

Original Research on University Support Staff Workload Request for Proposals

Deadline for Submission
April June 30, 2024

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Protecting and Enhancing Public Education
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Overview

OSSTF/FEESO is seeking a research team to conduct an independent study into workload issues facing support staff working at Ontario universities. The successful organization will be able to bring policy, economic, psychosocial, and other relevant analytic frameworks to bear on a key question: how have policy and funding changes over the past five years affected the workload, health, and mental wellbeing of university support staff? We envision the answers to that over-arching question as integrating results from the following component analyses.

1. A comprehensive overview of support staff roles and responsibilities in the university sector. For most observers, work at universities is performed by faculty and administrators. The highly diverse work performed by support staff is left invisible and therefore prone to cuts, speed-ups, and increased task assignments. This component of the analysis should provide a comprehensive and accessible understanding of the wide range of functions performed by support staff as well as the number of people employed in those roles.
2. A detailed analysis of the funding and policy background within which support staff are employed. At the provincial level, key policy shifts include recent government measures tying funding to Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) as outlined in Strategic Mandate Agreements (SMA

3), tuition freezes, and policies relating to international students. At the university-level, relevant policies might include processes for allocating resources to support staff, hiring practices, and strategies for reducing labour costs (including gapping). A key aspect of this component would be understanding the impact of recent policy shifts on workload, health, and wellbeing.

3. A careful investigation of the current state of the impact of policy shifts on workload and the physical and mental health of university support staff. This should involve a mixed-methods approach involving both quantitative and qualitative elements. For example, established and recognized tools such as COPSOQ II and III or similar should be utilized. We would also anticipate examination of employment trends data such as early retirements, absences from work, job postings, and related sources in order to describe the impacts policy shifts have had on workers in the sector.
4. A review of workload protection language in collective agreements relevant to the sector. While faculty association collective agreements typically include provisions related to workload, there is a distinct absence of such provisions in support staff agreements. A review of existing university support staff workload language and potential model language will be essential.

Organization Overview

The Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation is a certified trade union representing over 60,000 teachers and education workers across the province.

Our diverse English and French membership are represented in over 150 bargaining units across the province. We work in elementary and secondary school workplaces, private schools and consortia that offer support services to school boards and universities. Our members include educational assistants, continuing education teachers and instructors, psychologists, secretaries, speech-language pathologists, social workers, plant support personnel, attendance counsellors and many other education professionals.

For this project, OSSTF/FEESO is concerned about workload and working conditions for its diverse membership in the post-secondary sector.

Deliverables

OSSTF/FEESO envisions completion of two reports based on the above research.

1. A general overview providing province-wide analysis. This report is intended to provide a comprehensive and reliable of the overall state of the sector. It should be capable of informing the general public, unions, policymakers, and administrators about key issues. It should provide a persuasive and compelling argument (based on evidence) that concrete steps need to be taken to address the issues identified.
2. An OSSTF/FEESO-specific report capturing the specific challenges faced by OSSTF/FEESO members. Because OSSTF/FEESO represents a relatively small portion of the university support staff sector, there is a danger that the province-wide analysis described above would obscure the specific challenges facing OSSTF/FEESO members. The research design should therefore include a strategy for gaining a sufficient sample of OSSTF/FEESO members to properly describe their workload challenges.

Both reports should attend to the differential impacts of funding and policy context on equity-seeking and First Nations, Métis, and Inuit workers.

In addition, both reports should include recommendations in (at least) three domains.

1. Bargaining strategies/collective agreement language. These recommendations should provide guidance on terms that would protect members from increasing workloads.
2. Policy levers. These recommendations should provide guidance on policy proposals – at both the provincial and university level – that OSSTF/FEESO and its allies should pursue to promote positive working conditions, work-life balance, and mental and physical health for members.
3. Political strategies. These recommendations should provide guidance on concrete goals that OSSTF/FEESO and its allies can pursue to promote the conditions necessary to achieve the bargaining and policy goals described above.

Finally, researchers should be prepared to present their findings to (1) the OSSTF/FEESO Provincial Executive and (2) a meeting of members and/or local leaders such as OSSTF/FEESO's Provincial Council.

Proposal Guidelines

General

Proposals should include information on the following:

- A list of key research personnel to be involved in the project, including brief descriptions of research specializations and their affiliation to the principal investigator (i.e., in-house staff, contracted, etc.).

- A summary of the broad framework or approach
- An overview of the research strategy or research design envisioned to complete the analysis described above.
- Planned strategies for compiling the data necessary to complete both province-wide and OSSTF/FEESO-specific analyses.
- Examples of relevant published research (completed by one or more members of the proponent's team).
- A high-level timeline, including background research, data gathering, analysis, and completion of reports.
- A summary of any notable terms and conditions contained in your standard contact.

Collaboration

Given the scale of the proposed research, OSSTF/FEESO would be interested in potentially soliciting financial and practical participation from other unions in the sector. This would be done in consultation with the successful proponent and upon confirmation of the broad outlines of the research design. Proposals should include description of the team's past successes in undertaking collaborative projects of this nature and a general description of how such collaboration might be undertaken for this project.

Conflict of Interest

Please provide a statement describing connections or possible connections that your business or its employees may have (if any) to OSSTF/FEESO that may be seen as a conflict of interest.

Diversity Policy

Please provide your organization's diversity policies and whether you are recognized as a diverse employer.

Criteria for Selection

OSSTF/FEESO will select based on the following criteria:

- Understanding of the project's requirements, research questions, and demonstrated ability to meet those requirements;
- Understanding of the Ontario's post-secondary education system and OSSTF/FEESO's mandate in advocating for that system;
- Demonstrated ability to achieve the multi-framework and mixed-method research envisioned by the project
- Ability to deliver the final reports in a timely fashion; and

- Ability to incorporate analyses of differential impact depending on gender, race, disability and other identities, as well as on the intersection of those identities.

Budget

OSSTF/FEESO asks that cost estimates be included in proposals.

Terms and Conditions

Issuance of this RFP does not commit OSSTF/FEESO to award a contract, to pay any costs incurred in the preparation of a response to this request, or to procure a contract for services. OSSTF/FEESO reserves the right to:

- not award the contract necessarily to the lowest bidder;
- to conduct negotiations with one or more bidders in the event negotiations with the first bidder are unsuccessful;
- to obtain clarification of proposals as part of the evaluation process;
- cancel and reissue the Request for Proposal; and
- extend any deadlines and amend the procurement process.

Selection is dependent upon the negotiation of a mutually acceptable contract with the successful firm.

Submissions and inquiries

All submissions must be received by June 30, 2024

Any questions about this RFP or the selection process, as well as all proposal responses should be addressed to:

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All proposals must be submitted in a digital format via email to chris.samuel@osstf.ca.