

# CONTACT NORTH | CONTACT NORD OPERATIONAL FRAMEWORK IN SUPPORT OF ONTARIO POST-COVID-19 RECOVERY

As a community-based organization, Contact North | Contact Nord helps underserved Ontarians in 800 small, rural, remote, Indigenous and Francophone communities get jobs by making it possible for them to access education and training without leaving their communities.

## 1. SITUATION

- 4 million Ontarians live in small, rural, remote, Indigenous and Francophone communities.
- Many of them do not have ready access to a college or a university to get a degree, diploma or certificate, or upgrade skills that would lead to jobs.
- Many rural and remote communities have poor or no access to affordable broadband.
- Ontarians in these communities often have to relocate to pursue their education and incur related costs, including travel, accommodation, meals and other costs of attending on-campus classes.
- They can no longer contribute economically and socially to the communities they left.
- Ontarians in these districts and counties have lower levels of education and training — and higher unemployment rates — than the provincial average.
- Many Ontarians in these small, rural, remote, Indigenous and Francophone communities require education and training to prepare for new employment opportunities opening up or to address specific local challenges, such as a major employer shutting down.

## 4. TARGET GROUPS

1. Underserved Ontarians in 800 small, rural, remote, Indigenous and Francophone communities.
2. Special focus on serving five groups of underserved Ontarians:
  - Employment Ontario clients (unemployed)
  - Ontario Works clients
  - People with disabilities
  - Incarcerated
  - Newcomers and refugees
3. Special collaboration with Indigenous and Francophones as per [Contact North | Contact Nord's Mandate](#).
4. Faculty and instructors from Ontario's 24 public colleges, 22 public universities, 9 Indigenous institutes, 76 district school boards, 200 literacy and basic skills providers, and 50 skills development training providers.
5. 4,282 local and provincial community-based organizations.

## 5. OUTPUTS (April 1, 2019 to March 31, 2020)

1. 62,118 student registrations generated and supported.
2. 1,055,247 requests for services fulfilled.
3. 36 province-wide targeted recruitment campaigns executed.
4. 116 local online learning centres and 213 access points maintained.
5. 6,199 inquiries to the Student Information Hotline fulfilled.
6. 6,795 calls to the Technical Hotline supported.
7. 294,623 visitors generated 921,218 pageviews of portals.
8. Partnerships established with 177 Ontario Works offices.
9. Partnerships established with 188 Employment Ontario offices.
10. 99.9% up time on distance delivery platforms during scheduled activity.

## 6. OPERATIONAL CHALLENGES

1. Renewal of technology infrastructure that reached end of life.  
This infrastructure — servers, workstations, distance delivery platforms, routers, switches and other equipment — has a maximum five-year life cycle and much of Contact North | Contact Nord's infrastructure is at the five-year point.
2. Staff training and development  
With 250 staff spread out in six regions across the province and two operations centres in Sudbury and Thunder Bay, there are:
  - 100 staff recruitment campaigns annually and high turnover due to:
    - Highly qualified staff who leave Contact North | Contact Nord for other opportunities within the community; and
    - Many positions are part-time, paying minimum wage with fluctuating hours, and are dependent on demand for services at the online learning centres.
3. Broadband Internet connectivity  
Access to broadband Internet continues to be a challenge in the rural and remote communities we serve, particularly Far North and Indigenous communities.

## 2. INPUTS

1. \$9,877,443 annual investment by the Government of Ontario in 2020-2021 (1.3% increase from 2019-2020).
2. An ongoing suite of free shared services provided by Contact North | Contact Nord to students taking online courses from 24 public colleges, 22 public universities, 9 Indigenous institutes, 76 district school boards, 200 literacy and basic skills providers, and 50 skills development training providers.
3. Free use of the video and web conferencing platforms (Adobe Connect) and the open source learning management system (Moodle) eliminates the need for the providers to invest in, maintain and provide technical support for their own platforms.
4. Free training on the effective use of the platforms reduces training costs for individual providers.
5. Free local recruiting services in 800 small, rural, remote, Indigenous and Francophone communities reduces the per-student cost of recruitment and helps maximize the investment in developing online programs and courses by helping to ensure courses have economically viable numbers of students.
6. 250 Contact North | Contact Nord staff in six regions: 170 part-time (paid minimum wage) and 80 full-time across Ontario.
7. 116 online learning centres operated by Contact North | Contact Nord across Ontario as a three-way partnership, with the community contributing the space, Contact North | Contact Nord contributing the staff, technology and equipment, and the Government of Ontario contributing the funding. 27 of the online learning centres are in Indigenous communities.
8. 213 access points across Ontario where local residents can access a smaller number of Contact North | Contact Nord services.
9. Liaison with 4,282 local organizations across Ontario.
10. Advice for Ontario government on the role of online learning as a cost-effective means to provide equitable access to education and training to underserved Ontarians leading to jobs.
11. Contribute online learning expertise to external stakeholders.

## 3. ACTIVITIES

1. Free, high-touch, local support services in English and French to students and prospective students using Contact North | Contact Nord's 116 local online learning centres and 213 access points, including:
  - Information about available online programs and courses
  - Assistance with registration for online program or course of choice and information on financial help
  - Free use of computer workstations and high-speed Internet access
  - Free use of web conferencing and videoconferencing distance learning platforms
  - Supervision of written and online exams and tests
2. During the COVID-19 pandemic and similar situations, provide free, virtual support services, in English and French, to students and prospective students, including:
  - Information about available online programs and courses
  - Assistance with registration for online program or course of choice and information on financial help
3. Collaboration with local Ontario Works and local Employment Ontario offices to refer clients who need education and job training to Contact North | Contact Nord for support.
4. High-touch support to students using their home computers to participate in courses delivered via Contact North | Contact Nord's web conferencing platforms.
5. Targeted recruitment campaigns for Ontario colleges and universities to generate registrations.
6. Instructor orientation and training programs, in English and French, for users of Contact North | Contact Nord's videoconferencing and web conferencing platforms.
7. Technical support in English and French from 7:30 a.m. to 10:30 p.m., Monday to Friday, for all Contact North | Contact Nord's information technology resources supporting the 116 online learning centres, 213 access points, students, faculty and instructors, and all stakeholders across Ontario using Contact North | Contact Nord's services.
8. Portals include [contactnorth.ca/contactnord.ca](#), [studyonline.ca/etudiezenligne.ca](#), [teachonline.ca](#), [echannel.ca/apprentissageenligne.ca](#), [eclasses.contactnorth.ca](#) (portal providing student access to web conferencing platform) and [e-channel.contactnorth.ca](#) (portal providing student access to e-Channel courses).



## 8. STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

1. Help unemployed Ontarians and Ontarians on social assistance get the education and training they need for jobs and to exit the provincial support systems.
2. Expand the shared service, live synchronous platforms available to education and training partners in light of the massive shift of college and university courses to live delivery via Adobe Connect, Zoom and videoconferencing.
3. Prioritize the promotion of short courses and training opportunities to help Ontarians get the skills they need for their current and future jobs, while continuing to ensure 60% or more of the student registrations we generate are in college and university courses.
4. Expand the number of access points across Ontario where residents can access a smaller number of Contact North | Contact Nord's services.
5. Build on partnerships and support other Ontario government ministries (beyond the Ministry of College and Universities), including:
  - Labour, Training and Skills Development
  - Energy, Northern Development and Mines
  - Solicitor General
  - Indigenous Affairs
  - Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs
  - Francophone Affairs

## 7. RISKS

1. The Government of Ontario orders another temporary closure of non-essential workplaces due to COVID-19, affecting Contact North | Contact Nord's ability to provide in-person services.
2. A significant number of students do not return to online learning centres due to COVID-19-related health and safety concerns, reducing the overall need for the physical locations and impacting outcomes related to services provided at the online learning centres.
3. Students or Contact North | Contact Nord staff member infect a group of students and staff at one or more online learning centres or it is determined Contact North | Contact Nord is not following its COVID-19 health and safety protocols, impacting Contact North | Contact Nord's reputation.
4. A drastic reduction in Contact North | Contact Nord's annual operating grant \$9,877,443 from the Government of Ontario in 2021-2022.
5. Drastic loss of rent-free space in communities to house 116 local online learning centres, leading to fewer online learning centres available to serve Ontarians and/or a gap in the centres' availability.
6. The Government of Ontario directs the merger of online learning support organizations in the province into a single entity.
7. Partners — government, education and training providers, communities — determine Contact North | Contact Nord is not delivering results to justify its annual \$9,877,443 grant from the government.
8. Contact North | Contact Nord's two online learning delivery platforms crash repeatedly, and students and institutions lose confidence in Contact North | Contact Nord's ability to deliver at critical times.
9. Education and training providers opt to use their own online learning platforms rather than those available from Contact North | Contact Nord or become more confident in their internal ability to host and maintain online learning platforms, leading to a reduction in use.
10. Negative student and education and training provider experiences with Contact North | Contact Nord's services go viral on social media, impacting Contact North | Contact Nord's reputation.