

Guidelines:

Collaborative Programs

These guidelines offer advice to assist institutions explore opportunities and mitigate risks when engaging in partnerships involving ministry-approved programs.

Higher education increasingly involves collaborative arrangements in the provision of learning opportunities.

Such collaborations and partnerships amongst post-secondary institutions can take many forms and have positive impacts that include:

- enhancing learner pathways,
- facilitating effective delivery of high quality programming in regions where need and demand have been demonstrated,
- fostering efficiencies, cost-effectiveness and or system capacity, and
- preventing unnecessary program duplication and promoting synergies.

Scope

This guideline addresses arrangements between two or more Alberta post-secondary institutions for collaborative development and/or delivery of ministry-approved programs.

Brokering arrangements are the focus of Brokering Agreement Guidelines and are outside the scope of these guidelines.

Arrangements for Off-shore delivery of ministry-approved programs are the focus of Transnational Guidelines and are outside the scope of these guidelines.

Collaborations with respect to non-ministry approved programs, research enterprises or collaborating partners other than post-secondary institutions are outside the scope of these guidelines.

Collaborations outside of the province of Alberta are out of scope.

Guiding Principles

- Collaboration can be a powerful way to accomplish together what individual institutions cannot accomplish alone.
- Collaborations can minimize unnecessary program duplication, foster effective stewardship of provincial resources, and build system capacity.
- Collaborative provision of ministry-approved programs can enhance learner pathways and promote student success.
- Developing and delivering learning opportunities with others carries risk which needs to be effectively managed.
- Project management can be an effective approach to planning, developing and executing collaborative programs to foster success.

Pre-Planning

Initial planning for collaborations should explore the nature of the collaboration, including levels of engagement and resources required.

Prior to engaging with a potential partner institutions should:

- Conduct due diligence about the potential partner and its legal and cultural context,
- satisfy themselves that the prospective partner has the capacity to fulfil roles and responsibilities of a collaboration, and
- ascertain that the partner has shared interests.

When developing collaborations institutions should consider whether the potential partner is committed to:

- developing shared goals and a mutually beneficial relationship,
- clarifying roles, sharing responsibilities, and establishing a model or structure for managing the collaboration,
- sharing accountability,
- contributing resources and sharing risks/rewards,
- addressing student and labour market demand factors,
- identifying benefits to the provincial post-secondary system, and
- clarifying why collaboration is appropriate and beneficial given circumstances and goals.

Depending on the nature of the collaboration envisioned, helpful questions to guide development may include:

- Who should be consulted when exploring a collaboration?
- What research or data is needed about the potential collaboration?
- What assumptions and principles will ground planning decisions?
- What are the specific goals and anticipated benefits for students?
- What governance and financial arrangements should be negotiated for the institutions and their students?
- What roles, responsibilities, and resources will be established with partner?
- What specific institutional policies and practices need to be followed?
- What risks can be identified and mitigated?

Definitions

Collaboration is a mutually beneficial and well-defined relationship entered into by two or more organizations to achieve common goals.

Collaborative Provision refers to programs developed and/or delivered by two more post-secondary institutions and leading to the award of academic credit and credentials.

Memorandum of Understanding (MOU): an agreement between two or more parties outlining the terms and details of an understanding, including each parties' requirements and responsibilities.

Collaborative Agreement: a formal arrangement or legal contract that describes the framework, responsibilities and contributions for participants working together on a defined program initiative or project.

Collaborative Program Considerations

- Pre-Planning
- Memorandum of Understanding or Collaborative Agreement
- Administration and Decision Making
- Collaborative Program Development
- Collaborative Program Delivery

Memorandum of Understanding or Collaborative Agreement

Institutions should develop a MOU following a pre-planning phase in cases where decisions are made to pursue a collaboration.

Typically the MOU includes information about:

- Purpose and outcomes
- Record-keeping and reporting for ministry
- Funding and resource considerations
- Governance and decision-making mechanisms
- Accountabilities and evaluation
- Term of agreement and conditions for termination/renewal
- Communications with partners, stakeholders and the public
- Clarification about which partner is responsible for academic standards, student services, student non-academic misconduct, curriculum, admissions/registrations, transcribing, issuing parchments
- Dispute resolution
- Risk management provisions

Institutions should consult with legal counsel prior to signing MOUs.

Institutions should conduct internal reviews of MOUs prior to signing to ensure alignment with relevant legislation, collective agreements, and institutional policy.

Institutions should submit draft MOUs to the Post-secondary Programs (PSP) branch for review and feedback.

Institutions should consult about draft MOUs with Campus Alberta Quality Council (CAQC), as well as regulatory bodies and other quality assurance entities when applicable and make revisions as needed.

Institutions may wish to enter into collaborative agreements/contracts based on MOU provisions, in cases where program collaborations are critically important and involve significant risk.

Administration and Decision-Making

Institutions should develop and deploy policy about collaborations.

Senior administrators should endorse collaborations prior to making significant resource allocations as a way to mitigate risks.

Institutions should file copies of MOUs (and subsequent contracts, when applicable) in institutional repositories so that they are accessible to those staff requiring access to them.

Institutions should build student protection provisions into collaborations particularly related to program regulations, student and academic services, dispute resolution and contingencies upon agreement expirations.

Institutions should establish project management or coordination processes to manage partner relationships and related matters.

Institutions should track and monitor progress of collaborative programs.

Collaborative Program Development

In instances where two institutions are collaboratively developing a new program or specialization, a proposal should be submitted through the Program and Provider Registry System (PAPRS) for review and approval.

Institutions should notify Campus Alberta Quality Council, through its secretariat, in cases where a collaborative arrangement was not assessed in Council's original review of a program proposal. The credentialing institution may be required to submit a notification in the form of a proposed program change (see CAQC handbook).

Collaborative Program Delivery

Institutions should consult with PSP in instances where two institutions are proposing to collaboratively deliver a ministry-approved program. PSP can be helpful in providing advice about changes to PAPRS records that may be required for submission (to facilitate accurate reporting of enrolments, completions and related matters).

Institutions should include documentation about collaborative delivery of ministry-approved programs in Comprehensive Institutional Plans and Annual Reports, as appropriate.

Institutions should advise the Post-Secondary Programs branch as appropriate, when major collaborative program agreements end.

Further Information and Assistance

For additional information contact:

Director, Program Design and System Innovation

Alberta Advanced Education

780-643-9472

Related Guidelines:

- Brokering Agreement
- Program Proposal Timelines
- Enrolment Planning
- Program Learning Outcomes
- Program Duplication
- Transnational Education

Other related documents:

- Campus Alberta Quality Council Handbook

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.