

Guidelines:

Societal and Community Benefits

These guidelines identify considerations and offer advice for identifying, documenting, and demonstrating the societal and community benefits of a proposed program or specialization.

The ministry is committed to a program review and approval process that includes societal and community benefits as one indicator of the value and utility that a proposed program offers to Albertans.

The societal and community benefits of a proposed program can help establish the need for a program, particularly when this need cannot be captured by labour market demands and indicators.

Scope

These guidelines pertain to program proposals submitted by institutions to the ministry through the Provider and Program Registry System (PAPRS). These proposals can be for non-credential, certificate, diploma, and degree programs in matters concerning:

- new programs;
- new specializations; and
- reactivations of suspended programs and specializations.

While demonstration of societal and community benefits of a proposed program is not an essential requirement, it is an important consideration in proposals where labour market indicators may not be persuasive on their own.

A societal or community benefit from a program can be defined as a benefit to society at the local, provincial, or national level, and/or to particular communities or groups within society or to society as a whole. Societal and community benefits underpin a well-functioning society. They often lay the foundation for healthy and economically vibrant environments.

Labour market outcomes for individual program graduates are not considered (for the purposes of these guidelines) to be a type of societal and community benefit since they involve economic benefits accruing to an individual rather than the benefits accruing to the larger society. However, broad trends in labour market outcomes for a particular community or demographic subgroup that result from the delivery of a program could be categorized as a societal or community benefit.

Guiding Principles

- Societal and community benefits accruing from post-secondary educational programs can often lay a foundation for healthy, clean, and inclusive environments, thereby helping to foster a well-functioning society and contributing indirectly to positive economic outcomes.
- Identifying the social and community need for programs can be an important aspect of the program development process.
- Learning opportunities should be available to Albertans within a coordinated system where collaboration between educational providers yields community benefits.

Societal and Community Benefits Considerations

- Types of Societal and Community Benefits
- Identifying Societal and Community Benefits
- Documenting and Demonstrating Societal and Community Benefits
- System Coordination Review
- Societal and Community Benefits for Reactivated Programs

Types of Societal and Community Benefits

Societal and community benefits are typically one of two types: intrinsic or extrinsic benefits.

Intrinsic benefits are societal and community benefits deriving from the essential nature of the program of study and are related to the skills, training, and/or knowledge with which the program endows graduates.

Examples of intrinsic benefits include (but are not limited to):

- Fine Arts programming provides graduates with the skills to create and contribute to a vibrant cultural sector in a community or region, which in turn can help to attract tourists and industry to a region.
- Graduates of early learning and childcare programs provide care for and educate pre-school age children, which enables parents to work.
- Adult basic education and academic upgrading help reduce negative social outcomes for individuals lacking foundational skills necessary for today's economy by enabling these learners to improve on these skills and expand the range of educational/training opportunities available to them.
- Pre-employment programs can lay the foundation for economic growth within a community or region by creating opportunities for learners to ladder into apprenticeships in trades critical to the local economy. (Please see Guidelines: Pre-Employment Programs for further information on this subject.)
- Many types of programs (e.g., Bachelor of Arts in Political Science) include curriculum with civic education components that foster and promote awareness about the legal rights and responsibilities of Canadian citizens.
- Programs in the Environmental Sciences produce workers and researchers who have a positive impact on society through their efforts to foster clean water and air.

Extrinsic benefits are societal and community benefits which are related to a peripheral aspect of the program, and not the program itself, such as the program delivery location.

Examples of Extrinsic benefits include (but are not limited to):

- Expanded access to education by delivering a program in a rural environment or other underserved area;
- A program in a new academic discipline that supports the development of a new area of inquiry and knowledge, and has potential benefits for academic communities, which can trickle down to society.
- Flexible programming that appeals to learners who wish to continue working on a part- or full-time basis while they complete their studies; and
- Programs that target groups that have typically been underrepresented in post-secondary education (e.g., Indigenous learners).

Identifying Societal and Community Benefits

Institutions may find it useful, depending on the circumstances of the proposal, to consider the nature and scope of possible societal and community benefits that a proposed new program may offer by addressing the questions listed below. Not all questions will be relevant to each program proposal. Please use the questions that most apply to your program.

- How do the proposed program learning outcomes foster social and community benefits?
- What social need has influenced the development of the proposed program?
- How are potential graduates likely to contribute toward addressing the identified social need for the program?
- How might the program reach out to a segment of the population that has been underrepresented in a specific occupation/field or in education in general?
- How will this program benefit the targeted community?
- How does this program promote access to underserved regions?
- How will the proposed program impact the community in which it will be delivered?
- Are there distinct local, provincial, and national dimensions to the benefits from implementing this program?
- How will this program help expand knowledge?
- What are the potential longer-term economic outcomes of implementing this program?
- Is there research, public opinion polls, trends, and any other data that will support the case for why the program is needed?
- Are there other relevant government priorities that this proposal addresses?

Documenting and Demonstrating Societal and Community Benefits

Program proposals should include documentation about societal and community benefits as appropriate. Institutions should obtain this information by:

- consulting with relevant communities and professionals regarding what wider societal and community goals/benefits proposed programming addresses and why this program is needed;
- referring to research, public opinion polls, trends, and any other data that will support the case for why the program is needed;
- conducting focus groups or surveys to determine the need for the program within the targeted community; and
- investigating whether there any relevant demographic trends that support the proposed program.

System Coordination Review

During the system coordination review process, ministry staff will use information provided by institutions on societal and community benefits as an indicator of need for, and utility of, the proposed program. Other measures include demand from learners and employers for a proposed program, learner pathway considerations, distinctiveness of the proposed program, and its alignment with an institution's mandates and larger strategic direction.

Particularly in cases where there are data gaps or uneven findings with regards to these other indicators, it can be useful to provide evidence of tangible societal and community benefits of a proposed program in order to supplement the overall rationale for the program.

Societal and Community Benefits for Reactived Programs

Programs that have been suspended for a substantial period of time may need to demonstrate the continued societal and community benefits of the program as part of the rationale for reactivation.

The advice and considerations offered in this guideline is applicable in such cases.

Further Information and Assistance

For additional information contact:

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Related Guidelines:

- Learner Demand
- Labour Market Considerations
- Program Learning Outcomes
- Pre-Employment Programs

Other related documents:

- Advanced Education
Adult Learning System Principles

To obtain a copy of other guideline documents, or to ensure that you have the most recent copy of this guideline, please send a request via email to ae.psp-paprs@gov.ab.ca.