



Ontario Financial Empowerment Champions (Ontario FECs) - Project overview -

Background

Financial Empowerment (FE) is an approach to poverty reduction that focuses on improving the financial security of people living on low incomes. It is an evidence-driven set of interventions that have proven successful, both at eliminating systemic barriers to the full financial inclusion of people living on low incomes and at providing supports that help them improve their financial outcomes and build their financial security.

As FE is an emerging field, there is still much to learn about how to tailor and customize FE interventions to effectively support participants at different points along the continuum.

The Ontario Financial Empowerment Champions (Ontario FECs) project is designed to support five FE organizations to develop, test and expand their own FE delivery models in response to the unique make-up and needs of their communities. Many of the sites are expected to draw on existing delivery models, but they will also be supported and encouraged to explore new delivery approaches to address the unique needs of those living in poverty in their communities.

By encouraging diverse program approaches, but using similar metrics to measure success, the Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS) and Prosper Canada expect to learn a great deal more about what approaches are effective for whom, and under what circumstances.

The Ontario FEC project is an exciting opportunity to continue to develop and expand successful delivery models, while also supporting new innovations in efforts to build the financial stability, security and well-being of Ontarians living in or at risk of poverty, and helping them to move from poverty to opportunity.

Overview

Prosper Canada, in consultation with the Ontario's Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS), will select and support at least five non-profit FE organizations, partnerships and/or collaboratives in Ontario and their local partners to deliver and help scale proven financial empowerment interventions to improve the financial well-being of over 50,000 Ontarians living in or at high risk of poverty.

The four and a half year project will operate from September 20, 2016 to March 31, 2021.

Objectives

The specific project objectives are to:

1. **Distribute project funding and support to at least five FECs across Ontario** through an open, fair and transparent process
2. **Train and support at least five FECs in Ontario to deliver up to five proven financial empowerment interventions** that, together with Prosper Canada and local partners, will improve the financial outcomes of at least 50,000 Ontarians living in, or at high risk of poverty
3. **In partnership with Ontario FECs, work to embed financial empowerment interventions into large private sector, government, and/or non-profit service systems** to improve financial outcomes for their clients
4. **Build staff skills in all Ontario FECs to engage and train other public, private and community sector organizations to provide financial empowerment interventions** that address evidence-based community needs
5. **Generate legacy program tools, resources, metrics and best practices ("Program in a Box") for each target intervention** for use by practitioners, funders and policy makers and disseminate across Ontario
6. **Develop and maintain a cross-sectorial community of practice** for policy makers, funders, financial institutions, and practitioners to foster knowledge exchange, help align priorities and resources, and coordinate actions to expand the impact and reach of financial empowerment interventions
7. **Evaluate the components of the project** to capture the impact of financial empowerment interventions, inform future use of funding intermediaries and leveraging, as well as strategies to expand social innovations sustainably.

Ontario Financial Empowerment Champions

Prosper Canada, in consultation with MCSS, is responsible for selecting at least five FE organizations, partnerships and/or collaboratives to act as Ontario Financial Empowerment Champions (Ontario FECs). Eligible sites will be identified through Prosper Canada's financial empowerment network and will comprise of Ontario non-profit organizations and/or registered charities. Ontario FECs will be selected on the strength of their applications and the goal of achieving fair representation across Ontario.

Financial empowerment interventions

FE interventions are projects and activities that have been proven to increase the financial well-being of people living on low incomes. Organizations are encouraged to expand and/or implement up to five of the following interventions:

- Financial literacy education (Delivered directly to individuals living on low incomes or through training other frontline staff to deliver)
- One-on-one financial coaching and problem solving services
- Support to open Registered Education Savings Plans (RESPs) and access the Canada Learning Bond (CLB) and Canada Education Savings Grant (CESG)
- Assistance with tax filing and accessing government benefits
- Support to access basic banking services

Note: Implementing all five interventions is encouraged but not mandatory.

There are many different models that an Ontario FEC might choose to deliver these interventions. For example, an Ontario FEC may **partner** with another agency to provide financial literacy education to individuals, while providing financial coaching **in-house**. Table 1: *Financial empowerment interventions* (next page) provides a brief description of each intervention and lists examples of activities that would fit under each one. This list is meant only to provide an illustration and is not exhaustive.

Service systems

Prosper Canada is currently exploring how to embed FE interventions into services delivered by municipal and provincial governments (like social assistance), financial institutions (like bank branches), and nonprofits that have a large reach into low-income groups (like settlement service providers). Ideally, these “service systems” would have the following characteristics:

- Are stably resourced
- Have the necessary infrastructure to provide FE initiatives
- Have broad reach into low-income populations (10,000 individuals or more)
- Aim to tangibly improve the financial outcomes of their participants.

An example: Prosper Canada is working with St. Michael’s Hospital in Toronto to develop an online tool to help doctors connect patients to financial benefits for which they are eligible.

Those organizations selected as Ontario FECs will work with Prosper Canada to embed FE interventions into service systems.

Table 1: Financial empowerment interventions

	Intervention description	Project examples
Financial literacy education	Improve financial knowledge, skills and confidence of individuals by increasing access to quality financial education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivery of financial literacy workshops • Training of front line staff • Development of curriculum for specific groups (newcomers, youth, Aboriginal groups)
Financial coaching	Trained coaches meet with individuals to identify and work towards personal financial goals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One-on-one financial coaching • Matched savings programs • Financial case management and problem solving
Support to open RESPs, access CLB and CESG	Support individuals to open the federal Registered Education Savings Plan and access the CLB and CESG.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RESP, CLB and CESG promotion • Supports to open RESPs, in person or online (using SmartSaver tool) • RESP, CLB and CESG enrollment events
Assistance with tax filing and accessing government benefits	Boost incomes by helping individuals to file their taxes and access government benefits.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotion of government benefits • Online benefit calculators • Host volunteer tax filing clinics • Help to apply for government benefits
Support to access basic banking	Connect individuals to safe and affordable banking services, reducing reliance on predatory lenders.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supports to obtain government identification • Supports to open basic bank services (Chequing/savings accounts) • Help to set up direct deposit

Available funding

The Ontario Financial Empowerment Champions Project is funded by the Government of Ontario. Ontario FECs are eligible to apply for project funding of up to \$150,000/year for a 4.5 year period. Prosper Canada will work with each Ontario FEC to develop fundraising strategies to ensure sustainability of FE programming after the project ends on March 31, 2021.

Project supports

The capacity of Ontario FECs to deliver FE interventions will be strengthened in three main ways: training; sharing of tools; and access to the wider FE community including the five Ontario FECs as well as the five national FECs.

Training

Ontario FECs will receive training (as required) to successfully develop and implement FE interventions. This training will be followed by mentorship and the sharing of tools and materials.

Sharing of tools

Organizations often develop FE programs and curricula that are tailored to their participants' unique needs. Prosper Canada will work with each Ontario FEC to ensure that they have the necessary tools and materials to expand and develop FE interventions. These tools may range from intake forms for hosting tax clinics, to a central database to track outcomes and evaluate the project.

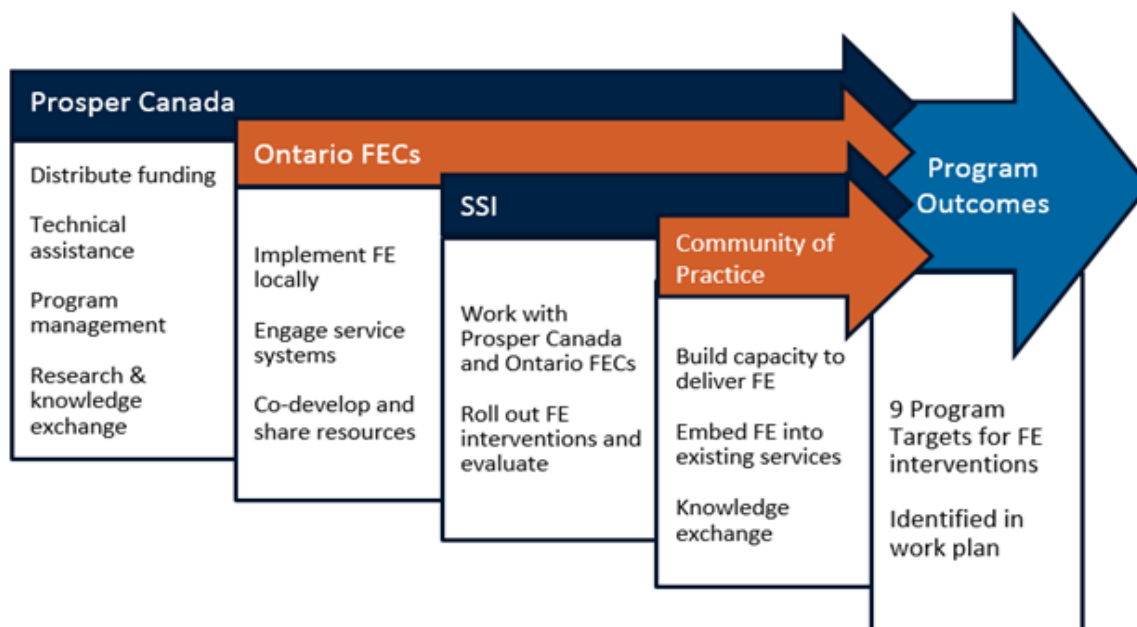
Access to FE community

Prosper Canada will act as a provincial coordinator of the project. Each quarter, all Ontario FECs will convene to share knowledge and discuss project challenges and opportunities.

Prosper Canada will also engage other FE networks and committees in sharing best practices and tools as they are developed across Ontario and Canada.

Below, Figure 1: *Ontario FEC partner relationship*, outlines the tasks and responsibilities of each group involved in this project.

Figure 1: Ontario FEC partner relationships



Ontario FEC outcome/output targets

The following chart demonstrates overall Ontario FEC project outcome/output targets that will be reached by the end of the project on **March 31st, 2021**. Annual outcome/output targets that each Ontario FEC will meet have also been included below. For the purpose of evaluating progress to each target, the organizations' current client reach for April 1, 2016 to March 31, 2017 can be included in Year 1.

	Target activity description	The Ontario FEC project as a whole will meet these targets	Each Ontario FEC (or partnership or collaborative) will meet these targets per year from Years 2 through 5
Targets	Financial literacy education delivered to individuals	Approximate reach of 14,000 individuals	Approximate reach of 700 individuals
	Individuals supported to meet with a financial coach and create a financial action plan	7,000 individuals	350 individuals
	Children enrolled in RESPs and CLB programs	6,000 children	300 children
	Individuals supported to file taxes	20,000 individuals	1,000 individuals
	Applications submitted for government benefits	3,600 applications	180 applications
	Previously unbanked individuals supported to open a bank account	400 individuals	20 individuals
	Individuals helped to set up direct deposit to their bank account to improve financial management and reduce banking costs	5,000 individuals	250 individuals

Project partners

The Ontario Financial Empowerment Champions Project is funded by the **Government of Ontario**.

Prosper Canada will distribute funding and provide project management and technical support to Ontario FECs.

Ontario FECs will partner with Prosper Canada to expand and/or implement FE interventions and train other frontline organizations to do the same.

Organizations that would like to become an Ontario FEC can access the application materials and online form through our website, www.prospercanada.org. **Ontario FECs will be selected by December 21, 2016.**

For more information

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