

Guidelines:

Identifying and Mitigating Risk

These guidelines give advice for identifying potential risks and mitigating against them in new programs and making changes to existing programs.

The department is committed to a review and approval process that includes consideration of potential risks to various stakeholder groups. Before recommending approval of a proposal, the department undertakes to ensure that risks have been foreseen and appropriate risk reduction strategies are in place to mitigate against them.

Scope

These guidelines pertain to program proposals submitted by post-secondary institutions to the ministry through PAPRS (Provider and Programs Registry System).

It is intended to help institutional staff in the development of proposals for new non-credential, certificate, diploma, and degree programs (and first-level specializations) but can be used for program reactivation proposals as well.

Planning processes for new proposals should seek to identify, assess, and respond to risks and opportunities.

System coordination processes should address matters related to risk and appropriate risk mitigation considerations.

Program risks are shared among key stakeholders. Guidance about identifying and mitigating risks is categorized by key stakeholder groups as follows:

- Post-Secondary Institutions
- Learners
- Alberta Post-Secondary System

Guiding Principles

- Risk is a shared responsibility amongst post-secondary system stakeholders and the government in programming decisions.
- Exploiting opportunities for new programs typically involve some risk.
- Innovation in the post-secondary sector requires managed risk.
- Risk assessment and management is integral to planning and developing programs.

Definitions

Risk: uncertainty about outcomes or future events.

Risk Mitigation: identifying what can go wrong, planning so as to avoid it going wrong, and minimizing impacts if it does.

Potential Risks and Mitigation Strategies for Post-Secondary Institutions

Potential risk conditions for post-secondary institutions include:

- inadequate demand for, or awareness about, a program;
- enrolment plans that raise questions or lack sufficient specificity;
- budget plans that lack specificity or raise questions about viability and sustainability;
- in a collaborative program delivery, lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities.

Depending on the circumstances of a proposal, institutions can mitigate risks with respect to learner demand and enrolment planning by:

- researching and projecting student demand for programs;
- developing enrolment plans that contain sufficient specificity;
- developing a comprehensive plan to raise awareness about a new or modified program;
- incrementally increasing enrolment projections over several years rather than assuming full enrolment in year 1;
- ascertaining minimum numbers of students needed to offset operating costs for initial program delivery;
- identifying assumptions underpinning transfer numbers and attrition formulas.

Depending on circumstances of proposals, institutions can mitigate risks with respect to budget plans by:

- including sufficient specificity with robust costing information -including references to staffing plans;
- including break-even analyses;
- identifying specific sources of funds in cases of internal reallocations;
- identifying one-time cost needs and funding sources to meet these needs.

Institutions can mitigate risks in collaborative programs by basing proposal information on terms and conditions documented in the Memorandum of Understanding that:

- contain sufficient specificity about roles and responsibilities of each institution;
- reflect strong partnerships and identify governance considerations; and
- clarify matters related to student protections, standards, and oversight.

Potential Risks and Mitigation Strategies for Learners

Potential risk conditions to learners can include:

- inadequate labour market opportunities for program graduates;
- limited transfer opportunities which can hinder learner mobility;
- limited work integrated learning (WIL) placement opportunities; and
- high tuition/program costs that present obstacles to accessibility and/or affordability.

Depending on the proposal, institutions can mitigate risks for learners by:

- consulting with student representatives to solicit feedback or increase understanding about program attributes. These consultations sometimes occur through Student Advisory Committees.
- consulting with employers and researching forecasts about labour market demand;
- showing evidence that sufficient numbers of appropriate WIL placements are available without negative impacts on other programs or institutions;
- identifying pathway opportunities into and/or out of the program; and
- establishing tuition and related fees in ways that support ministry principles of access, affordability and quality.

Potential Risks and Mitigation Strategies for the Alberta Post-Secondary System

Potential risk conditions to the Alberta post-secondary system include:

- poor alignment to institutional mandate and strategic plans, leading to potential mission drift for an institution;
- unsubstantiated institutional capacity and resourcing;
- unnecessary program duplication and/or potential program proliferation;
- negative impacts on other Campus Alberta institutions.

Depending on the circumstances of a proposal, institutions can mitigate risks with respect to the Alberta post-secondary system by:

- consulting with other institutions on proposed new programs;
- clearly articulating how a program fits within an institution's mandate and strategic directions (from Comprehensive Institutional Plan documents);
- analyzing proposed new programming or program changes against ministry frameworks and guidelines to show how proposals align with provincial priorities and expectations.

Additional Risk Mitigation

The ministry uses several other strategies designed to identify and assess risk resulting from new programs and program changes, for example:

- Including relevant questions about risk in proposal templates.
- Reviewing program learning outcomes to assess unnecessary program duplication and proliferation considerations.
- Consulting about provincial system impacts with post-secondary institutions.
- Asking institutions to provide clarification or additional information where proposals lack sufficient detail or fail to be sufficiently persuasive.
- Reviewing proposals to ensure that records have been created accurately.

Further Information and Assistance

For additional information contact:

Director, Program Design and System Innovation
Alberta Advanced Education
780-643-9472

Related Guidelines:

- Enrolment Planning
- Budget Planning
- Program Duplication
- Program Terminations
- Transnational Education

Other related documents:

- PAPRS Templates
- Schedule of Institutional Accountability Data Submissions, Alberta Advanced Education

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.