

# Graduate to Opportunity (GTO) Program



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Issue Date: November 2022



## Program Introduction

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Graduate to Opportunity (GTO) helps recent university and college graduates start their careers in Nova Scotia by reducing the cost to employers for hiring them into new, permanent, full-time jobs that pay at least \$35,000 per year.

GTO provides a wage subsidy for two years: 25% of the total wage in year one and 12.5% in year two.

Employers receive an additional 10% subsidy, for a total of 35%, in the first year if they hire an international graduate, a woman in an occupation where they are underrepresented, or a person who self-identifies as being of African descent or racially visible, as Mi'kmaq or indigenous, or as a person with a disability.

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

## Will GTO Work for You?

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- Graduate to Opportunity is available to:
  - 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
- Employers must have an organizational entity 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.
- The total number of employees of the organization working at all locations must be fewer than 100. If the organization is part of an amalgamated group of businesses, or the finances are consolidated with a parent organization for reporting or tax purposes, the total employee-count of the amalgamated group or parent organization must be included. The T4 Summary or summaries you submit must show this total number.
- The position you fill using GTO funding must be new to your organization. Employers cannot use Graduate to Opportunity to replace staff or fill existing vacancies.
- Contract or fee-for-service positions are not eligible for GTO. The new graduate must be an employee of your organization with a guaranteed minimum annual salary of at least \$35,000 (before vacation pay and any other benefits). This amount cannot be contingent on work performed or commissions earned.

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- The initiative will be calculated on the actual wage offered to the graduate, up to a maximum of \$60,000 a year. You are welcome to pay more than \$60K per year, however, additional amounts will not be included in the subsidy
- You are not eligible for this incentive if you will receive other government wage funding for the position, although you may receive funds for related projects.
- The graduate you hire cannot start work until your application is approved. Applications from employers who have selected a graduate will be considered, providing the graduate has not started work. We review most applications within 10 days.
- 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 residing at a NS address before the first payment is issued.

Federal, provincial, and municipal governments and their agencies, health authorities, post-secondary institutions, and school boards are not eligible for this program.

## **Graduate-Employees**

Employers can hire any recent post-secondary graduate. For the purposes of the program a recent graduate:

- has completed a degree or diploma-granting post-secondary program (generally two years or longer) within 12 months of the employment start date
- 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)
- has graduated from a post- secondary institution designated by Employment and Social Development Canada. A list of these can be found at this [website](#)

In most cases, a certificate for a program shorter than 2 years can only be used to determine eligibility if the graduate has completed the certificate within 12 months of completing a degree or diploma program. However, a graduate who has completed a direct-entry certificate program may also be eligible. Please contact your Agreement Manager to confirm.



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.

LSI will provide incentives to employers to 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 Graduate to Opportunity

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Ready to go?

Applications for the program are made through the Labour Market Program Support System (LaMPSS). There is a one-time registration process to access the system using the [LaMPSS External Access Form](#).

Once registered, users may access the application form for GTO on the GTO website: <https://novascotia.ca/programs/graduate-to-opportunity/>

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

You may receive GTO funding for more than one new position, although we prefer 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.

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

## Assessment and Approval

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Once received, an Agreement Manager will assess your application. Decisions are normally made within 10 days, though missing or incomplete documentation may extend this time.

The program staff consider:

- ❖ the type and quality of work offered
- ❖ the proposed salary
- ❖ program funding available

Once the application is approved, you will receive an email to provide you with confirmation of funding, which is contingent upon hiring an eligible recent grad. The email will introduce you to your agreement manager and include your agreement number, which you should include in all correspondence with the program.

## Selecting your Graduate

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Your organization is responsible for recruiting, selecting, and hiring a graduate for a job related to their field of study.

The GTO program will give you a hand by posting a list of approved positions on its website. 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.

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).  
This is where the Graduate has an opportunity to self-identify for the diversity bonus.
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 and passed all program requirements.
3. A signed copy of the employment agreement or letter of offer of employment.
  - 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 a minimum of \$35,000 annually. We prefer that the contract provide this annualized amount, but if you are listing an hourly wage, you must also provide set working hours that would ensure the minimum is met.

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

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

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During the two years of your agreement, your Agreement Manager is your resource. Once they have received your documents and determined that your graduate is eligible, they will send you an email asking you to sign your funding agreement.

The amount of the subsidy will be based on the salary in your GTO funding agreement unless the amount in the offer letter is lower. The start and end dates of the agreement will be based on the day the graduate starts work.

## Financial Reporting and Payments

The GTO program makes 4 payments over the life of the contract. Each payment will be a reimbursement for the time worked, based on the salary in the GTO contract.

The first financial report is due once the graduate has worked for six months. We will ask you to upload proof of wages paid to the graduate (e.g., the pay stub issued after the anniversary date, an annual T4) into LaMPSS.

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

For example, if your contract has a salary of \$40,000, we would expect the financial report at six months to show that the graduate had earned \$20,000 or more. We would then pay you 25% of the salary amount in the contract (35% if you are receiving the diversity bonus), for a first payment of \$5,000.

You'll receive a second 25/35% payment after your 12-month report and 12.5% payments at 18 and 24 months.

Following on from our example, you'd receive \$5,000 at 12 months, then \$2,500 at 18 and 24 months.

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 contract, your payment may be reduced.

## **Employment Changes**

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

You may be permitted to employ a second graduate to receive the rest of the wage subsidy. 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.

### **Please Note:**

Graduate to Opportunity is available only for permanent, full-time jobs.

If you decide to eliminate the new position or lay off your employee for lack of work within the two-year life of the contract, you will be required to repay any subsidy payments you have received.

If an agreement is closed before the end of the two-year period, any future agreements will be pro-rated for the length of time remaining in the closed agreement. For example, if a graduate worked for 8 months and you were not able to replace them, when you apply for funding for another new position, the program would, on approval, fund 4 months at 25/35% and 12 months at 12.5%.

If, at any time during the agreement, an overpayment is discovered, you will be liable to repay those funds to the province.



## **Evaluation and Feedback**

To assess the effectiveness of the program, we ask employers and graduates to complete surveys during the agreement period. All information we gather is de-identified. We will not share identifiable information without permission.

Both you and the graduate-employee must complete the surveys for us to issue payment. We will send links to the surveys by email – please make sure to update your contact information in LaMPSS as required.

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

If you require any additional information, please contact us:

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

