

Employment Services Transformation: Provincial Rollout June 2021 - General Questions and Answers

Employment Services Transformation: Provincial Rollout Implementation Questions and Answers

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General Implementation Questions

Question 1: What is the timeline for provincial implementation?

There are currently 12 remaining catchment areas for implementation of the Employment Services Transformation model. A phased approach will be taken, happening in several stages between now and the end of 2023.

June/July 2021:

The EST provincial roll out begins with the public announcement and release of limited Market Sounding and Request for Qualifications (RFQ) for 9 catchments (excluding the Toronto catchment and 2 catchments in the North).

After reviewing the applicants' Market Sounding submissions, the ministry will develop a detailed catchment phasing plan. The plan will articulate which catchments will be in the low complexity, medium complexity and high complexity phases.

Fall 2021:

The ministry will assess the RFQ to determine low complexity catchments and will then issue

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the Call for Proposal (CFP) for those catchment areas. Qualified applicants from the RFQ will be invited to participate in the CFP.

Early 2022 to December 2022:

The competitive process for medium complexity catchments will begin in early 2022, with agreements in place by December 2022.

April 2022:

Ministry – Service System Manager transfer payment agreements will be in place by April 2022 for identified low complexity catchments.

2023:

The competitive process for high complexity catchments (including Toronto and the North region) will occur in 2023, due to the additional engagement and implementation planning required.

Question 2: Which catchment areas will be part of this round of Request for Qualification?

There are currently 12 remaining catchment areas for implementation of the Employment Services Transformation model. The June 2021 RFQ encompasses nine of the remaining catchment areas:

- Durham
- Halton
- Kingston-Pembroke
- Kitchener-Waterloo-Barrie
- London
- Ottawa Region
- Stratford-Bruce Peninsula
- Windsor-Sarnia
- York

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The Toronto catchment and two catchments in the North region will not be included in this round.

Question 3: What activities take place during the Transition Period?

Following the competitive process for Phase 1, new service system managers for this phase will be provided with a Planning Period (April to June 2022) and Transition period (July 2022-March 2023) to establish themselves and for service providers to familiarize themselves with the new model. The prototypes confirmed this was crucial for success.

Factors that may impact network stability (e.g. service provider management and capacity building, stakeholder communications, labour relation issues, digital services) are addressed during this time. Then fully integrated service delivery can begin.

During the transition period, service system managers take responsibility for the existing agreements with service delivery organizations in their catchment areas for Employment Ontario and ODSP employment programs. At the end of the transition period, the service system managers also take on responsibility from municipalities to provide employment activities supporting Ontario Works clients.

Question 4: How has the ministry determined the service areas/catchments?

The ministry developed a framework, supported by data and feedback from stakeholders during vendor engagement. To further define the catchment areas, the ministry examined multiple factors, such as demographics, geographic and amount of change within a region.

The 15 determined catchment areas for EST are aligned with Statistics Canada Economic Region boundaries, with modifications to split the Toronto Economic Region into five catchments, according to Census Divisions. This allows for better data collection in terms of the local economy and evaluating the impact of the new model.

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Question 5: How many catchments can a Service System Manager oversee?

As part of the Market Sounding exercise, applicants would be required to rank their preferred catchments to help determine the depth of market interest and contestability. The specific approach for how many catchment(s) prospective SSMs may oversee will be informed by analyzing feedback from stakeholders and jurisdictional best practices to ensure fair competition and contestability.

Question 6: When does client intake begin?

During the Transition Period, Employment Ontario (EO) and Ontario Disability Support Program- Employment Supports (ODSP-ES) service providers are transferred to the service system managers and SSMs begin their responsibility of service delivery network oversight and EO and ODSP-ES client intake.

Beginning in the Integrated Employment Services Delivery Period, service system managers can make changes to the service provider network and performance-based funding begins. At this time, Ontario Works Employment Assistance is transferred to service system managers and OW-EA client intake begins in the catchment areas.

Question 7: How do you know the prototypes have been successful?

For the purposes of the provincial roll-out, “prototype success” includes:

- Reduction of transfer payment agreements administered by MLTSD from 109 total agreements (76 EO agreements, 33 ODSP-ES agreements) to three (3) contracts.
- On January 1, 2021, integration of OW employment assistance into Employment Ontario and the Integrated ES Delivery Period began in the three prototype catchment areas.
- While there are limited outcomes data to provide sufficient assessment of system success, preliminary data indicates that the EST model is serving more Social

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Assistance clients compared to non-prototype catchment areas. Since the start of the Integrated Delivery Period, more than 12,600 Social Assistance clients have been referred to Employment Ontario for the January 1, 2021 to May 10, 2021.

As the new service delivery model only came into effect on January 1, 2021, the ministry is continuously monitoring employment outcomes data to assess the model's effectiveness. MLTSD is closely monitoring prototype results to determine how the new service delivery model is meeting EST objectives, including outcomes for clients.

Question 8: Which catchments have a greater likelihood of being chosen for Phase1 implementation?

Due to the timing of the launch of phase 1 of EST rollout, catchment areas chosen for this phase will be dependent on various factors including:

- Feedback from the vendor engagement following the launch of the limited Market Sounding and Request for Qualification to identify catchments of low complexity and high vendor interest that would be included as part of Phase 1 Call for Proposal.
- Municipalities within the catchment area who are supportive of the model.
- Geographic characteristics that are comparable to the three prototype catchments which served an urban area (Peel), a rural area (Muskoka-Kawartha) and a mixed urban/rural area (Hamilton-Niagara).

Question 9: What were the SSMs' biggest challenges during the prototypes?

Public health measures related to the COVID-19 pandemic presented significant challenges to the SSMs on a number of fronts. In addition to the impacts on in-person service delivery, SSMs were also challenged in their ability to engage community partners and stakeholders to inform their service delivery models and supporting transition plans. This is especially true for those SSMs who were new to the Ontario service delivery context.

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There was also significant uncertainty about the volume of OW clients who might be referred. During the transition period, the SSMs built relationships and protocols with the municipalities and MLTSD established tools to support consistent assessment of clients and to allow tracking of volumes and outcomes.

Question 10: Why is EST implementation taking place in Toronto and the northern catchment areas last?

The ministry recognizes the uniqueness and complexities related to the demographic, geographic and population densities of Toronto and the Northern catchment areas which is why we have left implementation in those places for a later date.

The ministry will use the time prior to rolling out EST in Toronto and the North to make thoughtful considerations to developing a delivery approach that will best meet the unique needs of those communities. Decisions on system design requirements and service delivery improvements will be informed through engagement with key stakeholders including, municipalities, DSSABs, Indigenous partners, our service provider network and community groups.

EST Commercial Strategy

Question 11: What is the Employment Services Transformation (EST) Commercial Strategy?

The Commercial Strategy is intended to provide awareness and expectations about the EST model to potential SSMs while maintaining value for money, commercial viability, contestability and fairness in the competitive process.

The Commercial Strategy includes the following activities: market sounding exercise, vendor engagements, a two-stage competitive selection process, Ministry-SSM negotiations and transfer payment agreement.

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Question 12: Why is there a need for market sounding and vendor engagement?

Vendor engagement is a critical component for the use of commissioning for the design of public service markets. It communicates the ministry's approach to transformation and encourage participation in the competitive process. It also provides the ministry with information about best practices and important issues to ensure that the competitive process is well-designed.

Through market sounding and vendor engagement, the ministry will raise awareness within the vendor community and test the depth of market interest. During the prototype, the ministry used vendor engagement to inform the development of the delivery approach for services required for specialized populations, including People with Disabilities and other specialized groups.

For the provincial roll out, a limited market sounding exercise will be completed to determine vendor interest and identify catchments with low complexity suitable for the initial phase of implementation. It will not include changes to system design.

In addition, by engaging third parties, the ministry can encourage participation in upcoming and future competitive processes.

Question 13: How will Service System Managers (SSMs) be selected?

Service system managers will be selected through a two-stage competitive process. The ministry is aiming to attract high performing organizations with the sophistication to oversee the delivery and design of employment services as service system managers.

Stage 1: Request for Qualification (RFQ) for the 9 catchments.

- RFQ participation is open to any public, not-for-profit and private sector organization, as well as municipalities and municipal service delivery organizations.

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- The RFQ will communicate the principles, priorities, and delivery model objectives to potential organizations interested in competing as an SSM.
- During the RFQ stage, applicants would be required to demonstrate their experience and capacity to serve as a service system manager.
- The RFQ will be used to qualify organizations for the second stage of the selection process.

Stage 2: Call for Proposals (CFP) for the identified catchment areas.

- Only organizations that qualified through the RFQ will be invited to participate in the CFP.
- In the second stage, the ministry will invite qualified entities to submit proposals for the management and delivery of employment services, beginning with identified low complexity/high vendor interest catchments in the first evaluation round.
- As part of the CFP evaluation, the three highest scoring applicants in each catchment area will be invited to attend an interview.
 - After interviews are completed, the top applicant for each catchment is selected to enter negotiations with the ministry.

Question 14: Will there be an opportunity for prospective applicants to ask questions and provide feedback about the RFQ?

We remain committed to providing regular communications to help you understand and prepare for any changes. Additional details about the competitive process will be provided through sector specific information sessions which are scheduled for mid-June.

Details about these information sessions are available in the Request for Qualification document.

Further information about what is happening now, and next steps, can be found on the Employment Ontario Partners Gateway.

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Question 15: Once top applicants in the catchment areas are selected, what are the next steps?

Once the top applicants in the catchment areas are selected, individual negotiations between the ministry and each of the top applicant begins. The negotiations are intended to enable the ministry to turn the commitments made in the Call for Proposal submissions into contractual deliverables.

The top applicants also have the chance to bring forward transfer payment agreement items to negotiate. As part of the prototype negotiations in January 2020, non-negotiable items included:

- Performance Measures and Monitoring requirements
- Funding Model
- Common Assessment tool (client streaming)
- Cost proposal and targets
- General terms and conditions in the agreement
- Project objectives, timelines and activities

Once negotiations are complete, the next step is the signing of the Ministry-SSM agreement. Once the agreements are signed, the SSMs are in place and public announcements can be made.

Stakeholder Engagement and Impacts

Question 16: How will the ministry engage stakeholders during the provincial roll-out?

As the government prepares for the next stage of Employment Services Transformation, the ministry is committed to engaging with key stakeholders, including our municipal partners, service delivery partners, and the Reference Group on Employment Services for People with Disabilities.

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In response to feedback from First Nations partners, the government decided that the SSM model will not be implemented within First Nations communities (on-reserve). The province will engage with First Nations communities and other Indigenous partners to develop a model for employment services that will result in better outcomes for First Nation job seekers.

The province is committed to working with other Indigenous partners - including the Métis Nation of Ontario (MNO), the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres (OFIFC), the Ontario Native Women's Association (ONWA), Tungasuvvingat Inuit (TI) and Indigenous service providers - to support Indigenous jobseekers off-reserve.

There will be no immediate changes to the access and delivery of employment services for clients in the prototype catchment areas, including First Nations clients who access employment and training services off-reserve. The service system manager (SSM) model will apply to urban/other Indigenous service providers (off-reserve). SSMs will be required to engage with Indigenous organizations in order to provide employment services to Indigenous jobseekers in a culturally supportive way and deliver long-term, sustainable outcomes. To support the Request for Qualifications process, the ministry will hold information sessions with stakeholders and partners.

As well, the ministry remains committed to providing regular communications to help our stakeholders and the public understand and prepare for any changes.

Question 17: How will these changes impact service providers?

In the EST system, the contractual relationship with Employment Ontario service providers will shift from the ministry to SSMs. SSMs will be permitted to make changes to the service provider network and will be fully responsible for the planning, design and delivery of employment services within their region. The ministry will hold service system managers accountable for achieving specific outcomes, including the opportunity to get performance-based funding. Service system managers will oversee Employment Ontario service providers and, in some cases, may deliver services directly in their catchment area.

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The ministry will gradually implement the changes to Ontario's employment services, with regular communications to help people understand and prepare for any changes.

Question 18: What direct impacts will the employment services transformation have on municipalities, service providers or their staff?

The transformation will have no immediate impact on municipalities, service providers or their staff. Each catchment area will have both a Planning and a Transition period where program delivery is status quo once the new SSM is selected. The earliest Transition period for the next group of catchments will be in effect until 2023. A review of the prototype catchments confirmed that a gradual, phased approach was crucial for success.

Question 19: What role will municipalities have in the new system?

Municipalities are welcome to compete to be an SSM or a provider of the newly integrated employment system.

Municipalities are key partners in transformation of both the employment services and social assistance systems. As both Employment Services Transformation and Social Assistance Recovery and Renewal proceed, municipalities will increasingly focus on delivering life stabilization supports for social assistance clients. Municipalities and SSMs have built relationships in the 3 prototype areas to ensure that clients who are ready for employment can be referred into the new system.

Municipalities outside of the prototype communities that deliver Ontario Works employment services will continue to operate as in the past until full implementation. The government will continue to work with service delivery partners across the province to plan and deliver stronger, locally focused employment and social assistance services that help more people find and keep jobs.

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Question 20: Are Service System Managers required to work with under-represented groups (e.g. People with Disabilities, Indigenous People)?

As per the Ministry-SSM Transfer Payment Agreements, SSMs must meet certain Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), including:

- Francophone people served
- General population clients with disabilities served
- ODSP clients served
- Indigenous people served
- Newcomers served
- Youth with higher support needs served

The ministry is also interested in how SSMs support other underrepresented groups, such as:

- Black and racialized people
- Women with higher support needs, including intimate partner violence, human trafficking, etc.
- For Francophone services, SSMs are required to provide services in French in designated areas or ensure that a person requiring French language services is referred to a French-designated service provider within the Catchment Area. SSMs are also required to serve a certain proportion of Francophone clients and engage with their community partners to ensure services meet their needs.

SSMs are also required to be in compliance with relevant provincial legislation including the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act*.

During the prototype Transition Period, SSMs were required to submit a plan detailing their approach to service delivery and any network changes to be implemented including:

- Training and delivering of appropriate services in a culturally sensitive, safe, aware and equitable way that recognizes and respects the unique history, strengths, challenges and experiences of Indigenous peoples

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- Actions that the SSM will take to support client-centric delivery to:
 - Ensure appropriate and relevant services for clients, including Indigenous clients and those from specialized populations, to support them in achieving sustainable outcomes
 - Respond to the labour market needs of employers and communities, including Indigenous and Francophone communities

Question 21: Will Service System Managers collect desegregated race-based data?

Yes. Service system managers are asking Integrated Employment Services clients to self-identify their race through the common assessment tool. The ministry will be gathering this information to better understand who is accessing our services, the client outcomes of certain groups and potential barriers to make informed decisions about specialized programs and supports.

Question 22: What is the plan to ensure service system managers provide in-person service delivery sites in rural communities across the province?

To achieve balance between service system managers' flexibility to optimize service delivery footprint while protecting access to service in rural communities, the ministry established specific parameters and minimum service delivery requirements for in-person service delivery sites.

Service system managers are required to offer in-person service delivery that ensures at least 75% of clients in a community are within a drive time of 25 minutes or less. The drive time requirement takes into consideration population density in each catchment and geographic characteristics of communities.

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General Background

Question 23: How will these changes improve employment services?

The government is moving to a new service delivery model that is focused on outcomes. The changes will strengthen the overall delivery model and lead to improved employment outcomes for clients.

The SSMs will transform service delivery in a manner that supports a client-centric and outcomes-based approach, which was informed through consultations with service providers and key stakeholders.

SSMs will offer accessible services in a coordinated and integrated manner. It is expected that clients will receive a smooth employment services journey as the system transitions over time.

SSMs bring a wealth of experience and new approaches to service delivery which will be tested in each of the three prototype catchment areas. With the increased focus on outcomes, SSMs will bring an additional level of accountability to the employment services system in their areas.

In addition, the government is integrating Ontario's employment services which are currently delivered separately for clients of Employment Ontario and social assistance (Ontario Works, Ontario Disability Support Program).

Question 24: Why is the government integrating employment services?

The government is creating a stronger system that is easy to use and localized to help all workers, businesses, and communities.

Beginning in the prototype catchment areas, employment programs for Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program will be integrated into Employment Ontario to create one efficient, cost-effective system that is easy to use, helps all job seekers, including those on social assistance, and better supports employers. By integrating the three current systems into one strong, more seamless service system, the government aims to help service providers

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deliver better results for people and businesses and to provide job seekers with a clear path to employment.

Question 25: Why did the government start with prototype communities?

The 3 prototype regions, Hamilton-Niagara Peninsula, Muskoka-Kawartha and Peel, were selected to reflect Ontario's geographic and community diversity to ensure the new employment services system works for all Ontario job seekers and employers.

As the new service delivery model only came into effect on January 1, 2021, the ministry is continuously monitoring employment outcomes data to assess the model's effectiveness. Some early findings may be available during the Summer 2021. Adequate data to provide a fulsome evaluation will not be available until April 2022, at the earliest.

As the new system is implemented in the initial three catchment areas, the government will continue to work with service delivery partners across the province to plan and deliver stronger, locally focused employment and social assistance services that help more people find and keep jobs.

Question 26: How will this help with the economic recovery?

The economic downturn caused by COVID-19 comes at a time when the economy is rapidly changing and becoming more technology-driven and knowledge-based. A modernized employment and training system and highly trained labour force are key drivers of Ontario's competitiveness and prosperity.

To help people and businesses manage the economic impacts of COVID-19 and get Ontario back on track, the government supports effective employment and training solutions, and continues its efforts to make employment services work better for Ontarians.

The improved integrated employment services will work more effectively with other government services, including social assistance. When people find themselves facing barriers to employment, they can get the help they need to find and/or return to work in their communities.