

Request for Proposal (RFP)

(Issued on July 7, 2009)

Launch of a Canadian Accreditation System

Implementation of the National Environmental Program Accreditation System

Proposal Requirements:

- No more than 15 pages in length plus cover page, table of contents, and appendices
- E-mail an electronic copy in Microsoft Office Word or PDF format to: kcrane@eco.ca
- Proposal due at 5:30 pm (MST), August 6, 2009, no late proposals will be accepted
- Send any questions you may have regarding the RFP to: kcrane@eco.ca

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Introduction

ECO (Environmental Careers Organization) Canada is seeking a consultant that is an expert in accreditation systems to complete the third phase of ECO's National Environmental Program Accreditation (NEPA) project. The third phase of the project involves working closely with ECO Canada to run the first year of the accreditation program with four environmental programs, two universities and two colleges, for the period of August 2009 to June 2010.

This project involves a supervisory role in overseeing that policies and procedures are followed, as well as the assistance in carrying out the site visits, and the review of documents, schedules and applications. An additional component is to fine-tune the existing processes, documents and governance as needed, as a result of the lessons learned.

ECO Canada is looking for a contractor who can articulate and implement a methodology to:

- a) Identify the appropriate timelines in which to complete the cycle of accreditation;
- b) Assist in launching the academic program evaluation process, cycle, and necessary evaluation materials;
- c) Assist in implementing the accreditation system policies;
- d) Provide guidance in the reporting requirements and guidelines for volunteers;
- e) Deliver training for volunteers based upon existing materials from the Association of Accrediting Agencies of Canada (AAAC) and what has been developed;
- f) Provide recommendations for improvements on administrative processes; existing policies, procedures and documents to improve and enhance the system; and
- g) Make changes to administrative processes; existing policies, procedures and documents based on recommendations by working with the Standards and Documentation Committee to modify existing documents.

The consultant will have experience conducting accreditation site visits, administering an accreditation, or similar, system, and either managing—as staff member—or directing—as a volunteer—an accreditation system of a national structure, on a national basis. The consultant will also have experience in project management and volunteer management. The implementation of the accreditation system should be linked to the objective of the accreditation system—a rigorous, yet flexible, quality assurance mechanism for environmental programs that demonstrates to potential students and industry that they have met a national standard. The accreditation system ultimately links to the overall goal of ECO Canada, the promotion of the mobility and reciprocity of trained workers in Canada.

It is expected the contractor will carry out the project during the months of August 2009 to August 2010. The project methodology described by the contractor in the proposal needs to include specific dates for completion of each of the logical stages of the project.

The budget for this contract is not to exceed \$65,000 (excluding taxes).

1.0 Background

1.1 ECO Canada Background

ECO Canada is a not-for-profit corporation that assists the Canadian environment sector in implementing sound human resource development policies. Since its founding, ECO Canada has taken great strides toward developing a national human resource strategy that is focused on the needs of environmental practitioners, employers, educators, and students.

ECO Canada is one of approximately thirty national sector councils that were established with federal start-up funding to bring employers, workers, educators, and governments together to address human resource issues facing the environmental sector. The key objectives of ECO Canada are to:

- Implement national occupational standards for skills and training;
- Promote employment opportunities via a highly skilled workforce;
- Meet industry's requirements for qualified new entrants into the labour force;
- Provide labour market projections and information on trends for governments, educators, youth and industry planners;
- Facilitate and develop social/economic alliances between business and labour;
- Improve the dialogue between industry and the academic community; and
- Address the labour market entry problems and school-to-work transition difficulties encountered by youth.

ECO Canada is now an autonomous organization that is directed by the stakeholders it serves. Its mission is "to ensure an adequate supply of people with the demonstrated skills and knowledge required to meet the environmental human resource needs of the public and private sectors."

Visit www.eco.ca for more information.

1.2 Project Rationale

Since 1991, ECO Canada has been working toward establishing a national standard of environmental employment. Through the development of National Occupational Standards (NOS), and the certification of environmental practitioners through the Canadian Environmental Certification Approvals Board (CECAB), ECO Canada has made great strides towards this level of excellence.

While certification of environmental practitioners provides a mechanism for practitioners to measure their competencies against a national standard, there is no system through which practitioners can be assured that the skills and knowledge acquired through their post-secondary education meets those national standards.

In working toward closing this gap, ECO Canada has lead in the development of two national academic affinity groups—the Canadian College Environmental Network (CCEN) and the Canadian University Environmental Science Network (CUESN), in partnership with the Association of Canadian Community Colleges and the Association of Universities and Colleges of

Canada. The CCEN represents 26 Canadian colleges, technical institutes, and CEGEP's, while the CUESN has membership of 33 Canadian universities with undergraduate environmental science programs. Established in 2003, these organizations, were brought together to identify issues within environmental education and share best practices for improving programs. Through these discussions, the need for a national accreditation system for environmental education has been identified. Both the CCEN and the CUESN have requested that ECO Canada should establish and administer the accreditation.

To demonstrate their commitment, the CUESN has prepared an official partnership agreement with ECO Canada that states that ECO Canada will be the accreditation body for university environmental science programs. Further, the CCEN has established an accreditation sub-committee, to develop the accreditation scheme with ECO Canada. Both groups have formally agreed that the ECO Canada's NOS for Environmental Employment will be a cornerstone of the national environmental program accreditation process.

The creation of a national system that promotes mobility and reciprocity of trained workers in Canada is a defined goal of ECO Canada. The program also has the potential to increase registration of students in an accredited program that will assist in meeting the large labour shortage reported in the environment sector.

1.3 Project Background

ECO Canada, in the first and second phases of the project, researched and then developed a national accreditation system for environmental programs for post-secondary institutions, both universities and colleges—including CEGEPs and technical institutions, but hereby referred to as colleges—in Canada. The accreditation system will be the basis to evaluate the relevancy and appropriateness of post-secondary environmental educations. The National Occupational Standards for Environmental Employment are an important component of the curriculum criteria for ECO's accreditation system, and this differentiates our accreditation system from other systems. The next phase of the project is the launch of the accreditation system with four environmental programs.

The rationale behind the development of a national environmental program accreditation system is wide-ranging. First, there will be increased cooperation and communication between accredited post-secondary institutions. Second, enrolment will increase because programs will have met a national, industry-validated standard. Third, employment opportunities will increase for graduates that have completed an industry-recognized program, easing the school-to-work transition. Finally, accreditation will assist in program development through the design of relevant curriculum.

In addition, national accreditation will demonstrate to all stakeholders the educational institution's dedication to nationally validated and recognized standards, as well as the greater status of their degree, diploma, or certificate programs over those of non-accredited programs.

2.0 Project Considerations

2.1 Project Description

According to the 2004 Environmental Labour Market report published by ECO Canada, environmental employment is growing at a rate 60% more than the Canadian workforce. With such growth and anticipated vacancies of nearly 12,000 positions at the time of the survey, environmental employers are in need of an increasing supply of qualified practitioners.

Environmental post-secondary education in Canada is relatively young. While there are nearly 400 environmentally-related education programs¹, there is no national standard upon which to measure the relevance and applicability of these programs to industry need and employment.

As such, the labour market issue that the NEPA project will address is the gap between the national occupational standards and the Canadian post-secondary environmental programs.

The national accreditation program would demonstrate to potential new students and employers the programs that meet the national standard as benchmarked against the NOS for environmental employment. The national accreditation program of ECO Canada would:

- Increase enrolment in environmental programs because potential new students will see the value in the programs that have met a recognized national standard supported by the environment sector;
- Facilitate school-to-work transitions for graduates of accredited programs. Industry would recognize those graduating from programs that are benchmarked against standards developed by current environmental practitioners;
- Assist Canadian Colleges and Universities in developing programs and curriculum that are relevant and recognized by Canada's national Sector Council representing industry and current practitioners; and
- Increase cooperation, articulation, and resulting economies in the development of new environmental programs across Canada by increasing communication between accredited and non-accredited institutions.

National accreditation demonstrates to prospective students, counsellors, parents, and employers an academic institution's dedication to nationally validated and recognized standards. Institutions who participate in a national accreditation process tend to generate curricula improvements in their current programs and in the development of new ones, and their degree, diploma, or certificate programs have a greater status than non-accredited programs².

¹ ECO Canada's compendium of environmental Programs 2008

² http://www.cctt.ca/landing_4.asp

2.2 Preliminary Research

2.2.1 Research Summary

During the first phase of the project, research was undertaken to create case studies of Canadian accreditation systems, develop accreditation best practices, and perform a needs assessment of environmental educators in Canada. Some of the research highlights are presented.

Currently, there is a wide range of programs being offered in the environmental sphere. At the college level, there are a number of diploma courses being offered that are quite specialized, i.e. Water Quality, Wildlife or Forestry, etc.. At the university level, environmental programs are offered as a science program and as an arts program. In most cases, at the university level the environmental program is an environmental science program or an environmental studies program within the social sciences. However, there does not appear to be consistency in this regard.

With such diversity in programs, there are a lot of differences in how curricula are being developed. Generally, they are being developed through some combination of the NOS, input of advisory committees or councils, or through faculty within individual institutions. It is important to note that the National Occupation Standards do not form the basis of the curricula for many of the programs (particularly the university programs). This has all contributed to the difficulty in setting the accreditation criteria.

Many of the academics teach at institutions that have accredited programs. Because most of the academic institutions have experience with accreditation, the general perception of accreditation is fairly positive. Presently, few environmental programs are currently accredited (in one case, CTAB accredits the environmental program). There is a considerable level of support for the accreditation of environmental programs and interest in participating in a pilot program.

Some of the benefits of accreditation that were repeatedly mentioned in the first phase were:

- Having a recognized national standard for environmental programs
- Ensuring that curriculum is up to date, current and relevant;
- Enabling greater mobility for graduates; and,
- Validating the program.

Potential drawbacks to accreditation have been frequently cited during interviews:

- The standard could be set too low and therefore, there would be no value in being accredited;
- It may force curriculum to become too industry focused; and,
- It takes control of the course content away from the educational institutions.

The predominant viewpoint is that if accreditation is deemed as being valuable then it will be supported. It seems for most academics “value” means that the criteria are set at a high

standard. In most cases, the standard accreditation process (up front information-gathering and on-site visit) is seen as workable from the perspective of the educational institutions.

Currently there does not seem to be any consistency around reporting program information. Some programs report information to the government while others do not report any program information. In a rare number of cases, one or two departments report program information (like course content, faculty experience, etc.) but in most cases the information that is being reported is mainly around tuition fees, number of applications, number of admissions offered, employment rates of graduates, etc.

The main challenge to accreditation that was mentioned repeatedly was the financial cost associated with the accreditation process. This refers to both the cost of fees and the human resource costs. For academic institutions the hard costs associated with this type of undertaking are an obstacle. Despite these serious concerns, in most cases, academics were quick to say that as long as the process is value driven and from the school's perspective worth the financial cost, they would support it.

While there is wide support for the accreditation process at a conceptual level, there appears to be fairly significant concern in two areas: accreditation criteria and industry buy-in. Without a doubt concerns around criteria-setting (such as development and approval processes) were most salient.

During the research phase, January-July 2008, the academic community was clearly concerned with how the criteria would be set. They understand that, given the diversity of environmental programs, setting appropriate criteria will be a huge undertaking. It is imperative that academics and university and college administration see that the criteria have been set to a high standard that is inclusive of unique programs. Secondly, academics wanted to ensure that would be buy-in to from industry. This is ongoing in the accreditation set-up process. They don't want it to be industry-driven, but they do want to make sure that it is perceived as meeting industry's needs.

2.2.2 Project Update

The second stage of ECO Canada's national environmental program accreditation was to develop the system, adding to the preliminary framework that was laid during the research phase. At this stage, the eligibility criteria and the application documents have been completed, and guidelines for volunteers, and the volunteer terms of reference are finished. Accreditation policies are in place and training manuals, evaluation and reporting requirements are ready to be implemented. The governance structure has been created and will be formalized in order to launch the system.

The accreditation criteria, particularly the curriculum standard, are based in part on the adapted National Occupational Standards for Environmental Employment (NOS). From the NOS, two areas of the accreditation system competency framework have emerged, the transferable or enabling skills and the vocational or subject matter skills. An additional component to the competency framework are the higher level skills and knowledge that describe what is taught in environmental programs that is unique to environmental programs and not taught by other disciplines—chemistry, economics, biology, etc..

The criteria will be completed in late July 2009, and it is anticipated that there will be revisions based upon the feedback from programs involved in the first year of the accreditation system. As anticipated developing the accreditation criteria and program requirements has been the greatest challenge because of the broad and varied range of programs offered in the environmental sphere; ongoing consultation with industry, academics, competing and parallel professions is paramount.

The draft accreditation criteria will be provided as an associated component with this RFP. The finalized criteria will be posted on our web site at: www.eco.ca/nepa/standards at the end of July.

Currently, the project has a National Steering Committee (NSC) formed by representatives from universities and colleges across Canada, industry, and a subject matter expert and a National Working Group on Accreditation representing post-secondary environmental educators. Both groups were heavily involved in the development of the accreditation system and provided guidance as subject matter experts.

The Canadian Environmental Accreditation Commission (CEAC) will be set up and members will be recruited over the summer months. The commission will be finalized by November. Recruitment for volunteers is ongoing and guidance in selecting and training is expected from the successful contractor.

The CEAC, at time of implementation, will be an eight member body to be appointed by ECO Canada. The Commission will oversee the final program approvals (determine the accreditation status of the program) and assist in development, implementation, and maintenance of the accreditation process. There will be three standing committees of the CEAC: the graduate, diploma and certificate education committee to review the accreditation site visit reports and make recommendations to the Commission on the accreditation status of each program; the standards and documentation committee that will assist in drafting and developing new documents, updating and revising existing documents, and interpreting the criteria used in the accreditation process; and the appeals and complaints panel that functions when the CEAC has made a decision to withdraw or deny accreditation and will determine whether all information provided has been considered. After the initial first years of accreditation, when the number of programs seeking accreditation has grown to a level that necessitates a larger Commission, the CEAC will expand to a thirteen member commission, with a larger committee structure (five).

The interim report will be provided as an associated component of this RFP. The interim report includes the completed governance structure. It can also be found on our web site at: www.eco.ca/nepa.

2.3 Project Components

It is anticipated that the contractor will regularly communicate with the ECO Canada Project Manager to refine methodologies and work plans, and provide progress over the period of the contract.

It should be noted that certain deliverables might consist of the preparation and submission of more than one document. A payment schedule will be established based on the submission of the deliverables and on ECO Canada's approval and satisfaction with the deliverables.

Please include in your proposal, what your expectations of ECO Canada will be for management of the project and payment.

2.4 Deliverables

ECO Canada expects the contractor to propose a methodology that will best serve the project therefore the list of suggested activities and considerations presented below are given as a guideline. The methodology should include a list of deliverables, description of each deliverable, activities to achieve the deliverables, timeline to conduct activities, costs associated for each deliverable, consultants allocated to the activity and number of days per consultant allocated to each deliverable.

The following outlines a list of suggested activities that will be undertaken by the selected contractor throughout the duration of the contract:

- Provide guidance through the process: reviewing reports, applications, attending CEAC meetings, and other major events
- Oversee the process of evaluating applications and assisting in the review of eligibility decisions conducting on-site visits, reviewing Site Visit Evaluation Team reports
- Provide recommendations on issues determining eligibility or compliance with accreditation standards
- Provide advice and assistance to ECO Canada to provide to applicants and volunteers during the implementation phase
- Establish timelines for the Accreditation Commission from the application deadlines through to the Commission meeting
- Provide recommendations to ECO Canada to improve or enhance the accreditation process
- Assist the Standards and Documentation Committee to modify the content and/or terminology of the accreditation standards

In completing these activities based upon the proposed methodology of the contractor, ECO Canada will expect:

- Finalized manuals and guidelines that applicants will follow in applying for accreditation;
- Finalized annual timelines for all major steps and decision points in the accreditation process;
- Recommendations for improvements to policies and procedures, forms and documents used in the process;
- Recommendations for improvements to the decision-making process and staff administration/support; and
- Determine what information and specific documents applicants need to provide to satisfy the accreditation criteria.

- Revised accreditation system on the basis of lessons learned from the first year of accreditation process.

There is not a requirement for translation of any reports into French, as English is the working language for the project.

2.5 Timeline for Project

It is expected the contractor will develop an accreditation system during the months of August 2009 to August 2010. The contractor in the proposal needs to include specific dates for completion of the different components of the project.

3.0 Contractor Selection

3.1 Selection Criteria for Evaluation of Proposals

ECO Canada will apply several factors to the assessment of the submitted proposals. A fair and equitable process will be followed when selecting the contractor(s). In brief, these factors include:

1. Past Accreditation Experience (30 points)
 - The scope of accreditation background
 - References and examples of previous accreditation experiences can be supplied
 - Demonstrated understanding of an accreditation system through experience in managing or directing a national system
 - Demonstrated capability in administering an accreditation system, or similar system
 - Demonstrated experience in conducting or supervising site visits
 - Demonstrated experience in the implementation of an accreditation process either as a staff person or volunteer.
 - Experience training/mentoring volunteers involved in the accreditation process
2. Development of a thorough proposal (10 points)
 - Specify a schedule of deliverables in line with the methodology
 - Creating a viable timeline for the major decision points or events in first year of the accreditation cycle
 - Detailed allocation of resources
 - Processes for working with ECO Canada and ensuring ample project management communications
3. Demonstrated grasp of the accreditation system requirements and goals for launch (30 Points)
 - Describe an effective launch process, overseeing that policies and procedures are followed
 - Describe how the effective launch of the accreditation system will serve the needs of the environmental programs to ensure that both the process and results are of value to them

- Describe how the goal of strengthening the credibility of ECO can be achieved through the launch process
- Demonstrate an understanding of the value of accreditation in the proposal
- Understanding the differing needs and mandates of colleges and universities
- Understanding of ECO Canada's mandate, programs and stakeholders

4. Proposed Project Team (20 points)

- Qualifications
- Allocation of time and roles of each team member in completing the project

5. Budget to complete activities (10 points)

- the total cost of each deliverable
- processes for keeping project on budget (note that the value of the contract shall not exceed \$65,000—amount before taxes)

3.2 Timeline for Selection of Proposals

The timetable for the selection of the contractor is as follows:

July 7, 2009	Issue of the Request for Proposal.
August 6, 2009	Deadline for the submission of proposals. Proposals must be submitted to ECO Canada no later than 5:30 pm (MST).
August 10, 2009	Evaluation of submitted proposals, reference checks, and selection of the successful contractor by ECO Canada.
August 10, 2009	Contractor interviews. (To take place between 12:00 and 3:00 pm MST, unless other arrangements are made.)
August 12, 2009	Notification of successful contractor. Contracts start immediately upon notification and signing of contract.

4.0 Terms and Conditions

4.1 Proposal Terms and Conditions

ECO Canada would prefer respondents to submit a single proposal for all components of the project. However, if a consultant is only able to produce some components and not the full package, ECO Canada will consider partnership bids.

All consultants' electronic proposals must be received in full by ECO Canada by August 6, 2009, at 5:30 pm (MST) to be eligible for consideration. Late proposals will not be accepted. All bidders will be notified of ECO Canada's decision by August 12, 2009.

Respondents are asked to send one electronic copy in Microsoft Office Word or PDF format of the proposal to Kristin Crane, Manager National Environmental Program Accreditation at kcrane@eco.ca.

Responses to RFP questions will be replied to by email on a timely basis. Questions and answers will be shared and sent to all parties that have requested the RFP. No phone calls please. Questions can be emailed to kcrane@eco.ca.

4.2 RFP Terms and Conditions

The RFP is not a contract, or offer to enter into a contract, but a RFP for the supply of service to ECO Canada. ECO Canada reserves the right to reject any or all proposals, whether or not completed properly and whether or not it contains all required information. ECO Canada may reject any and all proposals without further questions or redress from any respondents. ECO Canada reserves the right to accept or reject proposals in whole or in part, to discuss different or additional terms to those included in the RFP or in any proposal, or to amend or modify any term in this RFP. ECO Canada shall not be responsible for any cost incurred by the proponent in preparing this RFP or otherwise prior to the signing of a contract with ECO Canada.

Following the evaluation of submissions by ECO Canada, the successful firm will be invited to enter into an agreement with ECO Canada to provide the required and/or services detailed in this RFP.