

Co-op and Indigenous Third-Party Sponsorship funding

As Indigenous students across post secondary institutions embark on their educational and career journeys, work integrated learning (WIL) programs such as co-operative education offer hands on work experience opportunities and related funding that help contribute to their success

Funding may be available to students through Indigenous funding bodies or partners. However, Indigenous funding bodies or partners have different guidelines around the Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP) as it relates to co-op and WIL opportunities. This infosheet provides an overview summarizing what band offices and educational officers may need to know about co-op at post secondary institutions.

What is co-op?

Co-op is a program that enables students to enrich their academic studies by alternating between study terms in classes and work terms in paid positions related to their program of studies (these are called co-op work terms). Through hands-on learning, students build experience, confidence, and connections with the community. Students in most degree programs have the option to participate a co-op program available at their institutions; other programs may integrate co-op work terms directly in the curriculum.

Co-op programs help students transition into careers after their graduation. For example, at the University of Victoria, 75% of students who take part in co-op receive a job offer related to their degree by the time they graduate—often with an employer that they met during their co-op experience.

Indigenous students often complete co-op work terms in their home communities or with Indigenous organizations and initiatives.

How does taking part in co-op impact Indigenous students' sponsorship?

While receiving wages from their co-op position, it is often possible for students to continue receiving sponsorship through their band council office, nation, or organization that administers the PSSSP (requirements vary from nation to nation).

Maintaining Full-time student status - Co-op is an academic program. UVic considers students full-time while registered in a full-time co-op work term. Although students receive a salary during their work terms, they continue to pay tuition (the co-op work term fee) as well as any ancillary student fees, and they may also need to pay for moving, travel, and commuting expenses.

Sponsorship eligibility - Under the PSSSP, eligible expenditures for full-time students include the cost of tuition and other compulsory student fees, books and supplies, regional living allowances, and other expenditures.

...continues on reverse

Under the PSSSP, full-time co-op students who are on a co-op work term are eligible to:

- Continue receiving funding for tuition and textbooks; and
- Continue sponsorship, when wages earned from a co-op work term can be applied by the student towards their living allowance.

Part-time student eligibility - Part-time students are also welcome to take part in part-time co-op opportunities. Under the PSSSP, part-time students may receive assistance for tuition and compulsory fees as well as the cost of books and supplies, but are not eligible for living allowances or travel costs.

What does participation in a co-op program look like?

1. If the co-op program is optional in the student's area of study, they will typically apply for the program at the start of their second year (though application deadlines vary). If the co-op program is a mandatory, integrated part of the students' academic program, then they do not need to apply.
2. At many institutions, students may complete an introductory course which prepares them for the work search and application process, and which helps students know what to expect as a co-op employee.
3. Students typically line up their first work term during the summer of their second year. They'll apply for positions that interest them and take part in interviews until they receive a job offer.
4. Once students secure a work term, they will pay a co-op tuition fee and complete a 4-month co-op placement. This payment schedule may vary at different institutions. For example, if students are taking part in a program where co-op is integrated into the curriculum, they may pay a portion of this work term fee every term.
5. After securing a work term, students will contact their third-party funders to provide documentary evidence of their registration, wages, schedule, and work term tuition fee.
6. As part of the co-op experience, students will self-assess their work-based learning at the start, middle, and end of their work term. They also complete a final project that reflects this learning. As well, they also meet regularly with their co-op coordinator and employer to evaluate and discuss their workplace competencies and performance. If they meet these academic requirements, their co-op work term will be listed on their academic transcript.
7. Depending on the program, and institution, students may complete up to 4 work terms over the course of their degrees. At some institutions, students who complete the set number of co-op work terms for their academic program will receive the 'co-op designation' when their degree is conferred.

Testimony from an Indigenous student sponsored by their nation:

"I received support from my educational coordinator and was able to apply for a co-op work term with my nation as part of my studies, while also receiving band funding. As part of my work term, I made valuable connections in my community, I created resources for our language programs, facilitated workshops, and recorded instructional beading videos. This co-op taught me the importance of open and frequent communication, relationship building, how to manage workplace demands and expectations in an efficient manner. I was able to use initiative and innovation to implement goals and objectives in a constructive and helpful way. This work has now opened up the possibility of continuing to work for my nation."—Sponsored Indigenous student, 2021

The PSSSP guidelines provided by Indigenous Services Canada are available online by consulting this link: <https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1100100033682/1531933580211>.

You can also contact the Education Branch of Indigenous Services Canada at aadnc.education-education.aandc@canada.ca.

This infosheet was adapted from materials developed at the University of Victoria.