

Ontario Works Policy Directives

8.1 Early Employment Supports

Legislative Authority

Sections 2, 4, 6, 7(4), 16(2) and 44 of the Act.

Sections 14(1), (2) and 25-31 of Regulation 134/98.

Audit Requirements

Documentation is on file to support decisions made.

Participant follow-ups are documented and have taken place.

Application of Policy

As a condition of eligibility for Ontario Works basic financial assistance, participants are required to participate in employment assistance activities.

In addition, participants are required to make reasonable efforts to accept and maintain employment that the participant is physically and mentally capable of undertaking, and to make reasonable efforts to seek, accept and maintain employment.

Ontario Works employment assistance activities are designed to assist participants in obtaining skills that support progress towards sustainable employment. All applicants and participants are provided with access to the supports they need to achieve these goals.

Supports are also provided to ODSP non-disabled adults with participation requirements; and, to ODSP recipients, spouses and dependent adults who do not have participation requirements but have voluntarily requested to participate in Ontario Works employment assistance activities.

The requirement to participate in a community placement and/or employment assistance activities is temporarily deferred for:

- A sole support parent with at least one dependent child for whom publicly funded education is not available;
- A participant who is a caregiver for a family member and the Administrator is satisfied that participation in employment assistance activities is impracticable;

- A participant who is 65 years of age or older; or
- Other exceptional circumstances approved by the Administrator (e.g., victim of family violence, awaiting WSIB, addictions, etc).

Employment assistance activities and supports include:

- structured job search and job search support services;
- employment information session;
- community participation (i.e., activities that allow people to contribute to the community and improve their employability);
- employment placement and job retention services;
- a self-employment activity and supports for self-employment development;
- referral to basic education or approved training programs;
- Learning, Earning and Parenting (LEAP) program;
- literacy screening, assessment and/or training
- job-specific skills training; and
- screening for substance abuse and referral to assessment and treatment if necessary (sites participating in this activity must be approved by the Director of Ontario Works).

In addition, participants are provided with financial supports to meet expenses associated with participation in employment assistance activities (see [Directive 7.4: Employment and Participation Benefits](#) for more information).

The level and type of employment assistance activity provided to a participant is determined based on the local labour market and the experience, skills and circumstances of each applicant or participant.

At the time of application, participants should be provided with information about the local labour market (e.g., employment opportunities, occupational groups in demand) and the range of Ontario Works employment assistance activities that are available to them.

Participants who are unable to benefit from one or more employment assistance activities due to personal circumstances (e.g., homelessness, transience, or lack of available child care) should be supported in resolving these obstacles as a first step towards participation in employment assistance activities.

In addition, participants should be provided with information on other supports that the participant may be eligible for and referrals should be made where appropriate. This may include referrals to federal income support programs such as Employment Insurance, Workplace Safety and Insurance Board, Widowed Spouses Allowance, Spouses Allowance, Old Age Security, Guaranteed Income Supplement and the Canada Pension Plan-Disability.

Where there are barriers to communication (e.g., inability of the participant to communicate in English or French, a hearing impairment, or emotional or mental instability), the Administrator should make reasonable efforts to ensure information is communicated and dialogue is possible.

Job Search Requirement

Participants are required to undertake an active job search either independently or in a structured job-search program. The intent is to support early testing of a participant's employability to help determine which further supports could be introduced.

The job search requirement is necessary unless the recipient:

- has participation requirements that are deferred;
- is participating in an addiction treatment program;
- is in attendance at an approved, full-time program of basic education or training, literacy or job-specific skills training (the job search requirement applies during the summer vacation period and may be restricted to short-term or seasonal paid employment for that period); or
- is registered with a job placement or self-employment development agency.

Independent Job Search

This includes any planned search for paid employment where the delivery agent and other supporting organizations are providing guidance to the participant.

Participants pursuing an independent job search should have basic labour market knowledge, job preparation skills and the ability to engage in this activity independently.

Participants who require basic labour market orientation and lack job preparation skills are not likely to be successful in an independent job search. The delivery agent should refer these participants to a structured job search.

Structured Job Search

Participants are required to engage in at least two of the following structured job search activities provided by the delivery agent:

- job club participation (peer group session)
- workshop attendance (as a separate activity from a job club)
- attendance for employment referral
- scheduled attendance at an employment resource centre to review job boards and speak to on-site workers about job-seeking efforts

Employment Resource Centre Services

Delivery agents provide participants with access to services through an on-site centre or at locations with strong links to the Ontario Works office, such as:

- a municipally-operated resource centre;
- a co-located/co-managed resource centre with other partners such as the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) or Human Resources Skills Development Canada (HRSDC); and/or
- local libraries.

Services should offer at least two of the following:

- information on available employment supports and the local labour market
- an inventory of available community supports, such as:
 - training
 - literacy
 - employment help centres
 - Job Connect Centres
 - counseling services
 - addiction assessment and/or treatment programs
 - Ontario Early Years Resource Centres
 - child care
- inventory of community placements and referrals to community placements
- equipment to support job searches (e.g., telephones, faxes, computers, and photocopiers)
- job clubs to provide structured group help on preparing and searching for work
- workshops on job search strategies, letter writing and job interview techniques
- job boards, job banks and referrals to paid employment opportunities

Participants in an independent job search may choose to access any of the services described above or, in some cases, may be required to use a specified resource such as a labour market orientation session or a resume writing workshop.

Basic Education

A referral to an educational program should occur at the earliest opportunity for participants in need of basic education.

This includes a referral to programs designed to offer participants the opportunities to:

- complete their secondary school education (Grade 12 or equivalency); and/or
- improve their language/literacy skills (see [Directive 8.3: Literacy Screening Assessment Training](#) for more information).

The referral may occur at the time of application or at any point when an opportunity is available. The educational program must support progress toward sustainable employment (i.e., provides basic language and work skills).

Job-Specific Skills Training

Job-specific skills training includes basic workplace skills and training placements that contribute to a participant's job-readiness and support progress toward sustainable employment.

Participants may access workplace preparation programs funded by MTCU either independently or through a referral from Ontario Works.

Participants who are referred through Ontario Works are eligible to have employment and training expenses covered, such as child care and transportation, by Ontario Works where they are not covered by the participating organization.

When making a referral, the delivery agent is expected to:

- screen the participant according to criteria or assessment resources provided through the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration, MTCU, and HRSDC, or locally-available educational or training facilities to ensure the referral is appropriate;
- identify locally-available approved education and training programs and providers, and develop and maintain the information, processes, and contacts for effective referrals;
- identify expected results of the participant's involvement in the training program; and
- monitor the participant's compliance with training requirements.

When participants are attending outside job agencies, verification of attendance must be provided.

Training for short periods of time that lead to a job (e.g., a two week certificate program that is connected to opportunities that are available locally) may be

funded as employment assistance related expenses (see [Directive 7.4: Employment and Participation benefits](#) for more information).

Training is job-specific. Participants interested in longer-term education opportunities and higher education opportunities need to apply for financial assistance through the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) and other post-secondary funding sources.

Financial Supports to Meet Participation Expenses

Expenses associated with participation in employment or employment assistance activities are covered under participation related expenses to support participants as they move along the service path. Financial supports for persons with disabilities and for child care are also available (see [Directive 7.4: Employment and Participation Benefits](#) for more information).

Administrators in a First Nations and northern communities have the discretion to exercise flexibility when approving employment activities and/or expenses based on cultural and geographic considerations in order to support employment outcomes for clients.