

Guidelines:

Program Duplication

These guidelines identify considerations and offer advice concerning program duplication matters to facilitate the development of comprehensive new proposals.

The ministry is committed to a program review and approval process that includes consideration about program duplication matters.

One of the purposes of the system coordination review conducted by the ministry on all new programs and specializations is to ensure that:

- instances of program duplication are identified and discussed;
- rationales for possible instances of program duplication are provided; and
- potential occurrences of program proliferation are prevented.

Program duplication is neither an inherently positive nor negative occurrence. A variety of factors influence whether program duplication is warranted and beneficial for students, institutions, and the provincial post-secondary system.

As an example, all Albertans should have access to adult basic education and academic upgrading opportunities; for that reason, the ministry supports the delivery of such programming by different educational providers across the province.

Scope

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

Guiding Principles

- Albertans should have access to a broad array of quality programs within a system that prioritizes innovative and differentiated academic programming.
- New programs should not substantively duplicate existing programs without a compelling justification which takes into account learner demand, local and provincial economic conditions, provincial priorities, institutional strategic plans, regional stewardship responsibilities, and institutional mandates.
- There are distinct roles for each group of publicly funded education providers based on each provider's mandate, institutional category, and regional stewardship responsibilities.
- Coordination and collaboration across the system is critical to minimizing duplication and facilitating the prudent stewardship of existing resources.
- Institutions play an important role in assessing and gauging impacts of potential duplications on other institutions and their students.
- A robust provincial admissions and transfer system facilitates student mobility, reducing the need for program duplication.

Identifying Potential Duplication

When conducting needs assessment for a new programming area and in order to prevent possible program proliferation situations, institutions should:

- identify internal program offerings that share key features (e.g., courses, content, learning outcomes, etc.);
- conduct an environmental scan of analogous programs offered by other institutions in the province (including both publicly funded institutions and private career colleges); and
- review program learning outcomes of analogous programs, where possible, to determine degrees of similarity.

If other institutions offer similar programs and/or specializations, institutions should conduct analyses to determine whether there remains a specific need for the program and/or specialization in a particular region or for unique delivery models.

In cases of program duplication, institutions should consider what the most appropriate course of action is given the circumstances of that case. Options include:

- Ceasing to develop the program or specialization proposal and concentrating resources in another, underserved programming area.
- Continuing to develop the proposed program with persuasive rationale (related to learner access, distinct features, labour market needs, etc.).
- Redeveloping or refining the program or specialization proposal in a way that enables the program to serve other needs within the system (e.g., an interdisciplinary focus or a different credential type).
- Partnering with another institution already offering the program to deliver the proposed program or specialization in a brokered or collaborative manner in an effort to conserve finite system resources while still expanding access to a program identified as needed in a particular region.

Definitions

Program Duplication: A situation that occurs when a post-secondary institution offers the same or similar programs or specializations as are already offered by one or more post-secondary educational providers in Alberta, including at its own institution.

Program Proliferation: A situation that could occur if there is a rapid expansion of similar programs or specializations already offered by multiple post-secondary educational providers (including both publicly-funded and private institutions) in the province without persuasive data documenting benefits and impacts for stakeholders.

The ministry considers program proliferation a negative development as it involves the expansion of programming without consideration of the wider impact, exposing institutions and the system to unnecessary risk.

Identifying Potential Proliferation of Specializations within a Program

Institutions should also be cognizant that program proliferation can occur within a program when there is a rapid expansion in the number of first-level specializations (majors) without full consideration of the benefits and impacts of these additions.

When developing a proposal, institutions should assess:

- if the specialization is sufficiently differentiated from other specializations within the program;
- if the program already has a sufficient (or excess) number of specializations; and
- whether the creation of this new specialization could negatively impact the sustainability of other specializations within this program.

Consultation and Collaboration with Other Institutions

Institutions developing a new program or specialization should consult with other institutions offering similar programs at an early stage in the planning process in order to:

- gain the perspective of staff at the institution and benefit from their experience already delivering a program in the proposed programming area;
- develop ways of mitigating risks to the system from program duplication; and
- identify possible avenues of collaboration among the institutions.

The ministry encourages collaboration among publicly funded institutions so that Albertans can have access to a broad array of learning opportunities while avoiding potential program proliferation.

If institutions identify a potential duplication as part of a needs assessment, institutions may wish to consider other options to avoid such duplication and potential proliferation, such as:

- partnering with other publicly funded institutions through brokering arrangements or collaborative delivery of programs; and
- extending access by offering programming through online, distance, or hybrid delivery, or through offerings in off-campus locations.

Through system consultation processes, the ministry provides opportunities for other publicly funded institutions to comment on whether new programs and specializations being proposed constitute unnecessary program duplication and possible proliferation or, conversely, expand opportunities for students.

Analyzing and Justifying Program Duplication

Institutions should address potential program duplication considerations in proposals to the ministry for new programs or specializations. In such analyses:

- a data-based rationale should be provided that demonstrates a need for such duplication; and
- particular attention should be paid to enrolment planning and to risk mitigation strategies.

For graduate programs with relatively small projected enrolments, institutions should also provide a compelling argument about the need for additional specializations.

System Coordination Review Criteria

With respect to these justifications for program duplication instances, the ministry evaluates each proposal within its own context; however, there is a framework of principles governing decision-making on this topic.

The department does not support program proposals that represent duplication in cases where there are negative impacts for other institutions who offer similar programs. Negative impacts on existing providers (which may include both publicly funded institutions and private career colleges) can include but are not limited to:

- competition for the same applicants;
- competition for the same limited clinical capacities;
- competition for the same limited work integrated learning placements;
- challenges to managing budgets and maintaining cost-effective programs; and
- challenges to managing existing agreements of various kinds (e.g., related to inter-institutional or collective agreement matters).

The department does not usually support program proposals for which there is not compelling labour market demand.

The department supports duplication when it can be demonstrated that:

- existing approved programs do not address the needs of particular student constituencies or communities (in these cases, evidence of student and labour market demand should be provided);
- the proposed program aligns with an institution's mandate and strategic plan;
- collaboration/partnerships with other institutions offering similar programs is not feasible;
- the program is unique, innovative, has value-added components and beneficial to students, community and the economy; and
- the institution has demonstrated capacity and expertise to deliver such a program.

The department encourages institutions to develop new programming to support provincial priorities and system innovation, but institutions should be cognizant that funding resources are finite.

Further Information and Assistance

For additional information contact:

Director, Program Design and System Innovation

Alberta Advanced Education

780-643-9472

Related Guidelines:

- Proposal Timelines
- Enrolment Planning
- Societal and Community Benefits
- Program Learning Outcomes

Other related documents:

- Advanced Educational Adult Learning System Principles
- PAPRS Templates

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.