour Market Programs Support System (LaMPSS).

Deadlines are firm:

- ▶ The date that the completed application is electronically sent to Employment Nova Scotia by the Case Manager is the date that is used to determine whether an application is late.
- ▶ When the deadline date falls on a holiday, then the application should be received by Employment Nova Scotia on the business day prior to the holiday – Business days are Monday to Friday and exclude Saturday and Sunday.
- ▶ Applications received after the deadline are not considered for funding.
- ▶ Denials of funding applications due to the filing of late application cannot be appealed.

Participants Who Start Training Prior to Receiving Employment Nova Scotia Approval

- ▶ The development of a Return to Work Action Plan (RTWAP) is a requirement of the SD Program, therefore, individuals who start training prior to developing a RTWAP and receiving approval from ENS will not be eligible for this program.
- ▶ Multi-year Programs: Multi-year programs must be approved prior to starting the first year to be eligible. The start date for a multi-year program is the start date for year one.

About Eligible Costs and Financial Assistance

All applicants are assessed for financial assistance based on their individual financial situation. As part of the application process, applicants must supply financial information.

Employment Nova Scotia uses a standard tool to determine individual entitlement needs and levels of support for eligible costs, called the Financial Assistance for Individuals Calculator. Financial supports are not negotiable. The Calculator determines the amount of financial assistance the applicant is eligible to receive.

Individuals who participate in Skills Development are normally required to make a financial contribution towards the cost of their training. The contribution amount is determined by the Financial Assistance for Individual Calculator.

ELIGIBLE COSTS

- ▶ Approved applicants may receive financial assistance called a basic living allowance.
- ▶ Approved applicants could be eligible for financial assistance for dependent care, tuition, books, accessibility supports, transportation, and accommodation.
- ▶ Individual entitlement needs and levels of support for eligible costs are determined by the Financial Assistance for Individuals calculator.

APPLICANT CONTRIBUTIONS

- ▶ Applicants are responsible for a minimum of \$200 contribution to their tuition costs.
- ▶ Computers and other capital cost items including tools of the trade may be considered as part of the applicant's contribution to their training when bought after their approval date only. (see examples of assets considered tools of the trade below.)
- ▶ Applicants are responsible for paying transportation costs to commute daily to training up to 30 km, each way.
- ▶ If applicants are in receipt of regular EI benefits, it is expected that applicants use those benefits to help cover their expenses.

- ▶ Individual levels of contributions for items noted above are determined by the Financial Assistance for Individuals Calculator.

TUITION LIMIT

- ▶ The maximum tuition support available to an applicant is up to \$10,000 within a 52-week period
- ▶ Individual entitlement needs and levels of support for tuition are determined by the Financial Assistance for Individuals calculator.

INELIGIBLE COSTS

- ▶ Cost such as licensing fees, registration fees, medical tests and certification, drivers abstract or other costs that are required for acceptance into a training program – or for subsequent employment – are not eligible.
- ▶ Fees charged by an association or regulatory body to enable an individual to be “registered” or “licensed” are not eligible.
- ▶ Computers, **with the exception of computers required to support individuals with permanent disabilities (See Skills Development Accessibility Supports)**, and other capital cost items including tools of the trade are not eligible costs but may be considered as part of the applicant’s contribution to their training.

Examples of tools of the trade are:

- Culinary items, such as pots, pans, knives
 - Tools associated with skills/trades training
 - Carpenter tools, such as toolboxes, wrenches, hammers
 - Mechanics tools
 - Hairdressing tools, such as scissors, brushes, hair dryers
- ▶ Expenditures that occur prior to the approval of an agreement are not eligible. These will not be eligible for reimbursement under any circumstance. These will also not be considered as part of the client contribution.

TRANSPORTATION AND ACCOMMODATION COSTS

- ▶ Applicants are responsible for paying transportation costs to commute daily to training up to 30 km, each way. Distances greater than 30 km each way are an eligible cost and paid on a per-km basis.
- ▶ Travel assistance may be available if it is necessary for a participant to relocate to the training. This assistance would be paid for one trip each way at the start and end of the training at a per km rate (less first 30 km each way). In addition, when it is necessary for a participant to maintain both a primary and a secondary residence to attend training, a flat rate accommodation fee may be paid on a weekly basis.

- ▶ Individual entitlement needs and levels of support for eligible transportation and accommodation costs are determined by the Financial Assistance for Individuals Calculator.

Skills Development Accessibility Supports

Students with permanent disabilities pursuing post-secondary education, who are funded through the Skills Development program, may be eligible for non-repayable assistance for educational disability related services and/or equipment required to participate in the student's program of study.

WHO CAN APPLY?

Individuals who meet all the following criteria can apply for SD Accessibility Supports. These clients who are who meet all the following criteria:

- ▶ currently funded through the Skills Development Program with Employment Nova Scotia to attend a training program.
- ▶ a person with a permanent disability has identified barriers/limitations that restrict the ability to perform the daily activities necessary to participate in their studies.
- ▶ in need of equipment and/or services that are directly related to overcoming educational barriers caused by a disability that may impact the successful completion of their specific academic training program.

HOW TO APPLY FOR SD ACCESSIBILITY SUPPORTS

Applications are completed by the applicant with assistance from their Nova Scotia Works Case Managers. The Case Managers will assist individuals with any applicable supporting documents that are required to support the client's disability then submit it to ENS.

Application packages received within four-weeks prior to the end of the program of study will not be assessed or processed by ENS, unless in exceptional circumstances and a Nova Scotia Works Case Manager will discuss these exceptional circumstances with ENS prior to submission.

WHAT CAN BE SUPPORTED WITH THIS FUNDING?

Skills Development Accessibility Supports may cover or make a partial contribution towards costs related to the following:

Assistive Equipment

- Computer
- Assistive Computer Software (e.g. Dragon Naturally Speaking, Jaws Screen Reader)
- Assistive Technology (e.g. mouse or keyboard alternatives, digital recorder)
- Alternate Format Learning Materials (e.g. Braille products)

Assistive Services

- Tutoring
- Note Taker
- Learning Disability Assessment
- Learning Strategists
- Academic Coaches
- Specialized Services (e.g. Attendant Care for Studies, Readers, Interpreters, specialized transportation)

Approval Process

Employment Nova Scotia assesses all complete Skills Development applications that are received by the application deadline.

Employment Nova Scotia notifies applicants of the decision regarding the application so they may proceed with their action plan to attend school.

- ▶ Notification will be made by telephone, in writing and/or email (if applicable).
- ▶ If approved, funding amounts will also be communicated.

WARNING ABOUT EXPENSES AND INVESTMENTS MADE PRIOR TO APPROVAL

In some cases, the decision from Employment Nova Scotia may not occur before the training program start date.

- ▶ If an applicant chooses to begin their training program before their application for funding is approved, the applicant assumes the risk in doing so. An application for funding does not guarantee approval of the application.
- ▶ If the applicant's request for SD support is denied, any investment made by the applicant is not be reimbursed by Employment Nova Scotia.
- ▶ Any costs incurred prior to an application being approved is not reimbursed by Employment Nova Scotia. Only costs which are paid after Employment Nova Scotia approval can be considered for reimbursement.
- ▶ Applicants are not entitled to Basic Living Allowance (BLA), childcare, or transportation during the period prior to approval. Funding is not provided for expenses already incurred prior to approvals.

ENTERING INTO A CONTRIBUTION AGREEMENT

Upon approval of a Skills Development Application, individuals must enter into a Contribution Agreement with Employment Nova Scotia.

Under this signed agreement,

- ▶ Employment Nova Scotia agrees to provide financial assistance directly to the applicant, based on actual costs, and the results of the Financial Assistance for Individuals Calculator to carry out the agreed upon activity to help the LMDA eligible participant obtain skills for employment to assist in their re-entry to employment as identified in their RTWAP.
- ▶ Employment Nova Scotia may terminate any obligation to contribute to training costs, even those costs owing prior to the date of termination.
- ▶ Skills Development participants are expected to participate in the training program diligently and make their best efforts to complete it successfully.
- ▶ Skills Development participants must advise Employment Nova Scotia of any changes that may affect the agreement and be aware of financial implications that may result from them withdrawing from or being expelled from the training outlined contribution agreement.
- ▶ Skills Development participants must inform Employment Nova Scotia if there is a change in their financial circumstance.
- ▶ Active EI applicants may also fall under Part 1, Section 27.1(1) of the EI Act and may be disqualified from receiving further Part I benefits once the Section 25 referral has been terminated.

Appeal Information

An appeal package is sent with each denial letter in case the applicant wishes to appeal a decision by Employment Nova Scotia.

The following CANNOT be appealed:

- ▶ Administrative issues or decisions made by community-based Employment Nova Scotia funded service providers and their staff (Nova Scotia Works Employment Services Centres). For example, applicants cannot appeal to Employment Nova Scotia if a Case Manager has not supported the applicant for Skills Development. Decisions such as this must be discussed with Nova Scotia Works.
- ▶ Decisions that are made related to eligibility for Employment Insurance (EI). For example, applicants cannot appeal to Employment Nova Scotia to have an EI claim reinstated or started to qualify for an individual client employment benefit. Decisions related to EI must be appealed through Service Canada using the federal government appeal processes.

- ▶ Overpayment calculations.
- ▶ Termination of agreements.
- ▶ Denials due to late applications.
- ▶ The Level of Funding: The Financial Assistance for Individuals (FAI) calculator takes family size, current financial situation, and cost of living into consideration to calculate a level of support aimed at ensuring that participants can cover their basic costs of living.
- ▶ Support for SD Accessibility Supports (i.e. equipment and services) which are based on pre-determined flat-rate amounts.

Contact Us

Employment Nova Scotia

Skills and Learning Branch

Department of Labour and Advanced Education

General enquiries: 1-877-223-0888

<http://www.novascotia.ca/employmentnovascotia/programs/skills-development.asp>