



PROGRAM OVERVIEW

AND FREQUENTLY ASKED
QUESTIONS

Cohort 3, Spring 2026 Intake

joinascend.ca

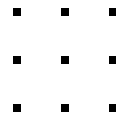
Funded by the Government of
Canada's Youth Employment
and Skills Strategy

Canada

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Our Partners



This project is funded by the Government of Canada's Youth Employment and Skills Strategy, led by Community Sector Council Newfoundland and Labrador (CSCNL), in partnership with Community Sector Network of PEI (CSNPEI), Impact Organizations of Nova Scotia (IONS), Nunavut Association of Non-Profit Organizations (NANPO) and Inspire Nunavut.



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What is ASCEND?



The Achieving Success through Community ENgagement & Development (ASCEND) program is an exciting opportunity to make a real difference in the lives of young people while strengthening the community sector across Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia. Cohort 1 began in May 2025, and the third cohort is scheduled to start in March 2026. The fourth and final cohort will happen in 2027 (exact dates and full details TBA).

ASCEND is an innovative program designed to support NEET youth (**aged 15-30, not in employment, education, or training**) by placing them with community sector organizations for fully subsidized (minimum wage and MERCs) 19-21 week work placements. The goal is 19 weeks of full time employment, however there is some flexibility if youth can't work full time, or can't work full time immediately, for any reason. For example, if a NEET youth participant has never had a job, full time employment may be overwhelming and unrealistic for them; we can work with them and their host employer to accommodate fewer work hours per week with a longer employment period (ex: instead of 35 hours for 19 weeks, it may be feasible to have the youth work the 665 hours over 25 or 26 weeks). Before these placements begin, participants will undergo 70 hours of virtual career and personal development training to ensure they're well-prepared to contribute meaningfully to their work placements.

Eligible Organizations

Any organization registered as a non-profit or charity in NL, NS, NU or PEI can apply to become an employer if they have a position to offer. For-profit organizations and businesses are *not* eligible to apply. Organizations can apply whether they have a youth they'd like to hire or not – we can help with trying to find and match a youth who has applied through our online application process. Organizations can apply to employ more than one NEET youth participant at a time, and can apply during as many of the four cohorts as they like.



Apply to become a host employer here: [Employer Application](#) or by visiting www.joinascend.ca to complete an online application.

Important: Submitting an application does not guarantee acceptance into the ASCEND program. This is a competitive, application-based process. Our team will review each submission carefully and follow up to confirm if your organization has been selected. We prioritize meaningful, well-matched placements—considering the role's suitability, youth goals and capacity, and location. If no youth have applied in your area and no referral is provided, we may not be able to make a match. Our goal is to ensure a positive, impactful experience for both youth and employers.

Eligible Youth

Who can apply as a participant?

This program is for NEET youth, meaning they are **between the ages of 15-30 and not in employment, education or training**. Youth in NL, NS, NU and PEI can apply if they meet these criteria, as well as the federal criteria for YESS program participants (see next section). Statuses with Employment Insurance or Income Support/social assistance programs do not affect eligibility.

There are some priority groups, however youth that do not belong to these groups are still encouraged to apply. These groups include newcomers, single parents, those with disabilities, youth in remote/rural/fly-in communities, 2SLGBTQ+ youth, Black, Indigenous and other racialized youth, etc. who meet the YESS funding criteria. Youth can participate in one of the four cohorts, and are encouraged to apply to a subsequent cohort(s) if they aren't accepted; they can apply to multiple cohorts, until they are accepted.

Apply to become a youth participant here: [Youth Application](#) or visit www.joinascend.ca to complete an online application.

Federal YESS criteria

A YESS participant must be a Canadian citizen, permanent resident, or a protected person under Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA), as confirmed by Government of Canada documents.

- Those awaiting refugee status or holding a temporary visitor, student or work visa, are ineligible to participate.
- All YESS participants must have a Social Insurance Number (SIN) and be entitled to work in Canada. A SIN beginning with "9" indicates temporary worker status, and such individuals are not eligible for YESS projects unless they have become protected persons under IRPA.

Eligible Youth

Important



This is an application-based program, and youth applicants are not automatically approved as participants upon completing the application. An ASCEND team member will connect with applicants to let them know if they have been accepted into the program.

We focus on meaningful employment opportunities for youth participants and ensuring organizations and youth are good fits for each other, and consider priority areas and barriers when deciding on which youth to accept. Location and position availability are also factors – if there isn't an organization that has applied to ASCEND in the same area as a youth applicant, there simply may not be anywhere to place the youth. All of these and more are considered when deciding which applicants are accepted as ASCEND participants.

Youth ultimately decide if they would like to accept an available position or not. If a youth applicant isn't interested in accepting an offered position, or working with an organization they have been matched with in an available position, they are not obliged to accept a position; they can withdraw from the application process and will still be eligible for another cohort of ASCEND.

How ASCEND Works

1 Application

Organizations apply to become employers and youth apply to become participants. The deadline for both applications is March 15, 2026.

2 Review

The ASCEND team reviews the applications and contacts both employers and youth to let them know if they have been accepted or not. Community Engagement Counsellors will work with organizations and youth to find out any needs, accommodations required, barriers, challenges, etc. The goal is to find out what will help placements be successful and beneficial/realistic for everyone.

3 Matching

Host organizations and NEET youth are matched based on referrals, location, needs, position availability and suitability, etc.

How ASCEND Works

4 Training

Youth participants complete 70 hours of virtual pre-employment training, over three weeks, arranged and coordinated by the ASCEND team. Youth participants are paid a training allowance by CSCNL (minimum wage equivalent) during these three weeks of training.


5 Placements

Youth begin their work placements, with weekly check-ins with Community Engagement Counsellors – youth complete a short online weekly survey to let their Counsellor know how their week went, so any challenges, required supports or other issues can be identified on a weekly basis. Counsellors will also maintain contact with the employers to ensure they are also supported in working with their NEET youth placement.

6 For employers:

Employer organizations submit monthly wage subsidy claims and payroll documentation to be reimbursed by CSCNL, as well as completing short online monthly check-in surveys.

Important: Wage claims should all be sent to Program Assistant Esther Osei-Nkansah, along with payroll documentation.



Cohort 3 Important Dates

March 15 2026: Application deadline

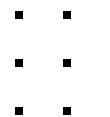
March 16-27: Finalization of assessments, approvals and placement matching.* Paperwork is collected from participants and employers.

March 30-April 17: Virtual pre-employment training for participants

April 20-August 28: Most placements begin and end.

**Assessments, approvals and matching for placements will also be happening on an ongoing basis as applications are submitted.*

FAQ's



Q: What does NEET stand for?

A: Not in Employment, Education or Training.

Q: What ages are considered “youth” for ASCEND?

A: Youth for this program are from the ages of 15-30, inclusive.



Q: Are there any priority areas or groups of youth that may be considered when accepting youth applications?

A: Yes. ASCEND aims to reach youth that are furthest from employment and may face multiple barriers to employment. These areas include, but are not limited to: single parents, newcomers, racialized youth, Indigenous and First Nations youth, 2SLGBTQI+ youth, those with disabilities (visible and invisible) and those living in remote, rural or fly-in communities.

Q: Can a youth apply to ASCEND if they do not belong to one of the priority areas?

A: Yes. The priority areas are just that – priorities. Belonging to priority groups and having multiple barriers to employment may be taken into consideration when approving and placing youth. As long as a youth is NEET*, they can apply (*see next question).

Q: What is the criteria for NEET youth status within Canada for employment for ASCEND?

A: To be eligible as a youth participant, a NEET youth must be a Canadian citizen, permanent resident, or a protected person under Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA), as confirmed by Government of Canada documents.

- Those awaiting refugee status or holding a temporary visitor, student or work visa, are ineligible to participate.
- All YESS participants must have a Social Insurance Number (SIN) and be entitled to work in Canada. A SIN beginning with "9" indicates temporary worker status, and such individuals are not eligible for YESS projects unless they have become protected persons under IRPA.

Q: How long is the pre-employment training period for youth participants?

A: Youth participate in 70 hours of pre-employment training over three work weeks (Monday-Friday).

Q: What types of training are done in the pre-employment training period?

A: A wide variety of training will be offered, to benefit different ages, experience, education levels and capacities of youth. These will include topics like workplace expectations, professionalism, digital literacy, resume writing, goal-setting, and more, to help them gain skills for their ASCEND placement, to build their resumes and for future experiences. They will also learn about the importance of networking, and have several scheduled opportunities to network with the other participants.

Q: Is the pre-employment training virtual or in person?

A: All pre-employment training is done virtually, so all participants can avail of the trainings at the same time, from the same facilitators, regardless of location.

Q: What if a youth doesn't have a device to participate in the training?

A: ASCEND has a number of laptops available to be borrowed for the duration of the training. We can arrange to send a laptop to a youth and have it returned after the training period, and will cover the shipping costs. The youth will simply have to sign a borrowing agreement outlining terms of agreement and use of the device.

Q: Do the youth get paid during the pre-employment training?

A: Yes, youth will receive a training allowance equivalent to minimum wage in the province or territory they will be employed in for their work placements. They will only be paid for the number of training hours they complete - they cannot get paid if they don't attend. The training allowance will be paid by CSCNL directly to the youth at the end of the training period. Cheques will be mailed to the youth participants after they complete the training. E-transfers can be arranged if having a cheque mailed will create undue hardship for the youth. Please note e-transfer processing is not always faster than mailing cheques.

Q: What types of employment opportunities will be offered?

A: Because ASCEND is an employer-informed program, the types of roles offered will depend entirely on the organizations that choose to apply and the positions they need to fill. This means we don't have control over which organizations participate or what kinds of jobs they offer. Opportunities may vary widely by region and by cohort. Our goal is to match youth with meaningful roles that align as closely as possible with their interests, skills, and goals—but the range of positions available will ultimately reflect the real needs of the community sector organizations at that time.

Q: What type of organizations can apply to become host employers?

A: Community sector (AKA non-profit sector) organizations can apply to become host employers.

Q: Can a for-profit business apply to become a host employer with ASCEND?

A: No. Only not-for-profit organizations are eligible to apply as ASCEND employers.

Q: Why can't a for-profit business become a host employer? They have lots of employment opportunities to offer.

A: A part of the goal of ASCEND is to address resource and staffing issues in the community-based sector, and to raise awareness among youth that this sector has employment, experience, skills-development and meaningful careers to offer.

Q: Can a NEET youth participate in ASCEND if they will be turning 31 during the training or employment period.

A: Yes, as long as the NEET youth is 30 when the pre-employment period begins, they can participate.

Q: I know a young person who is getting high school credits part time through a community-based program – can they apply to participate in ASCEND?

A: In order to meet the NEET criteria, a youth cannot be in education or training of any kind. Anyone doing courses to acquire high school credits in any way is in education and would not be eligible.

Q: I know a youth in university who my organization would like to hire for the summer. Are they eligible to apply as a youth participant?

A: A university student would be considered engaged in education, even while on summer break and not actively in classes; they would not meet the NEET criteria. ASCEND's goal is to reach youth furthest from employment, and university and college students are currently on a career path through post-secondary education.

Q: I know a youth that left high school early, is no longer in education and is unemployed – are they eligible to apply?

A: Yes. If an individual between the ages of 15-30 is no longer in school or employed, they can apply.

Q: If a youth is in high school but will be unemployed very early in the start of the ASCEND cohort, can they wait until school is over and start a little later with an employment period?

A: Generally, a youth must be NEET when the current cohort begins, to be eligible. If a youth is underemployed and faces multiple barriers, we encourage them to apply and they may be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Q: Can an unemployed youth that has a university degree or college diploma, but is no longer in education, apply to ASCEND?

A: Yes, as long as they are unemployed and no longer enrolled in university or college by the application deadline. ASCEND acknowledges that lack of education is not the only barrier to employment for youth.

Q: What happens if a youth is offered an employment placement they are not interested in?

A: As a youth participant, you are in control of your own choices throughout the ASCEND program - you are never obligated to accept a position that doesn't feel like the right fit for you. However, it's important to understand that Community Engagement Counsellors do not create job placements, and they can only offer positions that have been made available by organizations that choose to apply to ASCEND.

While we'll do our best to find a role that aligns with your interests and goals, we can't guarantee specific types of jobs or placements with particular organizations. Our role is to support you in exploring the opportunities that are available and help you make the most of them.

Q: My organization has a part time youth employee who we would like to be able to offer full-time hours to. Can we apply to be an employer and hire this youth full time for 19 weeks?

A: A youth who is currently employed would not meet the NEET criteria, as they are engaged in employment; the goal of this program is to help youth furthest from employment gain meaningful employment experience and career development opportunities.

Q: Is there any flexibility with the ages? For example, an adult that is in their forties but has an intellectual disability.

A: Unfortunately, due to our funding agreement there is no flexibility for age, and exceptions cannot be made.

Q: Can my organization choose a NEET youth to hire for the placement, or will one be assigned to us?

A: Both are options. If an organization knows of a NEET youth they would like to hire, they can refer the youth, and they will be placed with that organization, if the organization and youth are both approved. If an organization doesn't have a youth to refer, the ASCEND team will do their best to find a NEET youth in the same community/area from our pool of youth applicants to place with them. There is no guarantee that we will be able to find a youth, as there may not be a youth in your area that has self-referred.

Q: How do I refer a NEET youth that I would like to hire at my organization?

A: If there is a NEET youth you'd like to hire, you need to do two things:

- Indicate in your employer application who the youth is.
- Get the youth to complete the youth application.

Important: even if you refer a NEET youth, the youth still must complete the youth application form to get them into our applicant pool.

Q: Can I refer a NEET youth to ASCEND even if my organization is not applying as an employer?

A: Yes, you can simply get/help a youth to fill a youth application form. In the field that asks how they heard about ASCEND, they can indicate they heard from you or your organization so we are aware, if they would like.

Q: Can a youth self-refer to apply as a participant?

A: Yes, if a youth is interested in applying, they don't need to be referred by an organization. They can simply fill the youth application on our website.

Q: How will I know my application has been received?

A: When an organization or a youth completes an application form on our website it is automatically sent to the appropriate ASCEND team members and populates a spreadsheet. Once the forms are submitted, an automation ensures the organization and/or youth are automatically in our application pool. You should get an automatic email notification when your application has been submitted. Please check your email and spam/junk folders after you submit your application.

Q: What is the hourly wage amount that will be subsidized?

A: Minimum wage for the province/territory the organization operates in, including MERCs (Mandatory Employment Related Costs) will be reimbursed to the employer organization.

Q: What are the Mandatory Employment Related Costs reimbursed to employers?

A: These are the employer's required Employment Insurance (EI) premiums, Canadian Pension Plan (CPP) contributions, Vacation Pay (4% of gross pay, all regions), and workplace injury insurance (Workplace NL, Workers Compensation Board Nova Scotia, Workers Compensation Board of PEI).

Q: Can my organization supplement the minimum wage to increase the youth participant's hourly wage?

A: Yes, if the employer organization would like to pay the youth participant above minimum wage, they can "top up" wages. They will be reimbursed the minimum wage and the additional wages will be the organization's sole responsibility. For example, if the minimum wage is \$16/hr and an employer would like to pay \$18/hr, the employer will be reimbursed at \$16/hr (plus MERCs) and the additional \$2/hr and any other associated costs is the employer's contribution.

Q: Why is the employment period a range of 19-21 weeks, and not one set number of weeks?

A: The goal is 19 weeks of full-time employment. If a youth participant can't work full time hours for some reason, or can't work full-time hours immediately, there is flexibility to reduce the weekly hours but extend the number of employment weeks. There could be even more flexibility to extend the employment period beyond 21 weeks at reduced weekly hours, on a case-by-case basis.

Q: My organization can only provide a work placement that is less than 19 weeks. Is there any flexibility to offer a shorter employment period? Is there an option to offer part time employment for the full 19-week employment period?

A: Our funding agreement outlines that employers must provide the equivalent of 19 weeks x 35 hours of employment. Unfortunately, we cannot approve organizations as employers that cannot offer this.

Q: Is it possible for employers to get the grant/lump sum right before the placement?

A: No. Employers will be responsible to pay wages and Mandatory Employment Related Costs (MERCs) and submit reimbursement claims to CSCNL. Our funders do not allow us to distribute funds to employers in advance, and doing so would be against our funding agreement with ESDC.

Q: How often will the organizations be reimbursed?

A: Organizations will be reimbursed monthly, after they submit their wage claims and payroll documentation. For small organizations that would experience undue hardship with a monthly reimbursement structure, we can discuss bi-weekly reimbursements.

Q: How will the organizations be reimbursed?

A: Reimbursement cheques will be mailed to organizations, unless having a cheque mailed would create undue hardship; organizations can request e-transfer reimbursements.

Important: E-transfer processing is not always faster than cheque. Sometimes cheques arrive before e-transfers can be processed.

Q: How long will it take for reimbursements to be sent, once wage claims and payroll documentation have been submitted?

A: It usually takes 1-2 business days for cheques to be issued, once claims have been submitted, and they will be mailed as they are issued. Mailing time will vary depending on location. E-transfers can take up to a week to be processed.

Important: we cannot issue reimbursements until wage claims and payroll documentation have been submitted.

Q: Does this funding provide any other coverage, such as health benefits contributions?

A: Only Mandatory Employment Related Costs are covered under ASCEND (see previous question about MERCs).

Q: Can you provide equipment to an employer such as a laptop and accessories during the placement?

A: We can only provide equipment to youth participants, as deemed necessary for barrier removal, accommodations for pre-employment training and employment placements, etc. Equipment for employers would be considered capital costs and are not eligible.

Q: Can an organization apply to employ more than one youth participant in the same cohort?

A: Yes, organizations can apply for more than one position. There is no guarantee an organization will be approved for all of the positions they apply for, and there is a focus on meaningful work experiences and skills development for youth participants.

Q: Can NEET youth apply to ASCEND if they have completed another employment program in the past?

A: Yes, as long as they are not currently in an employment or pre-employment program, and are NEET, they can apply.