



Applicant Guide

Workplace Opportunities Removing Barriers to Equity

2026 Call for Proposals

Employment and Social Development Canada



Government
of Canada

Gouvernement
du Canada

Canada

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1. Introduction

You are invited to apply to the Workplace Opportunities: Removing Barriers to Equity (WORBE) 2026 Call for Proposals. Please read through this guide carefully to prepare for your application.

This guide offers a comprehensive overview to help applicants navigate the program, understand the eligibility requirements, follow the application process, and grasp the assessment methodology.

A glossary of key terms that support and clarify the content of this Applicant Guide is available on the [WORBE Call for Proposals website](#).

About the WORBE program

The WORBE program is an Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) initiative that supports employers subject to the [Employment Equity Act](#) (*the Act*) in advancing equity for the four designated groups through sector-specific strategies and collaborative partnerships.

Now, with \$2 million available annually, for up to three years, WORBE will invest its focus on measurable progress. While previous funding rounds emphasized awareness and education, the 2026 Call for Proposals will invest in innovative, scalable, and results-driven initiatives that go beyond awareness to full implementation.

To support this work, WORBE will provide access to a third-party evaluator to help projects set baseline measurements and apply consistent evaluation methods throughout the project lifecycle.

Whether you're a business, non-profit, academic institution, or a coalition of changemakers, WORBE offers a platform to test innovative ideas, build inclusive partnerships, and scale what works.

Applications must be submitted by February 27, 2026, at 3:00 PM Eastern Time via the Impact Canada website.

Impact Canada

The 2026 WORBE Call for Proposals is led by ESDC, with support from Impact Canada. [Impact Canada](#) is a federal team that specializes in creating programs that deliver measurable results through new and creative funding models.

Impact Canada is partnering with ESDC Labour Program, to pilot a pay-for-performance funding model for the WORBE program. This innovative approach ties funding to the achievement of specific, pre-defined outcomes, ensuring projects remain focused on measurable progress and tangible results.

The Third-Party Evaluator

To strengthen the quality and consistency of project outcome measurement and learning, the program will provide access to a third-party evaluator for all projects. The objectives of the evaluator include (but are not limited to):

- Building capacity among recipients to measure, track, and report on project impact using best approaches.
- Ensuring objective and credible verification of outcomes across projects in this Call.
- Offering practical guidance, best practices, and standardized testing methodologies to support consistent measurement within and across the projects in this Call.

This support is intended to maximize project effectiveness, enhance accountability, and foster shared learning for long-term sector improvement.

Engagement with the evaluator will occur throughout the project lifecycle. While participation is mandatory, the process is designed to strengthen project capacity, reduce reporting burden, and ensure consistency across the 2026 WORBE Call of funding recipients.

2. Application Criteria

Who is eligible to apply?

- Academic institutions.
- Employer associations (unionized or non-unionized) in Canada.
- Federally regulated private sector organizations.
- Not-for-profit organisations.
- Private sector organizations.
- Individuals* (incorporated, or who are willing to incorporate).

*Individuals or groups of individuals are encouraged to apply, but to be eligible to receive funding, they must establish a Canadian legal entity (such as a corporation or a not-for-profit organization) capable of entering into binding agreements in Canada.

The following are not eligible to apply:

- Entities that cannot enter into legally binding agreements in Canada.
- Government departments or agencies (federal, provincial, or municipal).
- Organizations based outside of Canada.
- Unincorporated individuals or groups who are unwilling or unable to incorporate in Canada.
- Private sector organizations that are not incorporated in Canada.

Note to organizations located and operating in Quebec

Organizations located and operating in Quebec must demonstrate compliance with the Province of Quebec's *M-30 Act* before they can receive funding from the WORBE program.

This requirement exists because the *M-30 Act* governs how Quebec public bodies – including government agencies, municipalities, school boards, and other publicly funded organizations – can enter into agreements with the federal government or its agencies.

If your organization falls under the scope of the *M-30 Act*, you will need to obtain formal authorization from the Secrétariat du Québec aux relations canadiennes before funding can be approved, should your application be selected. Without this authorization, any agreement with WORBE [may be considered invalid](#) under Quebec law.

For more information, consult [the Act respecting the Ministère du Conseil exécutif \(M-30\)](#).

What will be assessed

This section outlines the core requirements, expectations, and assessment criteria for project proposals.

All applications will be carefully reviewed by an independent panel of sector-related experts (review panel). They will assess your proposal based on:

- How well your project aligns with WORBE's objectives (see below).
- Whether your project plan is realistic.
- Whether the project is capacity-ready, with plans for staffing, infrastructure, and timelines, ensuring the resources needed for the project are fully defined and
- Your ability to build on the project's success and measure results.

We are looking for projects that demonstrate strong potential and clear progress toward the project's stated objectives. These qualities help ensure that funded initiatives make a meaningful impact.

Applying does not guarantee funding, but complete applications will be carefully reviewed and considered. Final funding decisions will be shared with all applicants.

Objectives

The goal of the 2026 WORBE Call is to support projects that can clearly demonstrate how their design fulfills each of the program's core objectives:

- Identify and eliminate employment barriers against persons in one or more designated groups.
- Improved representation of one or more of the designated groups within workplaces, occupational groups or sectors with low representation.
- Increased understanding among stakeholders of industry-specific barriers to diversity and inclusion and effective human resources practices to address them.
- Development of new inclusion tools and guides tailored to industry-specific needs.

In addition to the program's objectives, proposals must consider and incorporate the following:

1. Focus on Designated Groups

Your proposal must demonstrate how it will incorporate at least one of the designated groups per the Employment Equity Act:

- Women.
- Indigenous Peoples.
- Persons with disabilities.
- Members of visible minorities.

2. Increase representation

Projects must aim to increase representation in federally regulated industries, especially in sectors or occupations where designated groups are least represented. **This includes:**

- Identifying barriers to inclusion.
- Proposing targeted strategies to improve representation.
- Establishing reporting frameworks and key performance indicators.

Barriers to inclusion can include identifying and addressing systemic, structural, and cultural obstacles that limit equitable access, participation, and advancement for designated groups. This includes outlining concrete strategies that enable employees to fully engage and thrive in their work environments.

3. Target Specific Sectors and Occupations

Your project must focus on at least one of the following federally regulated sectors:

- Banking and financial services.
- Communications.
- Transportation.
- 'Other' federally regulated industries.

Within these sectors, your project should identify how to increase representation of the designated groups in one or more of the 14 Employment Equity Occupational Groups:

- Senior managers.
- Middle and Other managers.
- Professionals.
- Semi-professionals and Technicians.
- Supervisors.
- Supervisors (including crafts and trades).
- Administrative and clerical personnel.
- Skilled sales and service workers.
- Skilled trades workers.
- Clerical staff.
- Intermediate sales and service workers.
- Semi-skilled manual workers.
- Other sales and service personnel.
- Other manual workers.

4. Build Strong Partnerships

All projects must be partnership-based, involving active collaboration with employers. This includes:

- Shared responsibilities and decision-making.
- Financial or in-kind contributions from employer partners (no minimum amount required).
- Clear roles and commitments outlined in agreements.

5. Establish Measurement Systems

In collaboration with the third-party evaluator, projects must include systems to track progress over time. This may include:

- Developing tools, training, or digital solutions.
- Collecting and analyzing data.
- Reporting on equity outcomes throughout the project lifecycle.

A third-party evaluator can offer an objective assessment of your project's outcomes while working in close partnership with you. They can help design practical systems for tracking progress, develop tools and solutions to support implementation, and work with your project to ensure that reporting is clear and consistent.

This collaborative approach provides verifiable data for decision-making, strengthens accountability, and supports continuous improvement throughout the life of your project.

6. Protect Privacy and Data

Applicants must demonstrate how they will meet privacy and data protection requirements, including:

- Compliance with relevant legislation (e.g., *Privacy Act*, *Employment Equity Act*).
- Ensuring voluntary self-identification.
- Protecting individual identities through secure and ethical data practices.
- Methods for data storage and anonymization.
- Data access and consent protocols.

In summary, we encourage applicants to propose innovative, sector-specific solutions that address real challenges and reflect the needs of the communities they serve.

Successful projects will show a strong alignment with WORBE's objectives, demonstrate readiness to act, and present a clear path toward long-term impact and scalability.

3. Pay for Performance Funding Model

The 2026 WORBE Call offers up to \$500,000 per year for three years using a pay-for-performance funding model. This approach ties funding to the achievement of specific, attainable results and outcomes, ensuring that projects remain focused on measurable impact and accountability.

This model offers projects, and their employer partners, structured pathways to access funding as they reach key results throughout each project year, driving sustained progress and tangible outcomes.

As projects meet the agreed-upon results throughout each project year, additional funding is released. This model encourages strong planning, continuous progress, and clear demonstration of results aligned with WORBE's objectives.

Funding Distribution Table

Phase	Timing	Funding
Application	January 5 – February 27, 2026	-
Year 1: Development	Spring 2026	Up to \$500,000
Year 2: Implementation	Spring 2027	Up to \$500,000
Year 3: Measurement	Spring 2028	Up to \$500,000
Project End	Spring 2029	Total: up to \$1.5 million

Results Verification

The WORBE program aims to increase the representation of designated groups—women, Indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, and members of visible minorities—in federally regulated workplaces by removing systemic, structural, and cultural barriers to employment. The 2026 Call for Proposals emphasizes measurable progress, with funding tied to achieving specific, verifiable results.

Successful projects will include strategies to identify and eliminate employment barriers, improve representation in sectors and occupations with low diversity, and develop tools and practices that foster inclusion. Pre-determined results include establishing baseline workforce data, building strong employer partnerships, deploying tracking systems, completing training, and demonstrating early organizational changes.

Each year, projects must provide evidence of activities that lead to, or achieve, increased representation and scalable practices with employer partners. All results will be verified by a third-party evaluator to ensure accountability and lasting impact.

For clarity on key terms, applicants are encouraged to consult the [Glossary of Definitions](#) available on the program website.

Funding disbursements under this program are directly linked to the achievement of clearly defined results outlined in each project's proposal. While each project will be tailored to its sector and approach, all results must be:

- Specific and measurable.
- Verified and documented, with support from the third-party evaluator.
- Aligned with the project's work plan and outcomes framework.

Examples of activities leading toward results:

- **Baseline data established:** submission of a complete baseline data set measuring current representation of designated group(s) within the participating workplace(s).
- **Partnership implementation:** submission of signed partnership agreements outlining shared responsibilities, data protocols, and financial or in-kind contributions, if applicable.
- **Deployment of tracking systems:** launch and demonstrated use of approved digital tools or systems for ongoing measurement of workforce outcomes.

- **Staff and stakeholder training completed:** documentation for all relevant training sessions on measurement, privacy, and inclusion practices.
- **Verified organizational progress:** third-party evaluator confirmation of early outputs such as new recruitment initiatives, engagement activities, or adoption of new human resource (HR) practices.
- **Interim and outcome results:** supporting documentation and data evidence that demonstrates an increase in representation, or in intermediate indicators, as outlines in the project proposal and validated by the third-party evaluator.

Qualitative or Quantitative Outcomes

- **Quantitative outcomes:** typically involve data such as increases in designated groups representation, completion of surveys, or the number of partners onboarded. These can be verified through data submissions, reports, and system output reviewed by the third-party evaluator.
- **Qualitative outcomes:** typically include documented changes in policies, demonstration of inclusive practices, or evidence of improved organizational culture. These can be verified using interviews, focus groups, narrative case studies, policy reviews, and stakeholder feedback assessments.

General Guidance

- Every result must be substantiated by verifiable evidence, as determined in consultation with the third-party evaluator.
- Achievement of results will be reviewed and validated prior to the release of further funding. Projects that do not meet required results may see a delay or will not be eligible for the next instalment of funding.

4. Project Proposal

Overall, projects are expected to drive enduring improvements that increase representation of one or more of the designated groups over time.

The WORBE program expects projects to build a strong foundation in Year 1, expand and adapt in Year 2, and demonstrate measurable impact and scalability in Year 3 – ensuring projects evolve and deliver lasting change.

Application Phase

Applicants are strongly encouraged to respond directly to each assessment criterion within their submissions, providing concrete examples and demonstrated engagement with relevant sectors and designated groups.

Applicants must submit a comprehensive proposal that:

- Clearly demonstrates readiness to implement a project aligned with WORBE objectives
- Outlines a well-defined plan addressing the following key areas:
 - Alignment with WORBE's goals of increasing representation of one or more of the designated groups per the Act.
 - Feasibility, including a realistic structure, resource plan, and risk mitigation.

- Scalability, showing potential for expansion across sectors or employers.
- Outcomes measurement, with credible indicators and tracking mechanisms.
- Includes partnerships with federally regulated employers.
- Provides evidence of foundational engagement, such as stakeholder consultations and employer commitments.

Applications will be assessed by a review committee for alignment, feasibility, and readiness before funding decisions are made.

Year 1: Development

Focus: Establish a foundation for success by developing validated tools and resources, working with the third-party evaluator, and finalizing implementation plans. Ensure all activities are deployment-ready and fully aligned with WORBE objectives.

In the first year, projects must establish a strong foundation for implementation.

Applicants should:

- Collaborate with the third-party evaluator to build a baseline dataset and measurement framework that supports long-term impact tracking.
- Establish strong alignment with WORBE objectives by clearly identifying designated group(s) and sectors, supported by workforce analysis and stakeholder engagement.
- Build feasibility through a detailed project structure, resource plan, and realistic timeline.
- Demonstrate organizational and partner readiness, risk mitigation strategies, and compliance with data privacy requirements.
- Lay the groundwork for scalability by introducing standardized tools, processes, and employer onboarding strategies that can be adapted later.
- Prepare for measurement by defining outcomes and indicators, planning for baseline data collection, and integrating qualitative methods into the design.

Year 1 Expected Outcomes include, but not limited to:

- A finalized workplan, timeline and risk mitigation strategy.
- Signed partnership agreements with clear roles, responsibilities, and data-sharing protocols.
- A finalized workplan, timeline, and risk register.
- Developed training plans tailored for employers and project teams, as required.
- Initial setup of digital tracking tools and secure data collection systems.
- Completion of staff and partner training for measurement processes.
- Ongoing stakeholder engagement and consultation.

- Policies and protocols for data privacy and confidentiality.

Year 2: Measurement and Implementation

Focus: Transition from planning to execution by deploying tools and resources, tracking performance metrics against established baseline, and refining implementation approaches. Begin demonstrating measurable progress and prepare for scaling and adoption.

In the second year, the program looks for:

- **Outreach:** applicants should outline new partnerships, activities, and outputs that build on Year 1 foundations.
- **Enhanced feasibility:** continue refining processes and addressing emerging risks while maintaining strong collaboration with partners.
- **Intermediate measurement:** implement tracking systems with employer partners and start analyzing early data to inform adjustments.
- Applicants should describe strategies for expanding partnerships, increasing activities, and producing outputs that build on Year 1 achievements, positioning the project for growth and wider impact.

Year 2 Expected Outcomes for Funding include, but not limited to:

- Baseline workforce demographic analysis identifying representation gaps.
- A co-developed measurement framework tailored for each employer.
- Building on Year 1: digital tracking tools and applicable training ready for implementation.
- A completed Year 2 implementation plan outlining activities, timelines, and expected outcomes.
- Evidence of strong partner and sustained engagement.
- Verification that outputs align with the original proposal.

Year 3: Measurement and Scalability

Focus: Year 3 is about proving impact and demonstrating how project successes can be replicated and deployed in other areas including, but not limited to, sectors, workplaces, populations, and other regions.

By the third year, the program expects:

- **Comprehensive outcomes measurement:** demonstrate clear progress toward representation goals using both quantitative and qualitative methods.
- **Scalability planning:** present a credible strategy for replicating results beyond the pilot (as defined above), including but not limited to knowledge-sharing mechanisms.
- **Knowledge transfer:** Begin sharing tools, resources, and lessons learned with broader audiences to encourage uptake.
- **Final outputs:** Including, but not limited to, delivering standardized tools, protocols, and guidance that enable consistent implementation across diverse employers.

- **Long-term impact readiness:** ensure design decisions support continued accountability and adaptation after funding ends.
- A final report summarizing key activities, outcomes, and learning.

5. Assessment and Timeline

How your application will be assessed

Applicants should ensure their submissions address each assessment criterion directly. Include concrete examples, demonstrate readiness for partnership, and provide evidence of engagement with your sector and designated group(s) wherever possible.

Each application will be evaluated for its alignment with program objectives, feasibility, scalability, and approach to measuring outcomes.

Table: *Summary of the 2026 WORBE Call for Proposals Assessment Criteria*

Assessment Area	Rationale	Weight
1. Alignment	The program seeks projects that clearly align with WORBE's objectives to increase representation of designated group(s) in federally regulated workplaces.	30%
2. Feasibility	Applicants must demonstrate that their project is realistic, well-resourced, and capable of achieving intended outcomes.	40%
3. Scalability Readiness	The program values projects that can be adapted or expanded beyond initial partners.	20%
4. Measurement Readiness	Applicants should demonstrate initial planning and readiness to track outcomes.	10%

Application Timeline

The application timeline shown below is subject to change; however, in general, you can expect the following:

Description	Date
Launch of Call for Proposals	January 5, 2026
Application deadline	February 27, 2026, 3:00 PM ET
Application results	March 2026

6. How to compete an application

General Instructions

Before starting your application, confirm the following:

- Your private sector employer partners are subject to the *Employment Equity Act*.
- The project targets at least one designated group and one federally regulated sector.
- Initial conversations have taken place regarding data access and privacy compliance.
- Your team is prepared to co-develop a measurement framework with the third-party evaluator.

Submitting an application:

- Incomplete or late applications will not be considered.
- Applications may be submitted in either official language.
- Submit your completed application by **February 27, 2026, at 3:00 PM Eastern Time**.
- Apply via the [Impact Canada website](#).
- You may save your application and return to complete it later.

For questions about this application, please contact the WORBE team by email:

EDSC.PMTEOE-WORBE.ESDC@hrsdc-rhdcc.gc.ca

Enquiries will be accepted until the application window is closed. Please note it may take up to 5 days to receive a response. **Complete applications are:**

- Submitted on time through the Impact Canada website by the deadline.
- All required sections completed.
- Demonstrated planning for alignment, feasibility, scalability, and measurement readiness.

Incomplete applications:

- Have sections that are left blank.
- Have no clear identification of designated group(s) or sectors.
- Are submitted after the deadline.
- Fail to demonstrate alignment with WORBE objectives.

Section 1: Applicant Details

This section collects basic information about your organization and key contacts.

1.1 Title of Your Project Proposal (up to 25 words)

Provide a concise, descriptive title that reflects the core focus of your project. This title may be made public.

1.2 Describe your project proposal in one sentence using clear and simple language (up to 150 words)

To ensure clarity for all reviewers and provide a concise, public-friendly summary of your project.

1.3. Lead Organization/Group

Enter the name and legal details of the organization that will lead the project and receive funding if selected.

1.3.1 Organization/Applicant Name: Common name used in operations.

1.3.2 Full Legal Name of Organization/Applicant: Official registered name (if incorporated).

1.3.3 Address: Complete mailing address including city, province, postal code, and country.

1.3.4 Business Email: Primary contact email for correspondence.

1.3.5 Business Phone Number: Primary contact number for correspondence.

1.3.6 Organization/Applicant website URL (if available): organization website to allow reviewers to learn more about your activities and projects.

1.3.7. Organization/Applicant social media accounts (if available): you are invited to share links to these accounts.

1.4 Applicant Category

Select the category that best describes your organization. See eligibility section of this applicant guide for requirements if you are applying as an individual, or if you are an organization located and operating in Quebec.

1.5 Incorporation Status

Indicate whether your organization is incorporated in Canada. If yes, provide your 9-digit CRA Business Number. If not, confirm whether you are willing to incorporate to receive funding.

1.5.1 CRA Registration Number for Businesses, Charities, or Not-for-profit Organizations: Enter your nine-digit Business Number (BN) in this field. Follow this link if you require more information.

1.5.2 Contact Person for the Team

Provide details of the main contact person responsible for the application:

- Full Name.
- Job Title.
- Organization.
- Email Address.
- Telephone Number.
- Preferred Language (English or French).

1.5.3 Verify if you are willing to incorporate in Canada to receive funding, should your project be selected. Note: if you select 'No' to this question, your application will not be considered.

1.6 Contact Person details for the team or organization associated with submitting the application form.

1.7 Additional Contact Persons (Optional, Max 2)

Include up to two additional contacts who can support the application or project.

Section 2: Project Proposal

This section is evaluated and should be completed with clear, concise responses. Word limits are specified for each question.

2.1 Project Alignment

2.1.1 Designated Groups (150 words)

Identify which designated group(s) your project will focus on. Applicants should justify choice using workforce data or identified barriers.

2.1.2 Targeted Federally Regulated Sectors (150 words)

Specify which sectors your project will focus on and explain the rationale, including sector-specific equity challenges.

2.1.3. Foundation for Representation (150 words)

Describe how your project will improve representation of designated group(s) in federally regulated workplaces. Provide a description how activities link to expected outcomes.

2.1.4 Stakeholder Engagement (200 words)

Detail how you consulted with designated group(s) and stakeholders. Summarize feedback and how it shaped your project design and priorities.

2.1.5 Project Partners (200 words)

List all partners and their roles. Explain how collaboration will be managed and how potential conflicts will be addressed. Use a table if helpful.

2.2 Feasibility

2.2.1 Timeline and Results (200 words)

Provide a timeline of activities and deliverables. Explain how progress will be tracked and how you'll adapt to changes.

2.2.2 Project Structure and Resources (400 words)

Outline your project's design and resource plan, including financial, human, and technical resources.

2.2.3 Organizational Capacity (150 words)

Describe your experience and capacity to deliver the project, including partner readiness and expertise.

2.2.4 Risk Management (200 words)

Identify key risks and explain your mitigation and contingency strategies.

2.2.5 Data Privacy and Consent (200 words)

Explain how you'll handle personal and equity data securely and ethically, ensuring compliance with relevant legislation. The program expects applicants to demonstrate how personal and equity data will be handled securely

and ethically. This includes outlining safeguards for data protection and ensuring that participation is informed, voluntary, and respectful of individual privacy.

2.3 Scalability

2.3.1 Adaptability (250 words)

Describe how your project can be scaled or adapted by other employers or sectors.

2.3.2 Future Engagement (250 words)

Outline plans to expand partnerships and activities in years 2 and 3, including anticipated outputs and engagement strategies.

2.4 Measurement Readiness

2.4.1 Expected Outcomes (250 words)

Define the outcomes related to representation of designated group(s), including the indicators to be measured.

2.4.2 Tracking Plan (250 words)

Describe how you'll monitor representation with partners, including data sources and reporting mechanisms.

2.4.3 Qualitative Methods (200 words)

Explain how interviews, surveys, or focus groups will be used to understand lived experiences and barriers.

2.4.4 Standardized Tools (250 words)

Describe tools or protocols to help partners implement equity measurement consistently.

Section 3: Attestation

For your application to be eligible for funding, it must be completed and signed by the official representative(s) of the applicant organization in accordance with the organization's by-laws or other constituting documents.

Section 4: Optional Survey

This section is not evaluated.

This section collects information on your experience with this application process, information about your organization, as well as demographic information.

Note that any data collected will be used strictly for administrative purposes to help Impact Canada and ESDC understand whether and how these projects are an effective tool and improve upon their design in the future.

The data collected in this survey will be aggregated and no individual answers will be published. Your answers to this survey will not be used in the assessment process and will not affect your chances of success in this challenge or any other federal funding application. This information may be shared with other government departments.