



Request for Proposals

Consultant - Client Co-Design Initiative Inclusive Employment Partnership Program

Item	Details
Issued by	Stride
RFP issue date	Friday, June 19, 2026
Proposal deadline	Friday, July 17, 2026 at 5:00 p.m. ET
Anticipated contract period	August 2026 to March 31, 2027
Project delivery period	September 2026 to March 31, 2027
Maximum consultant compensation	\$10,000 CAD, inclusive of all consultant fees and applicable expenses/taxes unless otherwise negotiated
Expected consultant time investment	Approximately 60-70 hours total, with roughly 30-35 hours per project phase
Submission contact	Julie Henshaw, Executive Director jhenshaw@stride.on.ca

This RFP is for the consultant portion of a Community Investment Fund (CIF)-supported Client Co-Design Initiative. The full CIF project budget is \$25,000; Stride will separately manage participant honoraria, client travel supports, venue/refreshments, accessibility supports, materials, and administrative coordination unless otherwise agreed in writing.

1. Organizational Background

Stride is a non-profit organization that supports people living with mental health and addiction-related challenges to prepare for, find, and keep employment. Stride is launching the Inclusive Employment Partnership Program, an innovative initiative focused on creating customized, meaningful employment pathways for job seekers whose strengths and realities do not align with conventional labour market opportunities.

The Client Co-Design Initiative will ensure the program is designed with, not only for, the people it is intended to serve. The initiative will use a structured, inclusive, Design Thinking-informed process to engage highly barriered job seekers in identifying assets, barriers, accessibility needs, meaningful employment pathways, and practical supports required for success.

2. Project Purpose and Objectives

The selected consultant will work with Stride staff to design, facilitate, synthesize, and report on a two-phase client engagement and co-design process. The project objectives are to:

- Engage up to 50 highly barriered job seekers in a client-driven gap analysis and asset mapping process.

- Identify participant strengths, service gaps, systemic barriers, accessibility needs, and support requirements related to employment.
- Facilitate a smaller co-design process with approximately 12 participants to generate and refine ideas for alternative employment pathways, customized roles, accessibility supports, and program design elements.
- Translate engagement findings into practical recommendations that inform Stride's Inclusive Employment Partnership Program service delivery model, staffing/training considerations, outreach approach, and employer engagement/job-carving strategies. Project findings will also inform system level policy development (s) in employment services.

3. Scope of Work

The consultant is expected to lead the design, facilitation, analysis, and reporting functions in close collaboration with Stride. Stride will provide project oversight, participant recruitment support, space/venue coordination, participant supports, and internal program context.

Phase	Core activities	Timing
Phase 1: Client Insights and System Mapping	Finalize engagement plan and tools; support accessible recruitment and participation planning; facilitate two client focus group sessions and/or complementary interviews with up to 50 participants; synthesize findings into a client needs, assets, barriers, and service gap report.	September to November 2026
Phase 2: Collaborative Co-Design and Program Development	Design and facilitate four smaller co-design sessions with approximately 12 participants; guide participants through ideation, concept refinement, and feedback loops; develop practical recommendations for program model, supports, accessibility considerations, staff training needs, and employment pathway design.	December 2026 to March 2027
Final Reporting and Knowledge Transfer	Prepare a final report and debrief presentation summarizing the engagement process, participant feedback, key themes, recommended model components, implementation considerations, and suggested next steps for the Inclusive Employment Partnership Program.	Final deliverables due by March 31, 2027

Expected consultant activities

- **Project start-up:** participate in project kick-off meetings, review relevant background materials, and confirm a detailed workplan.
- **Methodology and tools:** develop facilitation plans, discussion guides, consent/participation language as applicable, participant evaluation tools, and accessible engagement materials.
- **Facilitation:** lead client focus groups and co-design sessions using inclusive, trauma-informed, accessible, and strengths-based approaches.
- **Analysis:** synthesize qualitative information, identify patterns, develop problem statements, and map participant assets, barriers, and opportunities.
- **Reporting:** prepare clear written reports and recommendations that can be used by Stride leadership and program staff to implement the Inclusive Employment Partnership Program. The report must also include recommendations focused on systems level planning and delivery.

4. Required Deliverables

#	Deliverable	Target timing
1	Project workplan, confirmed methodology, and detailed engagement schedule	September 2026
2	Engagement/facilitation materials, including discussion guides, participant activities, evaluation questions, and accessibility considerations	September-October 2026
3	Facilitation of Phase 1 engagement: two client focus group sessions and/or complementary interviews, in collaboration with Stride	October/early November 2026
4	Phase 1 findings report summarizing participant strengths, service gaps, systemic barriers, accessibility needs, employment goals, and problem definitions for Phase 2	November 2026
5	Phase 2 co-design session plan and prototype/idea-development tools	December 2026
6	Facilitation of four Phase 2 co-design sessions with approximately 12 selected participants	January-February 2027
7	Summary of participant evaluation results, including whether participants felt meaningfully engaged and able to contribute to the design process	February-March 2027
8	Final co-design report with recommended alternative employment model components, client supports, accessibility approaches, outreach/engagement considerations, staffing/training implications, employer engagement/job-carving considerations, and implementation next steps	By March 31, 2027
9	Brief presentation/debrief to Stride leadership and project staff	By March 31, 2027

5. Compensation and Expected Time Investment

Maximum compensation: \$10,000 CAD. This amount is intended to cover all consultant fees and consultant-incurred expenses associated with project planning, facilitation, analysis, reporting, meetings, and knowledge transfer. Proponents should clearly indicate whether HST applies and confirm that the proposed fee can be delivered within this maximum amount.

Expected time investment: approximately 60-70 hours total, with roughly 30-35 hours allocated to each phase. Proponents may recommend an alternative distribution of hours where it strengthens the approach while remaining within the compensation ceiling.

Activity area	Estimated consultant hours
Start-up, background review, workplan, project meetings	8-10
Engagement design, facilitation tools, evaluation tools, accessibility planning	10-12
Phase 1 facilitation and immediate follow-up	10-14
Phase 1 analysis and findings report	10-12
Phase 2 facilitation preparation and four co-design sessions	16-20
Final analysis, final report, and leadership debrief	10-12

Payment schedule: The final payment schedule will be negotiated with the selected consultant. Stride anticipates milestone-based invoicing tied to contract signing, acceptance of the Phase 1 report, completion of Phase 2 facilitation, and acceptance of final deliverables.

6. Anticipated Procurement and Project Timeline

The proposal deadline below provides approximately three weeks from the planned issue date, which is a reasonable response period for a focused consultant RFP of this size and scope.

Milestone	Date / timing
RFP issued	Friday, June 19, 2026
Deadline to submit written questions	Monday, July 6, 2026
Responses to questions issued	Wednesday, July 8, 2026
Proposal submission deadline	Friday, July 17, 2026 at 5:00 p.m. ET
Interviews	Week of July 20, 2026
Preferred consultant notified	By Monday, July 27, 2026
Contract finalized	By Friday, August 14, 2026
Project kick-off / planning	September 2026
Final project deliverables complete	No later than March 31, 2027

Project timeline

Month	Phase	Key activities
September 2026	Phase 1 start-up	Confirm workplan, finalize engagement plan and tools, confirm venues/logistics, and prepare recruitment materials.
Early October 2026	Phase 1 recruitment	Promote engagement opportunities and recruit participants in partnership with Stride and community partners.
October / early November 2026	Phase 1 engagement	Conduct two client focus group sessions and/or complementary interviews with up to 50 participants.
November 2026	Phase 1 reporting	Submit Phase 1 findings report and analyze findings for Phase 2.
December 2026	Phase 2 preparation	Organize venue/logistics and prepare co-design activities and materials.
January 2027	Phase 2 engagement	Conduct the first two client co-design focus groups with approximately 12 selected participants.
February 2027	Phase 2 engagement	Conduct the final two client co-design focus groups.
March 2027	Final reporting	Submit final consultant report, complete leadership debrief, and wrap up all final deliverables by March 31, 2027.

7. Consultant Qualifications

Stride is seeking a consultant or consulting team with demonstrated experience in:

- Design Thinking, human-centred design, co-design, community engagement, service design, or systems design.
- Facilitating inclusive, trauma-informed, accessible engagement with people with lived/living experience of disability, mental health and/or addiction challenges, poverty, unemployment, or other intersecting barriers.
- Designing and facilitating focus groups, interviews, participatory workshops, and feedback loops.
- Synthesizing qualitative engagement data into practical, actionable recommendations.

- Employment services, workforce development, inclusive employment, disability inclusion, community mental health, social services, or related sectors (asset, if present)
- Producing concise, clear written reports for non-profit, public sector, or funder-facing audiences.

8. Proposal Requirements

Proposals should be concise and should include the following:

1. Cover letter and consultant/team profile, including contact information.
2. Understanding of the project, including key opportunities, risks, and considerations.
3. Proposed methodology and facilitation approach, including how engagement will be accessible, trauma-informed, culturally responsive, and meaningful for participants.
4. Proposed workplan and timeline aligned with the required March 31, 2027 completion date.
5. Description of relevant experience and up to three examples of similar work.
6. Proposed project team and roles, if applicable.
7. Detailed budget showing fees, estimated hours, hourly rates if used, applicable taxes, and any assumptions. Total consultant compensation must not exceed \$10,000 CAD.
8. Two references for similar work, preferably in the non-profit, employment, mental health/addictions, disability, health or community engagement sectors.

9. Evaluation Criteria

Criteria	Weight
Relevant experience with co-design, Design Thinking, inclusive facilitation, and/or service design	30%
Understanding of equity, accessibility, trauma-informed practice, and engagement with highly barriered participants	25%
Quality, clarity, and practicality of proposed methodology and workplan	15%
Strength and usefulness of proposed deliverables and reporting approach	15%
Value for money and ability to deliver within the compensation ceiling	10%
References and overall fit with Stride's needs	5%

10. Submission Instructions

Submission deadline: Friday, July 17, 2026 at 5:00 p.m. ET.

Submission method: Email proposals in PDF format to Julie Henshaw, Executive Director, at jhenshaw@stride.on.ca, and cc Terri Skov, Manager, Specialized Employment Services, at tskov@stride.on.ca and Rajni Shridhar, Inclusive Employment Partnership Coordinator, at rshridhar@stride.on.ca. Please use the subject line: "CIF Co-Design Consultant RFP - [Consultant Name]."

Questions: Questions may be submitted to rshridhar@stride.on.ca by email by Monday, July 6, 2026. Responses will be shared by Wednesday, July 8, 2026. Stride may share responses to questions with all known prospective proponents where doing so supports a fair process.

11. General Terms and Conditions

- Stride may accept or reject any proposal, in whole or in part, and is not obligated to select the lowest-cost proposal.

- Stride may request clarification, conduct interviews, check references, or negotiate final scope and terms with one or more proponents.
- Costs incurred in preparing a proposal are the responsibility of the proponent.
- All materials, data, reports, tools, and deliverables produced under the contract will become the property of Stride unless otherwise agreed in writing.
- The selected consultant will be expected to maintain confidentiality and comply with Stride policies related to privacy, ethical engagement, accessibility, and respectful service delivery.
- The selected consultant may be required to provide proof of insurance, references, and any other documentation required by Stride prior to contract finalization.
- Final deliverables must be completed no later than March 31, 2027 to align with the CIF project requirements.

Thank you for your interest in supporting Stride's Client Co-Design Initiative.