

Ontario Budget 2023 | First Work Pre-Budget Submission

Maximizing Ministry Collaboration with Community Experts

First Work is Ontario's employment network and association group for Employment Service Providers, advocating for the practitioners in this sector and the job seekers they serve, especially youth. Our 100+ member network convenes to share best practices in the space, advance evidence-based policy recommendations, and identify training needs to best serve the job seekers of Ontario. Our Province-wide lens into local economies enables dual-customer (job seeker and employer), community solutions to labour issues – insights which are echoed in the following submission.

Amongst a tight labour market and looming recession, Employment Services Providers (ESPs) are more essential than ever in supporting the growth of local economies. With compounding and competing pressures impacting Ontario's workforce, there is an opportunity to utilize ESPs as a resource in local economic recovery, recognizing them as the community labour experts they are.

Unlike temp agencies, ESPs are a publicly funded resource that work for both sides of the economy coin: the job seeker and the employer. ESPs help employers not only secure the talent required but also work with that talent to ensure they retain the job they've been hired for – creating mutual benefit for the employer and employee.

The tight labour market Ontario and the rest of Canada is experiencing requires a hiring mind-set shift.

To ensure Ontario meets the needs of both regional economies and its workforce, First Work asks the Government to consider the following recommendations.

Prioritize Youth-Specific Programming in Employment Ontario to provide youth-facing-barriers equitable access to supports

Existing untapped talent available in Ontario is hard to reach – with 1 in 5 Ontarians aged 24-29 being classified as NEET (not in employment, education, or training) in 2021.¹ Government programs like Youth Job Connection (YJC) and YJC Summer don't just upskill young people to be job-retention ready; they also capacitate ESPs to outreach to this hard-to-find young talent.

A strong youth talent pipeline is critical for stable economic growth; but there is also a need for increased effort to reach these NEET youth to lessen their future government burden. Beyond youth, the impact of pandemic on Ontario's unemployed cannot be understated. Those who were unemployed prior to pandemic are inherently disadvantaged in returning to the labour market; navigating a gap of skills demanded by employers, while likely dealing with poverty.² These individuals required intensive supports from ESPs to become job – and retention – ready.

¹ Statistics Canada (2022) *Table: 37-10-0196-01 Percentage of 15-to 29-year-olds in education and not in education by labour force status, highest level of education attained, age group and sex* [Data table]

<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=3710019601>

² Ontario's Unemployed: Diverse Experiences, Common Challenges. <https://firstwork.org/research/ontarios-unemployed/>

Government should continue focus on initiatives to reach those furthest from employment, enabling equitable and stable economic recovery for local talent. First Work requests the Government maintain or re-integrate youth specific programming like Youth Job Connection and YJCS programming through the EO transformation to ensure the province's young people are not left behind in Ontario's economic success.

Government should support the revitalization of programs whose reach is effectively designed to ready those furthest from employment for meaningful work in local economies.

Further Consideration for Accessibility through Digital Upgrading of Ministry Resources to ensure no one is left behind

This government has also taken tremendous strides in improving digital access across public services. Digital access to services is critical in the post-COVID world; however, there must be consideration for structural advancement in access to digital connectivity. Specifically, while digitizing access of programs like Better Jobs Ontario (BJO) can reduce the associated paperwork, there must be consideration for who is accessing these digital services. With specific criterion to qualify for the program, the know-how and digital literacy of the client is likely too low to find success in the digital BJO route, necessitating ESP intervention and support. Consideration for the accessibility of digital services – particularly for those with lower digital literacy or limited connectivity – should be included within the government's ongoing efforts in digital advancement.

Continue to remove the Siloes of Government to Expand EO Programming for Youth with the Ministry of Education

This government has taken great strides to break the siloes between ministries, indicative through the integration of employment supports between MLITSD and MCCSS to ensure ESP resources are available to all job seekers. These large-scale initiatives, which leverage Ministry resources paired with the strength of experience existing in the sector, help the government to support the breadth of their constituents, from workers to employers. There is an opportunity for Government to further de-silo the work between Ministries, specifically for youth.

ESPs regularly work with school boards and teachers to offer career exploration opportunities with youth – activities typically funded in part through outreach components of YJC programming. By supplementing Civics courses with local professionals in employment, youth are equipped with the resources they need to leave school and successfully transition to a community contributor. Community-based service providers have the expertise of local economic and labour market information to appropriately guide young people to local careers that suite personal needs, increasing individual success. Greater collaboration on a ministry level between the MLITSD and MOE would allow for these activities to be uniformly accessible across the province, enabling vibrant communities that begin at school. A prime example of continued ministry collaboration would be to utilize ESPs to aid to deliver Skilled Trades Recruitment endeavors, coinciding with their existing work with school boards as well.

By maximizing employer access to existing government services, ESPs can continue to be the resource employers turn to for their labour issues. We look forward to working with the Government to ensure that the youth of Ontario and those furthest away are successfully integrated into the labour market

We welcome the opportunity to further share our thoughts with you.

For more information:

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About First Work

First Work is Ontario's employment network: a leading membership organization bringing together the best providers of employment programming and services, business leaders, academia, and government to develop and advance evidence-led solutions for employment. Our 100+ membership community positions us at the bridge between job seekers and employment, bringing innovative partnerships with industry partners to the workforce development space. Our direct engagement with job seekers, youth and employment services providers ensures our services are relevant, timely and apply an intersectional lens. Our continued advocacy at all levels of government supports progressive policy development for the benefit of all job seekers.