



**REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS**

**Focus Group Facilitator:**

*Development of Alternate Career Information for CSMLS Internationally Educated Medical Laboratory  
Technologist Applicants*

**Issue Date: October 25, 2013**

**Response Deadline: November 11, 2013 (5:00pm EST)**

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## **Project Overview**

Approximately 200 internationally educated medical laboratory technologists (IEMLTs) apply to CSMLS each year to have their credentials assessed. In most cases (90% of all assessments) internationally educated practitioners do not meet Canadian standards immediately; that is to say "Prior Learning Assessors" typically identify gaps in their education/experience which must be remediated before they become eligible to sit the certification exam. To this end, each of these applicants receives a customized "learning plan", detailing subject deficiencies and potential avenues of remediation. These individuals are given a period of time to remediate these gaps and become eligible to sit the CSMLS certification exam.

However, even after an internationally educated individual has remediated any and all identified gaps, anecdotal evidence and quantitative research suggests that they still experience difficulty passing the certification exam and becoming fully integrated into the workforce. A CSMLS study shows that only 34% of international candidates pass the certification exam on their first attempt compared with 86% of those educated in Canada<sup>1</sup>.

Although many applicants successfully complete their learning plan and become certified/licensed there are a number who are "lost" in the system and never become employed as medical laboratory technologists. While there are likely a number of reasons for this occurrence, in some cases, it is possible that many come to the realization that the practice of laboratory science in Canada is considerably different than they experienced in their home country. As such, the job of a licensed/registered MLT may not be the most practical and fulfilling choice for these individuals. Directing applicants, early in the assessment process of potential, alternate careers that make better use of their skill sets may help to reduce the number of those who are lost in the system and decrease levels of unemployment and underemployment among applicants.

## **Project Objectives**

The primary objectives/deliverables associated with the "Alternate Careers" project are as follows:

- To undertake an environmental scan/literature review of best practices in the field of alternate career pathway development and communication;
- To have an expert review laboratory science competency profiles and essential skills (and NOC codes/descriptions) and recommend a list of suitable, potential alternate careers essential skills (NOC) – not confined to the health sector;
- To conduct focus groups and/or surveys with IEMLTs who are i) currently in the assessment process, ii) have become licensed and ii) "dropped out" of the assessment process and gather their feedback on the type(s) and potential utility communication materials related to alternate careers;
- Develop a list of alternate career pathways/communication materials for IEMLTs and associated protocols how and when this information should be provided to applicants;

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<sup>1</sup> "Determination of Factors Contributing to Exam Success for Prior Learning Assessment Candidates" Christine Nielsen, CSMLS, HSM Practicum Ryerson University. April 2004, Pg. 8.

- Revise elements of the PLAR process as necessary (i.e. define appropriate intervention points and communication materials)
- Based on the above, develop partnerships with referral sources (i.e. employers and/or placement agencies).

### **Key Subcontracts**

A number of individual consultants will be retained to support the project and its objectives. These include:

1. *A Researcher:* An external researcher will be retained to conduct a literature review and environmental scan related to alternate careers. Presently, CSMLS (and many other regulatory bodies) have conducted fairly limited work in this regard. The only two “alternate careers” CSMLS have identified (biotechnology sector, medical laboratory technology assistant) have come about in an *ad hoc* manner as opportunities presented. The researcher will bring forth best practices in the field of alternate career generation so that CSMLS is able to more systematically identify potentially referral sources and prepare appropriate interventions.
2. *An Essential Skills Expert:* A key component of the project relates to determining what MLT skills are transferrable to other unregulated careers. CSMLS will retain an expert with experience in reviewing competency profiles and translating them into practical workplace terms. The aim of this work is to generate a list of alternate careers that are potential referral routes for IEMLTs that are unlikely to become licensed as such in Canada.
3. *A Focus Group Facilitator:* Once the findings from the researcher and essential skills expert have been analyzed, the CSMLS will retain an individual or firm (by competitive RFP process) with experience in working directly with internationally educated health professionals. This individual will be charged with the task of gathering information directly from IEMLTs on the perceived value, need and timing of alternate career information. The focus group facilitator will also conduct an “evaluation” component with IEMLTs on the relative utility of alternate career information once it has been developed.
4. *A Communications Consultant:* Once potential alternative careers and intervention strategies have been determined, a communication consultant will be retained via a competitive RFP process. This individual will develop suitable material directed at IEMLTs in the credential assessment process. All material will be provided in a plain-language format (in both official languages) to ensure the highest possible levels of clarity and comprehension.

Quality primary research conducted directly with IEMLTs is essential in ensuring that the alternate career materials produced by the CSMLS are useful, timely and welcome. It is in this capacity that we are seeking the services of a focus group facilitator (#3).

### **Reporting Structure**

The essential skills expert will report directly to the project manager, Keith Johnson, and will also liaise with the project Advisory Committee, and CSMLS staff.

### **Deliverables**

- Review relevant project information to date including updates from two other project consultants: an “Essential Skills Expert” and a “Researcher”;

- Develop and administer an appropriate primary research methodology which, at a minimum, includes focus groups with IEMLTs in at least three locations across Canada. Potential focus group questions include:
  - What types of alternate careers, if any, are IEMLTs interested in?
  - At what points in the assessment process would IEMLTs like to learn about alternate careers?
  - What information related to potential alternate careers would IEMLTs benefit from (e.g. labour market information, training requirements, salary ranges, etc.)
  - How is the concept of alternate careers perceived by IEMLTs (i.e. is it seen as something “lesser” than a MLT?)
  - Would IEMLTs consider alternate careers in non-health care fields?
  - *Note- The likely target group for this investigation will include a combination of IEMLTs who have successfully completed the licensure process as well as those who are in the process of having their application assessed by CSMLS.*
- Develop research tools including a focus group facilitation guide as well as materials for recruiting suitable subjects. Bidders may also recommend other, additional forms of primary research to compliment focus groups. These may include online surveys, telephone interviews, etc. and should be detailed in the proposal.
  - *Note - Focus groups (and other research tools used) are expected to be “pan-Canadian” in nature – i.e. best efforts should be made to gather input from applicants across the country with access provided in both English and French.*
  - *Note - Focus group participants will be paid a \$150 “consulting fee” for their attendance. These funds will be distributed by the CSMLS directly. A total of 30 focus group participants are budgeted for.*
  - *Research methodology and associated tools, communications, etc. are to be reviewed and approved by the CSMLS Research Ethics Board (REB). The process is expected to take a maximum on one month to complete (see tentative timelines).*
- Develop and implement a set of project evaluation tools directed at IEMLTs who have accessed alternate career information (once developed and hosted on a CSMLS microsite). These are expected to consist of a brief online exit survey with individuals who have accessed the alternate career microsite and some form of follow up communication with focus group participants who have also had a chance to review the alternate careers information developed as part of this project.
- Prepare an interim report detailing:
  - Findings from the focus group sessions;
  - Preliminary recommendations related to the form and content of alternate career information presented to IEMLTs.
- Prepare a final report detailing:
  - The research methodology used;
  - Feedback from the CSMLS REB and consequent adjustments;
  - Findings from the focus group sessions;
  - Findings from the evaluation surveys conducted with those who have accessed the newly developed alternate career information;
  - Recommendations related to the dissemination of alternate career information to IEMLTs.

**Tentative Timing and Activities**

<b>Time</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
October 25, 2013	Distribute RFP	Project Manager (PM)
November 11, 2013	Receive responses	PM
November 18, 2013	Select Focus Group Facilitator and initiate contract	PM and Selection Committee
November 20, 2013 12:30-3:30pm EST	Initial meeting with the PM, CSMLS staff, Focus Group Facilitator, Researcher & Essential Skills Expert (Hamilton, ON)	PM, CSMLS, Researcher, Essential Skills Expert, Focus Group Facilitator
November-December, 2013	Development of research methodology and recruitment strategy	Focus Group Facilitator
December 11, 2013 (est.)	Present research methodology to the project Advisory Committee	Focus Group Facilitator, Advisory Committee (AC)
Early-January, 2014	Submission of research methodology and associated recruitment tools to the CSMLS Research Ethic Board	Focus Group Facilitator
January-February, 2014	Review and approval from the CSMLS REB	REB
February-March, 2014	Recruitment of focus group participants	Focus Group Facilitator, CSMLS
March-April, 2014	Administration of focus groups	Focus Group Facilitator
May, 2014	Summary of preliminary findings (interview report)	Focus Group Facilitator
August, 2014 (est.)	Implementation of alternate career information on CSMLS microsite	CSMLS
August-September, 2014	Evaluation surveys administered and feedback from IEMLTs collected/analyzed	Focus Group Facilitator
September 30, 2014	Submission of final report	Focus Group Facilitator

**Assumptions**

- CSMLS reserves the right to refuse all bids received.
- Documents will be prepared in English. The costs of any written translations will be the responsibility of CSMLS.
- The focus group facilitator will provide written status reports to the project manager as required.
- Focus groups and/or surveys as proposed are expected to be offered in both official languages (French and English).
- The bid submitted is to be exclusive of costs related to travel. The focus group facilitator will be reimbursed for associated project travel costs in line with Treasury Board and CSMLS guidelines.
- The costs of room rentals for hosting focus groups will be paid for separately by the CSMLS. The focus group facilitator is expected to arrange all associated logistics.
- The essential skills expert will provide updates to CSMLS and the project's Advisory Committee via teleconference as required.

- The focus group facilitator will be required to attend 2-3 face-to-face meetings in on the Greater Toronto-Hamilton Area (GTHA).
- Bids are not to exceed \$55,000 (inclusive of all applicable taxes – i.e. GST/HST).
- All documents produced in this project will become the exclusive property of the CSMLS.
- Documents will also be submitted to the Government of Canada as part of the project reporting requirements and may be shared by the CSMLS and key project participants (i.e., professions participating in the Advisory Committee) though professional networks and dissemination venues.
- Upon signing the project contract, the focus group facilitator will be required to sign an agreement respecting the confidential nature of CSMLS documentation and content.
- No part of this project is to be subcontracted without prior permission of the CSMLS.
- A bid tendered and/or awarded in response to this RFP does not preclude a firm or individual from bidding or being awarded another contract associated with this project.
- Joint submissions as well as those from individuals and firms are welcome.

### **Proposal Format**

The proposal is not to exceed eight (8) pages in length (exclusive of curriculum vitae).  
The proposal must address the following six (6) components:

1. An introductory section that describes the intended methodology and shows that the applicant clearly understands the scope and intent of the project and how to approach this type of work;
2. A work plan detailing timelines, key activities, deliverables, communications, personnel and associated costs;
3. A brief account of any similar projects the applicant has completed in the past with specific attention to those dealing with the research for health care professions, immigrant groups and/or regulatory bodies;
4. A summary of the consultant’s experience in conducting focus groups and surveys with internationally educated/trained professionals;
5. A brief curriculum vitae/bio of all the applicants involved; and
6. 2-3 references of clients from similar projects CSMLS may contact at its discretion.

### **Preparation of Proposals**

- Proposals are to be sent by email to the project manager, Keith Johnson at [keithjohnson.pm@gmail.com](mailto:keithjohnson.pm@gmail.com).

**Proposals are to be received no later than November 11, 2013 at 5:00 p.m. EST.**

- Questions regarding the RFP are to be sent in writing to [keithjohnson.pm@gmail.com](mailto:keithjohnson.pm@gmail.com). No questions will be answered within 48 hours of the submission deadline.

**Criteria for Review of Proposals**

The Selection Committee will use the following criteria to review proposals:

- Understanding of requirements – the proposal demonstrates that the respondent has a clear understanding of the scope and nature of the work required
- Suitability of the proposed methods/approach
- Plan meets the stated objectives
- Appropriateness of the timeline for completion
- Qualifications and related experience – of both the organization (if applicable) and the individual(s) assigned to the project
- References from customers for whom the organization/individual(s) has completed similar work
- Reasonableness of costs for proposed methods/approach