Graduate to Opportunity (GTO) Program

NOVA SCOTIA

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Program Introduction

Graduate to Opportunity (GTO) supports Nova Scotia employers looking to hire recent post-secondary graduates for new, permanent, full-time jobs. It helps recent university and college graduates start their careers in Nova Scotia by reducing the cost for employers who hire them.

GTO supports employers in one of two ways:

GTO Grow
GTO Grow is for employers who plan to hire a recent post-secondary graduate into a new, permanent, full-time position that pays at least $37,500 a year. Eligible employers receive 25% of the first year's salary and 12.5% of the second year's salary.

GTO Innovate
GTO Innovate is for businesses looking to hire a recent masters or PhD graduate for an innovation-focused job that pays at least $60,000 a year. Eligible employers receive 30% of the first year's salary and 15% of the second year's salary.

Both GTO Grow and GTO Innovate provide an additional 10% subsidy in the first year, if employers hire a recent graduate from an equity-deserving group. This includes any employee who self-identifies as:

- Mi'kmaq or indigenous,
- African Nova Scotian
- racially visible
- a person with a disability
- a member of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community
- a woman in an occupation where they are underrepresented, or
- an international graduate

GTO particularly encourages applications from employers in the following provincial priority sectors:

- Offshore and Onshore Wind
- Onshore Natural Gas and Offshore Oil and Gas
- Seafood and Agrifood
- Mining and Critical Minerals

Critical sectors are also:

- Defence/aerospace
- Housing/construction
- Artificial Intelligence/Digital

The program is administered by the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration (LSI).

Defining Nova Scotia Employers

Your organization must be registered and operating in Nova Scotia (e.g., registered with Nova Scotia Registry of Joint Stocks). If your registration is extra-provincial, you must provide details about your Nova Scotia operations.

Please note, in most cases:

- A physical location is not required, but the majority of your employees must live and work in Nova Scotia.
- Human resources activities, such as providing pay advice, T4s and Records of Employment should be handled by the Nova Scotia location.
- If you are not sure whether your organization meets these requirements, please contact us before making an application.

If your organization is part of a priority sector and does not meet these requirements, please contact us to discuss eligibility.

Eligible Organization Size and Structure

At the time of application employers must be in good standing with and not in violation of Immigration, Labour Standards and Safety rules and regulations at LSI. The Department will confirm your standing directly with the regulator.

GTO Grow is available to Nova Scotia businesses of fewer than 100 full-time employees, start-up companies incorporated within two years of the application date, social enterprises, not-for-profit organizations, and registered charities.

If your organization is part of a priority sector and does not meet these requirements, please contact us to discuss eligibility.

GTO Innovate is available for Nova Scotia businesses with fewer than 200 full-time employees.

At the time of application employers must be in good standing with and not in violation of Immigration, Labour Standards and Safety rules and regulations at LSI. The Department will confirm your standing directly with the regulator.

Determining Employee Count:

Include the total number of employees working at all locations of your organization or related organizations (regardless of the legal structure of each) in your application.

- If your organization is part of an amalgamated group of businesses, the finances are consolidated with a parent organization for reporting or tax purposes, or otherwise closely linked, the total employee count of all entities must be included in your application. The T4 Summary or summaries you submit must show this total number.
- Franchises are only eligible for GTO if they are headquartered in Nova Scotia and have an eligible employee count across all locations. Independently owned operations franchised from companies headquartered outside Nova Scotia are not eligible.
- Federal, provincial, and municipal governments and their agencies, health authorities, post-secondary institutions, and school boards are not eligible for this program.

Eligible Jobs/Positions

The position you fill using GTO funding must be new to your organization. That is to say that the new employee must increase your organization's total employee count. You cannot use GTO to replace staff or fill existing vacancies.

The new graduate must become an employee of your organization with a guaranteed minimum annual salary of at least $37,500 for **GTO Grow** and $60,000 for **GTO Innovate** (before vacation pay and any other benefits). This amount cannot be contingent on work performed or commissions earned. Contract or fee-for-service positions are not eligible for GTO.

GTO cannot be combined with other government wage funding, i.e., "stacking" of funding is not permitted. You may receive government funds for related projects, as long as the salary or wage for the GTO-funded position is not a line-item of that funding.

The subsidy will be calculated on the actual salary offered to the graduate, up to a maximum of $60,000 a year for **GTO Grow** and $70,000 for **GTO Innovate**. You are welcome to pay more than these amounts, but additional amounts will not be included in the subsidy.

Employers from all sectors are eligible to apply as long as they hire graduates for jobs related to their field of study. However, positions that will be prioritized are those that align with provincial strategic priorities in areas such as:

- Offshore and Onshore Wind
- Onshore Natural Gas and Offshore Oil and Gas
- Seafood and Agrifood
- Mining and Critical Minerals

Critical sectors are also:

- Defence/aerospace
- Housing/construction
- Artificial Intelligence/Digital

Graduates hired through **GTO Innovate** must spend at least 50% of their time on activities such as:

- Applied research
- Product and service development
- Market analysis for new complex products or activity
- Improvement of product quality, customer services and business efficiencies
- Process development or improvement
- Technical feasibility studies and pilots for product launches or market entry

As a part of application for **GTO Innovate**, you will need to submit a breakdown of the time your new employee will spend on the tasks listed above.

Graduate-Employees

You can hire any recent post-secondary graduate through GTO Grow. The graduate must have completed a degree or diploma-granting post-secondary program (generally two years or longer).

In most cases, a certificate for a program shorter than two years can only be used to determine eligibility for **GTO Grow** if the graduate has completed the certificate within 12 months of completing a degree or diploma program. However, a graduate who has completed a one-year direct-entry certificate program may also be eligible. Please contact your Agreement Manager to confirm.

GTO Innovate employers can hire any recent graduate who has completed a master's or doctoral degree from a recognized university.

For the purposes of the program a recent graduate:

- Has completed a degree or diploma-granting post-secondary program within 12 months of the employment start date.
- Has graduated from a post- secondary institution designated by Employment and Social Development Canada. A list of these can be found at this website.
- Provides proof that they have successfully completed all requirements for their program of study (degree, diploma, or letter from the institution that shows the date requirements were completed).

Please note:

- The graduate you hire cannot start work until your application is approved. Applications from employers who have selected a graduate will be considered as long as the graduate has not started work. We review most applications within 2 weeks.
- The graduate must **not** be an existing full-time employee. If they have worked for your organization in the past (on contract, part time, or as a co-op student) be sure to let your Agreement Manager know.
- Once hired, the employee must live and work in Nova Scotia. If you are recruiting from outside the province, the employee must be living at an NS address before the first payment is issued.

Important

> The position offered to the graduate should relate to their diploma, certificate, or degree. *For example*, a culinary arts graduate would be appropriately employed as a cook or chef, but not as a receptionist or carpenter. Similarly, there are many types of work that a graduate could take on with an engineering degree, but we would not be able to support that graduate working as a cook.

The program will support the hiring of family members only where it supports the employment of individuals from groups underrepresented in the labour market, and where the employer has followed a fair hiring process.

Individuals who self-identify as one or more of the following may be eligible:

- Mi'kmaq or Indigenous
- African Nova Scotians
- Visible minorities (including persons of African descent)
- Persons with disabilities (consisting of a physical, cognitive, or mental impairment that presents a persistent barrier to work)

A fair hiring process includes:

- Advertising the position (which can include language that indicates a preference for candidates from one of the populations above)
- Interviews
- A rationale for selection

Applying for GTO

Ready to go?

Applications for the program are made through the Labour Market Program Support System (LaMPSS).

If you are registered, apply for GTO Grow and GTO Innovate using their respective application forms on the GTO website:

If you need to register, clicking the application links will take you to an access request form. You will proceed to the application form once you have provided your organization details.

To apply, you need:

- A description of your organization and its mandate.
- A contact at your organization who will be responsible for the agreement.
- A job description for the new position you wish to create.
- A T4 Summary or other document that shows the number of employees.

Additionally, every application for **GTO Innovate** must be accompanied by an Innovation Plan. Use the template for the Innovation Plan found on the program website. The plan must outline:

- The innovation-focused activities the new employee will undertake.
- The amount of time estimated for each activity.
- Key measures of success.

If you are currently budgeting for a position, but do not plan to fill it in the next month or two, please contact us before applying. Staff are happy to advise on an appropriate timeline for your application.

Subsequent Applications

You may receive either kind of GTO funding for more than one new position, although we generally require an interval of at least six months between applications. The number of supported positions may be limited by budget availability.

The program can only consider one position per application.

Please keep the following in mind if you are making **a second or subsequent** application:

- You must have filled any previous positions approved under the program.
- You must not have an active GTO agreement that has a vacancy because the graduate has left or been dismissed.
- The graduate in any active agreement must have been working for six months or more before a new application is approved.

GTO can provide a full subsidy for the **first five** graduates you hire using the program.

However, **the sixth graduate you hire**, and any graduates hired after that through either **GTO Grow or Innovate**, will be funded at a lower subsidy rate:

- 15% of the first year's salary
- 5% of the second year's salary

Assessment and Approval

After you submit, an Agreement Manager will assess your application. Decisions are normally made within 10 days. Missing or incomplete documentation may extend this time.

The program staff consider:

- The type and quality of work offered.
- The proposed salary in the context of the labour market.
- The program funding available.
- Provincial strategic sector alignment.

Assessment of **GTO Innovate** applications will also consider the type of innovation-based activities the graduate-employee will work on and the percentage of time they will spend on this work.

Once the application is reviewed, you will receive an email with our decision. If approved, the email will introduce you to your Agreement Manager and include your agreement number, which you should include in all correspondence with the program. Your funding is contingent upon hiring an eligible recent graduate.

Selecting your Graduate

Your organization is responsible for recruiting, selecting, and hiring a graduate for a job related to their field of study. Please review the eligibility requirements before making an offer, to ensure the graduate you have selected will be eligible for funding.

The GTO program promotes all approved positions on its website, which will make your position more visible to recent graduates. This list includes company name, the title of the position and a website where applicants can find more information.

We can also provide resources for hiring young people, including a list of frequently used job search sites.

If your selected hire belongs to an equity-deserving group, Labour, Skills and Immigration has a range of resources and training available to help your workplace become welcoming and inclusive. Please ask your Agreement Manager for more information on these resources.

Once you have selected a graduate, you need to submit three documents to your Agreement Manager **within 10 days of the start date** to confirm eligibility and make your agreement active:

1. A completed Graduate Information Form (please download using the link).
2. A copy of the graduate's degree/diploma. If the graduate has not received their degree or diploma, you may submit a letter from their university or college showing the date they completed all program requirements.
3. A signed copy of the employment agreement or letter of offer of employment between you and the graduate. This agreement or letter must show the total annual salary, or, if an hourly rate is to be paid, the number of hours the graduate will work in a set period (for hourly employees, please see the box below).

The agreement/letter must confirm that the position offered is **permanent and full-time.** For the purposes of the program, full-time is 30 or more hours of work per week.

The salary in the agreement or letter must be competitive for the role and at least:

- $37,500 annually for **GTO Grow**
- $60,000 annually for **GTO Innovate**

A note on hourly wages: If the hourly wage multiplied by the number of hours the graduate is expected to work in a week result in a total that is at or near the program minimum salary, you risk receiving **no** subsidy if the graduate ultimately works fewer paid hours.

If the amount paid to the graduate is less than the program minimum once the agreement reaches a milestone, the program will not make a payment unless you make an adjustment payment.

If you hire an individual that does not qualify for GTO, we will close your agreement. You are welcome to apply again in the future.

The Agreement Period

Once we have confirmed that you have hired an eligible graduate, we will issue a funding agreement (contract) for you to sign.

Please review the agreement contract for accuracy before you sign.

The amount of the subsidy will be based on the salary in the letter of offer or employment contract you send your Agreement Manager. The start and end dates of the agreement will be based on the day the graduate starts work.

Remember: These guidelines form part of the contract.

During the two years of your agreement, your Agreement Manager is your resource – please contact them if you have questions about your agreement or need to make changes.

Financial Reporting and Payments

The GTO program makes four payments over the life of the contract, based on the salary in the GTO contract. These payments are issued once we receive a financial report that shows the graduate's earnings.

The first financial report is due once the graduate has worked for six months. We will ask you to upload proof of amounts paid to the graduate (e.g., the pay stub issued after the anniversary date) into LaMPSS.

> When making your reports, be sure to confirm that you are on track to meet your contract requirements and supply an explanation for any shortfall, as well as a plan to mitigate it. If you have paid less than the amount stated in the funding agreement, your payment may be reduced. If you have paid less than the program minimum, you may not receive any payment until this has been addressed.

The program will make payment after receiving and reviewing the financial information.

In year 1, you will receive 25% of the salary amount of the contract, in two installments, one after the graduate has worked for six months and one after the graduate has worked for 12 months.

In year 2, you will receive 12.5% of the salary amount in the contract, in two installments, one after the graduate has worked for 18 months and one after the graduate has worked for 24 months.

> *For example*, if your **GTO Grow** contract has a salary of $40,000, we expect the financial report at six months to show that the graduate has earned

$20,000 or more. We would then calculate 25% of the salary amount in the contract, and divide that by two, for a first payment of $5,000. You will receive the rest of the 25% ($5,000) after your 12-month report, assuming the graduate continues to earn at least the amount in the agreement contract.

You will then receive two payments equaling 12.5% of the salary – in this example $2,500 each – after your financial reports at 18 and 24 months.

Employment Changes and How They Impact Your Agreement

If the employee resigns or you dismiss them, you must provide your Agreement Manager with a copy of the employee's Record of Employment (ROE) and last pay stub. These documents must clearly show the reason the employee left.

If your graduate leaves the position, you may be permitted to hire a second graduate to receive the rest of the wage subsidy. You can do it only once during the agreement term. A replacement employee is eligible if:

- They have graduated within 12 months of starting work in the position, and
- They are not already working for you

If this is not possible, please contact your Agreement Manager to discuss options.

Scenario: Your graduate leaves in the first six months
GTO is intended to support long-term (permanent) hiring.

If the graduate you hire does not work for you for a minimum of six months, and you opt not to hire another recent graduate, you will not be eligible to receive the subsidy.

If you do hire a second graduate, the first graduate's time worked will be counted towards your payment, but we will not release the next milestone payment until the second graduate has completed six months of employment. This may mean you receive two payments close together.

Scenario: Your graduate leaves after six months
The conditions above regarding second graduates continue to apply.

If you hire a person who does not qualify for GTO, or if you will be waiting more than 3 months to fill the vacancy, you will receive a pro-rated payment for the time the graduate has worked. Your agreement will be closed. If you apply to GTO for another new position in the future, your next agreement will be made for the time remaining in the closed agreement.

> *For example*: A GTO Grow graduate-employee worked for 8 months and you were not able to replace them. When you apply for funding for another new position, the program will fund 4 months at 25/35% and 12 months at 12.5%, if that position is approved.

Scenario: You eliminate the position
If you eliminate the GTO position or lay off your employee for lack of work within the two-year life of the contract, you must **repay** any subsidy payments you have received.

Overpayments

If we discover that you have been paid monies you are not entitled to at any time during the agreement – due to the departure of the graduate, because the dates provided to the program were inaccurate, because you have laid off the graduate or for any other reason – you will be required to return any overpayment.

Evaluation and Feedback

To assess program effectiveness, we collect feedback from you as well as your graduate-employee during the agreement period.

We will send survey links by email – please make sure to update your contact information in LaMPSS as required.

Both you and the graduate-employee must complete the surveys for us to issue payment.

All information we gather is de-identified. We will not share identifiable information without permission.

Your Agreement Manager may also contact you from time to time during the agreement to request feedback or collect other information.

GTO Grow Program Summary

1. Read program guidelines and confirm your organization meets eligibility criteria. These guidelines form part of the funding agreement.

2. Develop a new position and confirm it meets the eligibility criteria.

3. Apply online. (Apply for LaMPSS access if necessary.)

4. If approved, hire an eligible recent graduate. Ensure that they have graduated from a degree or diploma program within 1 year of their first day of work.

5. Send your Agreement Manager a Graduate Information Form completed by the graduate-employee, a copy of the graduate's degree/diploma and a copy of the signed employment agreement or letter of offer.

6. Your Agreement Manager will confirm that the graduate is eligible and send you a link to sign your agreement contract in LaMPSS.

7. At the 6-, 12-, 18- and 24-month mark, log in to LaMPSS and make a Financial Report to upload the graduate-employee's pay stubs.

8. At the 6- and 18-month mark, complete the employer survey, and have the graduate-complete the employee survey. Your Agreement Manager will send you the survey links.

9. You will receive reimbursement by direct deposit.

10. Keep in touch with your Agreement Manager and let them know if anything changes during the two-year agreement period.

GTO Innovate Program Summary

1. Read program guidelines and confirm your organization meets eligibility criteria. These guidelines form part of the funding agreement.

2. Develop a new position focused on innovation. Confirm it meets the eligibility criteria.

3. Apply online. As a part of the application, submit the innovation plan using the template available on the program website. (Apply for LaMPSS access if necessary.)

4. If approved, hire an eligible recent graduate. Ensure that they have graduated from a master's or PhD program within 1 year of their first day of work.

5. Send your Agreement Manager a Graduate Information Form completed by the graduate-employee, a copy of the graduate's degree and a copy of the signed employment agreement or letter of offer.

6. Your Agreement Manager will confirm that the graduate is eligible and send you a link to sign your agreement contract in LaMPSS.

7. At the 6-, 12-, 18- and 24-month mark, log in to LaMPSS and make a Financial Report to upload the graduate-employee's pay stubs.

8. At the 6- and 18-month mark, complete the employer survey, and have the graduate complete the employee survey. Your Agreement Manager will send you the survey links.

9. You will receive reimbursement by direct deposit.

10. Keep in touch with your Agreement Manager and let them know if anything changes during the two-year agreement period.

Contact Us

If you require any additional information, please contact us:

yepinfo@novascotia.ca
(Toll Free) 1-800-424-5418
(Local) 902-424-6000

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