

# 2007 Budget Consultation Submission

To

**Honourable Greg Sorbara  
Minister of Finance**

Presented by

Debby Sefton  
Vice-President  
Contact North/*Contact Nord*

[www.contactnorth.ca](http://www.contactnorth.ca)

November 5, 2006



Good Morning Minister Sorbara

On behalf of Contact North, Northern Ontario's Distance Education and Training Network, thank you for the opportunity to be with you this morning and share our thoughts and ideas on the 2007 Ontario Budget.

In reviewing your invitation and request for feedback, we have chosen to address your first point, "What can the Ontario government do to continue to foster economic growth and job creation in the province?"

As you know, Contact North works with Northern Ontario's school boards, colleges and universities to provide access to education and training opportunities for residents of small, remote and Aboriginal communities across the north. In many of these communities, Contact North is the only means to access secondary school and post-secondary programs and courses.

In our view, continuing to support access to quality secondary school and post-secondary education and training is perhaps the most important contribution the Government of Ontario can make to foster economic growth and job creation in the province.

Your 2005 Ontario Budget made an historic commitment to post-secondary education in Ontario and outlined a clear focus on providing access to education and training, including your access guarantee, for all students.

Minister, in Northern Ontario, access is provided in one of two ways:

1. Through a main or regional campus of a college or university.
2. Through a Contact North Access Centre in communities without a college or university campus.

By our estimate, over 210,000 residents of Northern Ontario, aged 15 or older, do not have access to a college or university campus in their communities. These residents rely on Contact North and our distance education technologies to connect them to the education and training opportunities they need.

In July of this year, your colleague, the Honourable Chris Bentley, Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, announced a \$1.5 million special contribution from the 2005/06 Change Fund to support Contact North in closing some of the gaps that exist in access to education and training in the north.

This special funding has allowed us to open Access Centres in 20 new communities, allowed us to bring videoconferencing capability to 11 additional Access Centres and allowed us to upgrade our technological infrastructure. However, more remains to be done to truly close the gap and ensure all residents of Northern Ontario can access the education and training they need without leaving their community.

As part of the next phase of addressing these gaps, we would like to:

1. Target another 20 communities in 2007/08 to open new Access Centres.

2. Equip more of our Access Centres with videoconferencing and high-speed Internet access.
3. Improve the student-to-computer ratio in our Access Centres.
4. Replace and upgrade components of our technology infrastructure to support new users and to ensure we provide a quality learning environment.
5. Work with Northern Ontario's colleges and universities to ensure we offer the programs and courses that residents need by updating and developing new curriculum for delivery via Contact North.

We know that right now, 70 - 80 percent of all new jobs require a post-secondary education. And, if anything that percentage is bound to rise in the coming years. Currently, 53 percent of 25 to 34 year olds in Ontario have a post-secondary education.

We also know that if we make education and training opportunities available in communities across the north, we are supporting the economic and social health of those communities and helping to stem the youth out-migration trend.

If young people do not have to leave their community for their post-secondary education, they are far more likely to remain in the community and continue to make economic and social contributions. The Northern Ontario School of

Medicine is based on this premise that if we train doctors in the north, they will practice in the north.

With the continued support of the Government of Ontario, we can work with Northern Ontario's colleges and universities and local communities to address the gaps, provide access to education and training opportunities and further support economic development across the north.

Minister, in closing, I want to take this opportunity to thank you personally and your government for its tremendous support of access to education and training in Northern Ontario. We are fortunate to have passionate advocates in Minister Bentley and yourself.

Thank you.

## **About Contact North/*Contact Nord***

Contact North/*Contact Nord* is Northern Ontario's Distance Education & Training Network.

### **Mandate**

1. To improve access to formal education and training at the secondary and post-secondary levels, and to informal education opportunities, for residents of Northern Ontario.
2. To collaborate with Aboriginal peoples, Francophones and communities in Northern Ontario to facilitate response by educational providers (working with Northern Ontario institutions specifically) to meet identified needs.
3. To support innovation in education and learning through testing and applied research of new modes of "delivery" using technology and to share information in Northern Ontario, nationally and internationally.

Through a unique combination of audioconference, videoconference, and Internet technologies, Contact North/*Contact Nord* facilitates access to credit and non-credit courses offered by Northern Ontario's colleges, universities and school boards as well as other publicly funded educational institutions outside of Northern Ontario.

In 2003/04, Contact North/*Contact Nord* completed the introduction of a leading edge e-learning platform that allows residents of small, remote and rural communities to bring the rich potential of the Internet into their distance education experience. Coupled with audioconference and videoconference capabilities, the Internet is transforming the distance education experience and providing a higher quality learning experience for users of the Contact North/*Contact Nord* Network.

Fourteen post-secondary institutions - known as Contact North/*Contact Nord*'s Educational Partners - offer close to 600 credit programs and courses at a distance via the Network. Residents of small and remote communities access the programs and courses via audioconference, videoconference and Internet technologies through a real time, interactive exchange between students and instructors at local Access Centres maintained in 86 communities by Contact North/*Contact Nord*.

There is no charge for local residents to access their programs and courses via the Contact North/*Contact Nord* Network and they pay the normal tuition fees levied by the post-secondary institution.

For many individuals in these 86 communities, Contact North/*Contact Nord* is the only option to pursue their post-secondary goals and continually upgrade their skills.

## Contact North/*Contact Nord* At A Glance

- Canada's largest and oldest distance education network celebrating 20 years of providing access to education and training opportunities for residents of Northern Ontario.
- Serving over 800,000 square kilometres (equal to the combined size of the United Kingdom and France)
- Facilitated 12,662 course registrations in 2004/05.
- 589 credit full-time and part-time programs and courses available from fourteen educational institutions.
- Current Educational Partners include:
  - Collège Boréal
  - Cambrian College
  - Canadore College
  - Confederation College
  - Keewatin-Patricia District School Board
  - Lakehead University
  - Lakehead District School Board
  - Laurentian University
  - Nipissing University
  - Northern College
  - Saint Paul University
  - Sault College
  - University of Ottawa
  - University of Sudbury
- Approximately 5,000 unique learners.
- More than 85% of all course registrations come from outside of the five major centres of North Bay, Sault Ste. Marie, Sudbury, Thunder Bay and Timmins.
- 83 small and remote communities served.
- Local community partners donate the equivalent of almost \$1 million in physical space to house each Access Centre.
- Government of Ontario provides an annual operating grant.
- Private sector partners include Bell Canada, IBM Canada Ltd., Telus Corporation.
- Services available in English and French
- Contact North/*Contact Nord* is organized as a not-for-profit corporation governed by a volunteer Board of Directors comprised of the Presidents of Northern Ontario's colleges and universities and community representatives including private sector and First Nations representatives.
- Distance delivery technologies include audioconference, videoconference and e-learning platforms.
- Contact North/*Contact Nord* has provided its expertise to in distance education to similar organizations in China and Trinidad and Tobago.



## **What Students Say About Contact North/*Contact Nord***

It's made a world of difference in my life. It gave me a sense of purpose.  
*Student from **Elliot Lake***

It has been excellent for my personal growth and I'm looking to take some more courses.  
*Student from **Hornepayne***

It is very important to me as I would not be able to leave my family to go out of town, and also financially it would have been impossible.  
*Student from **Atikokan***

In all honesty, I wouldn't have pursued my studies without having Contact North/*Contact Nord* in my community.  
*Student from **Kapuskasing***

It's great, very convenient. It's possible to work at your own pace. The small class sizes help make learning easier.  
*Student from **Terrace Bay***

## **What Employers Say About Contact North/*Contact Nord***

Access to training and professional development opportunities for our employees is critical for our organization to remain competitive. As well, having our employees training in our community reduces the risk that we will lose them if they leave the community for training.  
***Jenny Billings**, Supervisor  
Family and Children's Services of the District of Rainy River - Atikokan*

Contact North/*Contact Nord* is an appreciated, effective, efficient and mutually cost-saving service. [It is a] vital community and business service.  
***Vala Monestime Belter**, Director of Nursing  
Algonquin Nursing Home - Mattawa*

The Atikokan General Hospital supports the work of Contact North/*Contact Nord* in Atikokan. The availability of this service in our community allows our employees to obtain the training and professional development they need to help us maintain a skilled complement of health care workers and administrative staff.  
***Robert G. Wilson**, Chief Executive Officer  
Atikokan General Hospital - Atikokan*