

Ontario Autism Program: Entry to School Program Call for Applications Guidelines

March 30, 2021

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Section 1: Introduction and Context

In December 2019, the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) announced key elements of the needs-based, sustainable and family-centred Ontario Autism Program (OAP), including a broad range of services that will offer families more supports for their child's specific needs. The program will recognize that every family's experience and needs are different, and that children and youth on the autism spectrum have different levels of need at different points in their lives.

In the needs-based OAP, all children/youth up to age 18 with a written diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) from a qualified professional will be eligible to register for the OAP. Families will have access to the following service pathways and program supports in the new program:

- **Core clinical services** that include Applied Behaviour Analysis, speech language pathology, occupational therapy and mental health services;
- **Foundational family services** for all families in the program, to build their capacity to support their child's learning and development;
- **Early years supports and entry to school services** to help young children access critical services when they will benefit most, and to prepare them to enter school;
- **Urgent response services** to support children and youth who are in service, or are waiting for service, and have significant and immediate needs; and
- **Care coordinators** to support families throughout their journey by providing orientation to the program, service planning and navigation, and help with managing transitions.

Two types of early years services will be available in the needs-based Ontario Autism Program:

- caregiver-mediated early years programs; and
- entry to school services.

The focus of this call for applications (CFA) is to select organizations in four regions (Central, East, West, and Toronto) to deliver the entry to school program, which is described in detail in Section 4 below. Service providers in North region were selected by the ministry in December 2020 to begin implementing the program as early adopters in spring 2021. The three identified lead agencies in the North are expected to partner with other providers in their communities, including private providers, to implement the program.

Section 2: Submission and Review Process

MCCSS is releasing this CFA to invite interested service providers to express their interest and apply to deliver the entry to school program in their communities.

This CFA is being distributed to government-funded providers and non-government funded providers. Interested service providers can apply if they are based in Ontario, and are:

- a government-funded provider;
- a non-government funded provider (private provider);
- an organization; or
- a group or partnership with other organizations in your region.

The CFA process will identify initial service providers to implement an entry to school program from January 2022 to March 2024. As these initial programs are implemented, services will be evaluated and adjusted as needed. Once an Independent Intake Organization (IIO) becomes operational, they will assess regional capacity and any need for additional providers in the respective regions after the initial contract period.

Funding allocations for selected service providers will be determined by the ministry and outlined in a service agreement between the ministry and recipient. Selected service providers will receive funding from the ministry via a transfer payment service agreement, that sets the terms and conditions associated with the funding.

Service providers must direct the majority of funds provided to direct service delivery. A maximum of 10% of the funding can be directed to administrative support, project management and overhead.

a) Submission Process

1. Documents must be submitted in electronic form, in either word or PDF format.
2. Submissions must be submitted electronically to MCCSS at OAP_CFA@ontario.ca.
3. Applicants are encouraged to answer each of the questions clearly, completely and concisely. The application must be typed in point or paragraph form and adhere to the specified word count.
4. Any supporting documentation provided must be submitted in clearly defined appendices at the end of the submission.

5. Applications must be submitted with the subject line: “Entry to School Program Application – [Name of Service Provider]”.
6. Completed applications must be received by MCCSS by **no later than 5:00pm EST on June 25, 2021**. Applications submitted after the deadline may not be considered.
7. Applicants will be sent an electronic confirmation of receipt of their application within one business day.
8. Questions about the CFA may be submitted to MCCSS at OAP_CFA@ontario.ca between March 30 – April 30, 2021 at 5:00pm EST. Following the end of the question period, responses to questions submitted will be shared with all prospective applicants who initially received the CFA, and any individuals who have submitted questions.

Service providers who are interested in applying for the entry to school program should carefully review the program criteria, implementation timelines, and CFA evaluation criteria, and submit a completed application form to MCCSS by 5:00pm EST on June 25, 2021.

The ministry will be holding video information sessions for interested service providers regarding the CFA on April 7, 2021 from 2:00-3:00pm and April 9, 1:00-2:00pm. Please see the attached memo for more information regarding these sessions, including how to register for a session. In addition to the information sessions, questions about the CFA may be submitted to the ministry between March 30 – April 30, 2021 at 5:00pm EST.

Applicants must identify which MCCSS region they will serve, including which service delivery areas they will serve within the region (See Appendix A for a list and map of service delivery areas within each region). Applicants may not deliver services across more than one region. Applicants are strongly encouraged to develop partnerships in order to cover as many service delivery areas within their identified region as possible. When the Independent Intake Organization for the OAP is implemented, it will establish an integrated and coordinated regional network of service providers within each of the five MCCSS regions, including service providers delivering the entry to school program.

Applicants should propose their service capacity based on anticipated local demand for these services. Please refer to Section 4B for the estimated number of children eligible for the entry to school program.

b) Review Process

MCCSS will evaluate applications based on the demonstration of how the program design will meet the objectives and expectations identified in the CFA document. If required, MCCSS may ask applicants to clarify specific aspects of their application. MCCSS will notify both successful and unsuccessful applicants in writing.

c) Partnership Expectations for Applicants

Applicants will be expected to build on or initiate innovative and collaborative local partnerships with both publicly-funded and private providers to implement an entry to school program within their communities.

In their application, applicants must demonstrate how they will partner and collaborate with community social service providers, both government-funded and non-government funded providers, to support coordination and implementation, including how the program would be integrated into the community/region's existing service system. Strong partnerships between local service providers will help to facilitate efficient delivery of programs across the region, including supporting the various cultural, linguistic and geographic needs of children and families within the region. Applicants must also identify their approach for developing and maintaining relationships with local school board partners within their region to implement the program effectively.

A group of service providers/organizations within a region may wish to submit a joint application. Joint applications will be expected to outline how the service providers that form the partnership will work together to determine what type of service delivery model they anticipate would work best within their community's existing service system.

In the case of joint applications, criteria will be applied to the collective capacity of the partnership group. However, a single service provider should be identified by the partnership as the applicant and the service provider that will lead the implementation of the program in their community and sign a transfer payment service agreement with MCCSS. If a service provider within the partnership has an existing transfer payment agreement with the ministry, then this service provider would be considered the lead organization, or "applicant". If none of the service providers in the partnership group have an existing transfer payment agreement with the ministry, a single service provider should be identified by the partnership as the lead applicant and they will sign a transfer payment service agreement with the ministry. It is expected that the lead service provider will enter into sub-contractor agreements or Memoranda of Understanding with the other service providers within the partnership.

Section 3: Timelines

Below are the timelines for applicants interested in delivering the entry to school program:

CFA issued	March 30, 2021
Information sessions for prospective applicants	Session 1: April 7, 2pm-3pm Session 2: April 9, 1pm-2pm
Information sessions for school boards	April 2021 (dates to be confirmed)
Deadline for questions	5:00pm EST on April 30, 2021
Application deadline	5:00pm EST on June 25, 2021
Evaluation of CFA submissions and follow up questions for applicants as required	June – August 2021
Selected service providers notified	September 2021
Transfer payment agreement development	Fall 2021
Service providers begin implementation planning	January 2022 – February 2022
Program launch (e.g., Children preparing to transition to school in September 2022 begin to receive group-based program)	March 2022

Section 4: OAP Entry to School Program

A. Description of the OAP Entry to School Program

The entry to school program will be a six-month group-based skill-building program for young children, aged 3 to 5 years, who are entering school for the first time (either kindergarten or grade one). The program will be focused on preparing them to enter school. Following the group-based program, children will receive transition supports as they enter school, to support a successful school transition. Families and educators will be able to access consultation services from entry to school program staff, upon request, during a child's first six months in school.

B. Key Elements of the OAP Entry to School Program:

Program Element	Description
Program Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The entry to school program will be a group-based program for young children, aged 3 to 5 years (36-71 months), who are entering school for the first time and will be focused on preparing them to enter school. • The group-based program must target skill-building within all of the following six domains: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication: For example, expressing wants and needs, understanding words and language, social communication, non-verbal communication, conversation, ability to learn to use a communication system/device effectively within a variety of activities. • Play: For example, toy exploration, constructive play (such as drawing, puzzles), reciprocal play, parallel play, imaginative play, pre-symbolic, symbolic and social play, and engaging in group play/games. • Social interaction: For example, understanding of social boundaries, social reciprocity, interactions with peers, acquiring new behaviours by observing/imitating peers. • Functional routines: For example, following classroom routines, self-help skills such as dressing and toilet training, and using the teacher as a source of support. • Behavioural self-management: For example, emotional regulation, self-management, self-monitoring, ability to use effective strategies to cope with sensory sensitivities. • Pre-academics, learning and attention: For example, acquiring new learning skills, working within a group setting, and independent work.

Program Element	Description
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The group-based program will be multi-disciplinary and should be delivered by staff with expertise in Autism Spectrum Disorder, applied behaviour analysis, speech-language pathology, occupational therapy, and early childhood development. • Within the group-based program, individualized programming should take into account each child’s developmental profile. • Service providers will have flexibility to develop the curriculum for their program, aligning with the program requirements outlined in Section 4B.
<p>Duration and Intensity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group-based skill-building program will be up to six months of service offered on half days (three hours per day), five days per week, with flexibility for the number of days or hours a child attends depending on their needs. • After children complete the group-based program and transition into school, during the child’s first six months in school, the family and/or educators will have access to targeted consultation from entry to school program staff, based on their individual needs and/or educators’ requests, to support the transition.
<p>Eligibility</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children with a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder (ASD), between the ages of three to five years (36-71 months), who are registered in the OAP, and who are entering school for the first time (either kindergarten or grade one). • Children on the waitlist, and those receiving childhood budgets or interim one-time funding will be eligible. • Children with an active OAP behaviour plan and children receiving core clinical services are not eligible to access this program. • Children can receive other OAP, special needs and/or community-based early years programs concurrently (other than core clinical services within the OAP). • Eligible children may receive one OAP early years program per fiscal year (i.e., April 1 to March 31). Families can choose either the entry to school program or a caregiver-mediated early years program in one fiscal year, based on their child’s individual needs. Families may choose to access the other early years program the following year, if their child meets the eligibility requirements. • Eligible families will be referred to providers by the OAP (i.e., initially by the Central Intake and Registration Team and in the future by the

Program Element	Description
	Independent Intake Organization once it is operational) once families have registered for the OAP.
Collaborative Staffing Model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group-based program will be delivered by multi-disciplinary program staff with expertise in Autism Spectrum Disorder, applied behaviour analysis, speech-language pathology, occupational therapy, and early childhood development, with a recommended staffing ratio of 1:4. • OAP entry to school staff will consult with other clinicians already working with the child (such as occupational therapists or speech language pathologists) to align goals and gather information to support successful school transitions. • Strong partnerships will be developed between OAP entry to school staff and local school boards to support successful implementation.
Delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program will be delivered in a community setting with consideration of opportunities to leverage existing settings in local communities if relevant (such as childcare centres, preschools, schools) and based on local capacity and community partner agreements. • Program will be delivered taking into account the various cultural, linguistic and geographic populations of children within a service provider's/partnership's region, including but not limited to: First Nations, Inuit and Métis children and families, Francophone and other linguistic populations, as well as rural and remote communities. • Program enrolment: Program will have a rolling entry and exit approach, based on the timing of each child's individual entry to school plan. • Children's entry into the program will be aligned with the school year as much as possible (i.e., September or January school entry), so that children receive the group program in the six months immediately preceding their school start date. • Depending on the proposals submitted, the ministry may fund multiple service providers within each region to deliver the program across the entire region. • Program is intended to be delivered in-person, where possible. Please include virtual delivery options in your proposal for consideration in the context of the current COVID-19 pandemic.

Estimated number of children eligible for entry to school program:

Regional Distribution of Children Eligible for Entry To School Program, as of March 01, 2021		
Geographic Location	Estimated Number of Children Eligible for ETS between Jan to Dec 2021 ¹	Estimated Number of Children Eligible for ETS between Jan to Dec 2022 ²
Central Region	4,294	4,299
Dufferin	47	63
Halton	382	408
Peel	1,516	1,541
Simcoe	633	584
Waterloo	371	368
Wellington	120	104
York	1,225	1,231
East Region	2,365	2,299
Durham	746	785
Frontenac	132	127
Haliburton	*	*
Hastings	96	99
Kawartha Lakes	46	50
Lanark	42	43
Leeds and Grenville	51	55
Lennox and Addington	21	19
Northumberland	57	56
Ottawa	840	760
Peterborough	90	81
Prescott and Russell	64	66
Prince Edward	*	*
Renfrew	85	82
Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry	79	68
Toronto Region	2,947	3,122
Toronto	2,947	3,122
West Region	1,390	1,304
Brant	77	88
Bruce	*	*
Chatham-Kent	33	35

Elgin	35	27
Essex	171	158
Grey	16	18
Haldimand-Norfolk	63	66
Hamilton	432	396
Huron	*	*
Lambton	52	48
Middlesex	192	189
Niagara	230	212
Oxford	40	32
Perth	31	22
Location not determined ⁴	120	88
Ontario (includes North Region data)	11,611	11,573

Source: OACIS data as of March 01, 2021.

* Data is suppressed due to small counts.

1. Children 36-71 months of age, as of January 1, 2021.
2. Children 36-71 months of age, as of January 1, 2022.
3. Postal code in OACIS may be missing or invalid.
4. A number of children eligible for ETS between Jan to Dec 2022 may have been served through the pilot program during the previous year.

Note that these numbers are estimates based on current OAP registrations and are subject to change. It is also expected that uptake will be lower in year one (2022-23) due to the time it will take selected providers to implement the program.

C. Key Objectives and Desired Outcomes of the Entry to School Program

Objectives
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. To support young children on the autism spectrum to successfully transition to school.2. To facilitate children's skill development in school readiness skills across six key domains (i.e., communication, play, social interactions, functional routines, behavioural self management, and pre-academics, learning and attention) to support their transition to kindergarten.3. To support increased capacity-building for both providers and educators to help meet children's needs.4. To build families' confidence in the capacity of schools and interdisciplinary teams to meet children's needs.5. To increase families' understanding of what supports can be offered within the school environment.6. To empower parents to be active participants in their child's team supporting their transition to school.7. To foster strong connections between the home and school environments through establishing open, two-way communication regarding the child's transition process.

Outcomes
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Young children on the autism spectrum are able to successfully transition into school.2. Children are better prepared to participate in school activities.3. Schools have additional information and community support to meet the needs of individual children as they enter school.4. Parent/caregivers are satisfied with transitional experiences.5. Families have confidence in the capacity of schools and communities to provide effective transition supports for all children.6. Collaborative relationships between schools, community service providers, and families are enhanced.

D. Roles and Responsibilities of Entry to School Program Staff and School-Based Transition Team

The entry to school program will deliver the group-based component of the program. As a child is close to completing the group-based program and is preparing to transition to school, both entry to school staff and school board/school-based staff will work with the family to support the transition.

The joint school-based transition team may include the school principal or designate, relevant school/school board staff, OAP entry to school staff, families, and any other relevant professionals involved with the child. The joint transition team will identify a lead to coordinate the transition process, based on local transition processes.

OAP Entry to School Program Staff Roles and Responsibilities:

- Deliver the group-based skill-building program and consult with other clinicians working with the child to align treatment goals and strategies;
- Collaborate with families to set goals for the child during transition to school;
- Prior to the school transition, coordinate case-conferences and support sharing of information with all other parties, including the school-based transition team and other OAP-funded and special needs clinicians providing services to the child, to identify the child's strengths and needs;
- Work with the school-based transition team members to support the development of the child's transition to school plan;
- Collaborate and share information with the school-based transition team members on the child's progress;
- Provide assistance to educators, Educational Assistants (EAs) and other professionals working with students transitioning to school as required to support the child transition into the classroom setting; and
- Provide resources and/or consultation to families and classroom educators if required to support a child's transition to school.

School Board Roles and Responsibilities in the Entry to School Program

- Familiarize themselves with key parameters and objectives of the MCCSS entry to school program.
- Provide input into the proposal development process led by MCCSS- funded providers, as possible during COVID.
- Support MCCSS funded providers to design the transition planning process, including the composition of transitional teams, the roles and responsibilities of partners, and the

timelines. Boards may wish to look to learnings and best practices from the Connections for Students model. More information about this model can be found on the Ministry of Education's website by clicking [here](#).

- Enter into a Memorandum of Understanding agreement with the MCCSS-funded provider, subject to providers and school boards' policies.
- Participate in the development of child-specific transition plans based on the individual needs of each student, and best practices learned from the Connections for Students model, to the extent capacity allows.
- Use information obtained through the development of the child's transition plan to inform the child's Individual Education Plan (IEP), where appropriate.

School-Based Transition Team Roles and Responsibilities:

Principals are required to ensure that a plan for transition is in place for children with ASD entering school and includes relevant ABA methods, where appropriate, as per Policy/Program Memorandum (PPM) 140 *Incorporating Methods of Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) into Programs for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)*. This transition plan should be integrated into existing planning processes for students entering school.

As outlined in PPM 140, school board staff are expected to work with parents and community agencies to plan for a successful transition. For students entering from the OAP entry to school program, this collaboration should include:

- Working with the family, entry to school team and community providers to identify a child's strengths and needs and to set goals for the transition process;
- Sharing information about the child's progress with other members of the joint transition team to inform planning; and
- Supporting the implementation of the transition plan in the classroom, with access to resources/consultation provided by the entry to school program staff where needed. Plans will include individualized and flexible supports that could be offered by the school and/or community agencies.

E. French Language Services Act

There is a legislative obligation under the *French Language Services Act* (FLSA) for the service provider(s) and/or partnership to deliver all programming and services in both French and English.

The selected service provider(s) and/or partnership must also be able to demonstrate a plan for how French Language Services will be delivered for all programming and services offered in the MCCSS defined region.

When entering into a contract agreement with providers, the selected service provider(s) and/or partnership must integrate a French Language Services clause to ensure FLS capacity and that services provided are delivered in accordance with the FLSA.

F. Evaluation of Entry to School Program Applications

The following criteria and scoring will be used to evaluate all applications to deliver an entry to school program:

Rated criteria	Points*
Service Provider Capacity	80
Partnerships with Local School Boards	55
Partnerships with Community Social Service Providers	45
Staff Knowledge, Experience, and Expertise	30
Implementation Plan	45
Evaluation Plan	40
Budget	15
TOTAL:	310

Service Provider Capacity (80 points)

The service provider/partnership has:

- Demonstrated experience providing high-quality, family-centred, and culturally appropriate early years services to children on the autism spectrum.
- Demonstrated experience developing new program curriculum.
- Demonstrated capacity to develop and implement program based on key elements outlined in section 4 and within established timelines outlined in section 3, including how the program will be integrated within the service provider’s/partnership’s existing community service system. Readiness to serve various cultural, linguistic and geographic populations of children within service provider’s/partnership’s region, including but not

limited to: First Nations, Inuit and Métis children and families and Francophone and other linguistic populations, as well as rural and remote communities.

- Demonstrated capacity/plan to offer virtual service delivery options, if required, given the current environment due to COVID-19.
- Ability to employ a screening mechanism for children referred to the service provider by the OAP, including the proposed process for how information on children's individual needs will be captured to inform service planning for the group-based program.
- Effective governance and financial policies and procedures in place and the support of senior management and a Board of Directors, if applicable, to successfully manage the design and implementation of an entry to school program.

Partnerships with Local School Boards (55 points)

The service provider/partnership has:

- Demonstrated experience working collaboratively with school boards in the service delivery area (French, English, public and Catholic and section 68 school authorities).
- Ability to develop and maintain relationships with school board partners in the service delivery area in order to efficiently deliver entry to school services across the service delivery area.
- Demonstrated commitment in principle of proposed school board partners to collaborate to successfully implement program. Letters of support will be encouraged, where possible.
- Demonstrated ability to facilitate consistent information sharing by promoting the program with school board partners and amongst service providers, and with families of children receiving services, regarding the delivery of entry to school services.

Partnerships with Community Social Service Providers (45 points)

The service provider/partnership has:

- Demonstrated well-established relationships and experience in collaborating with a broad network of community social service providers to support coordination and implementation, including how the program would be integrated into the community's existing service system.
- Well-positioned to take an interdisciplinary and collaborative approach when working with other service providers to implement the program(s).
- Demonstrated ability to develop and maintain relationships with children's service providers in the service delivery area in order to efficiently deliver entry to school services across the service delivery area.
- Demonstrated ability to facilitate consistent information sharing by promoting the program, both amongst service providers and with families of children receiving services, regarding the delivery of entry to school services.

- Commitment to implement and maintain clear processes and protocols for collaboration and information sharing among relevant providers in the children’s services, education, and health sectors through such methods as up-to-date agreements and/or memoranda of understanding (MOUs) that address, at a minimum, how and when to share information and roles and responsibilities in contributing to entry to school services.
- Demonstrated commitment in principle of proposed partners to collaborate to successfully implement the program. Letters of support from partner service providers will be encouraged.
- Demonstrated ability to take a leadership role in the management of any conflicts with service partners across sectors.

Staff Knowledge, Experience, and Expertise (30 points)

- The service provider/partnership employs or has the capacity/ability to employ (if gaps are identified) staff that have expertise in Autism Spectrum Disorder, early childhood development, applied behaviour analysis, occupational therapy and speech-language pathology.
- The service provider/partnership has demonstrated a commitment to and experience in consulting and collaborating with other clinicians (within organization and with clinicians employed by other service providers) as part of an interdisciplinary approach, as well as experience working collaboratively with families to identify children’s strengths and needs to develop individualized goals.

Implementation Plan (45 points)

- The service provider/partnership has included a detailed workplan, using the template provided in the Applicant Response Document that provides a timeframe for each of the key activities to be completed to launch an entry to school program beginning in March 2022.

Evaluation Plan (40 points)

- The service provider/partnership has included a brief description of the evaluation approach that will be used to monitor and measure outcomes of the program on an annual basis.

Budget (15 points)

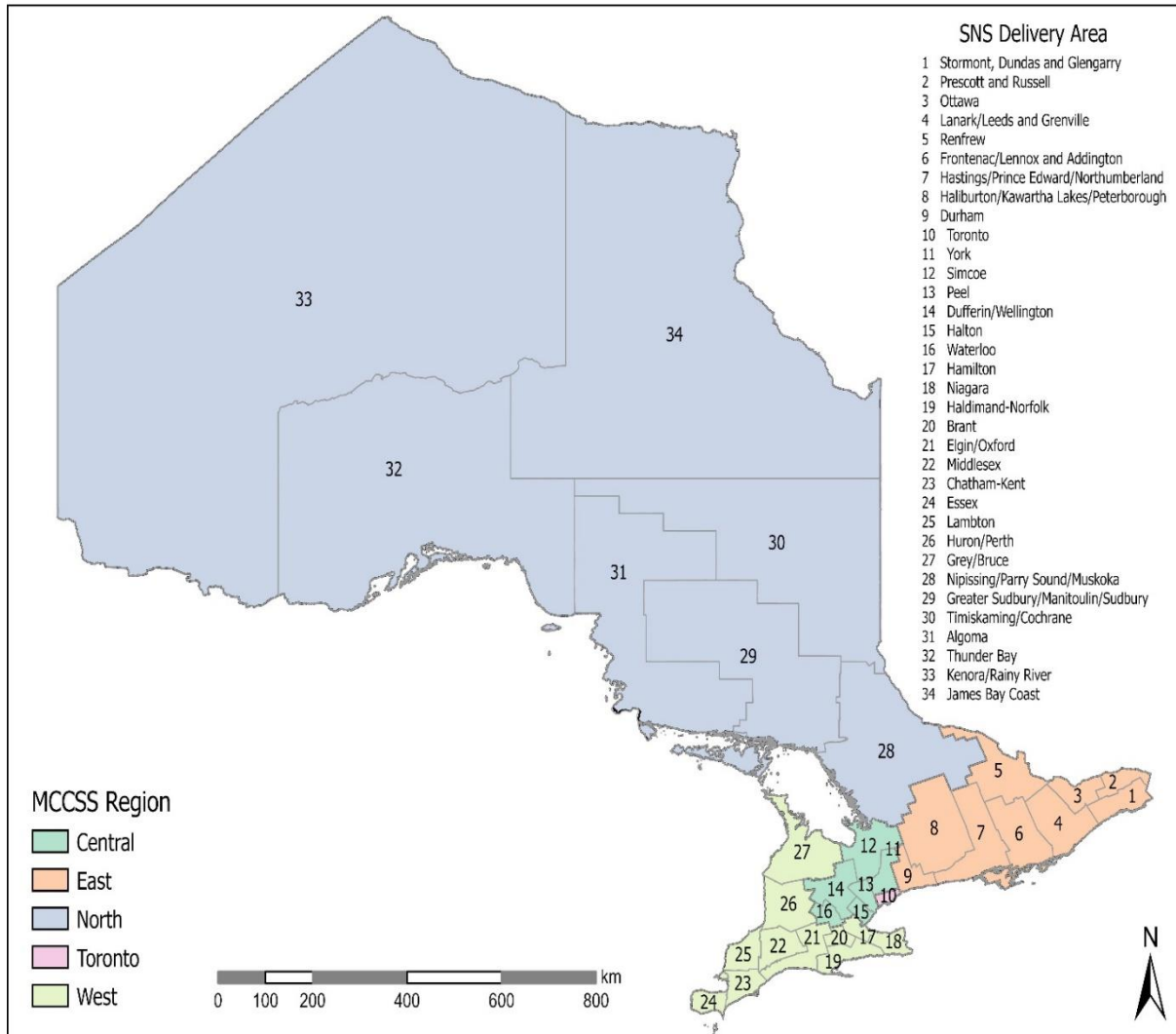
The service provider/partnership has included a proposed budget, using the template provided in the Applicant Response Document, that:

- Shows clear linkages to the workplan and the service provider’s capacity to meet the requirements outlined in the CFA within established timeframes.

- The cost estimates are reasonable from the ministry's point of view based on its knowledge and experience funding similar services.
- The allocated administrative costs do not exceed 10% of the total budget.

Appendix A - Service Delivery Areas

Special Needs Service Delivery Areas Overlaid with MCCSS Regions



Produced by: Solutions Design and Delivery Unit, Data Strategy and Solutions Platform Branch, Business Intelligence & Practice Division, MCCSS. October 2020

