



2025/2026 Partnership Program Guidelines

The Regional Tourism Organization (RTO) program was developed to partner or assist organizations that act in the best interest and promote and coordinate tourism activities with the entirety of the region. RTOs enhance the economic impact of the tourism sector by leveraging partnerships and collaboration across the entire industry. RTO funding must be used to support the region as a whole.

The Province strongly encourages RTOs to work with all tourism partners including other regions, sector-based organizations, municipalities, and other organizations on matters of mutual interest. Strong partnerships and a coordinated approach are vital to the future sustainability of tourism across the province.

TPN will provide an opportunity to all tourism related businesses in the Niagara Region to participate in the Partnership Program. TPN will consider applications from all organizations and highlight projects that promote tourism activity and employment in the Niagara Region, whilst ensuring there is a diversity of program initiatives and geographic representation. TPN will focus on the development of investments that support innovative, scalable, and long-term sustainable activations.

Tourism Partnership of Niagara

Vision: To position Niagara as Canada's premier, sustainable, and innovative tourism destination by fostering industry excellence, delivering exceptional visitor experiences, and driving economic prosperity through collaboration, leadership, and strategic investment.

Mission: To champion the breadth, growth, and sustainability of the Niagara region's tourism industry by fostering collaboration, leveraging data-driven insights, and providing visionary leadership. We are dedicated to promoting regional awareness, enhancing visitor experiences, and empowering local stakeholders to create a vibrant and inclusive tourism destination that benefits our communities and visitors alike.

Partnership Funds

The Tourism Partnership of Niagara (TPN) is eligible to receive partnership funds from the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming in addition to the TPN's standard funding agreement.

The value of partnerships among industry sectors cannot be overstated. Regardless of the partnership allocation of funds, the TPN can maximize support for tourism in their regions by expanding the breadth and diversity of their partners. Strong partnerships and a coordinated approach to product development, regional planning and marketing are essential to the future sustainability and increased competitiveness of tourism across Ontario.

The TPN is expected to use ministry funding to develop and deliver strategies to support the following destination management priorities or pillars:

1. Product Development
2. Marketing
3. Industry Advancement
4. Investment Attraction/ Investor Relations
5. Workforce Development

What does Partnership Funding Mean?

The TPN will be an active partner in the project planning and/or execution and will financially support **up to 50%** (to a maximum of \$75,000) of an approved application, with the Partner (hereafter referred to as “The Applicant”) providing the remaining project funding. The value of funds provided will be at the discretion of the TPN. The TPN will manage the partnership funds and will co-manage the project.

TPN Role and Responsibilities:

The TPN will:

- Consult and co-manage the project development process and compliance considerations at the onset of the project conception, i.e., before the project begins.
- Optimize the project by helping to define and align strategies.
- Ensure financial commitments and payment obligations are met as the primary financial comptroller of the project.
- Review any procurement consideration and participate in fulfilling any procurement requirements.
- Review and pre-approve any marketing materials, press releases or communication regarding the project.

PROJECT COSTS

Eligible costs are those deemed reasonable and necessary by the TPN & Ministry for the successful implementation of deliverables.

Ineligible Contributions and Expenses

1. **In-kind donations**
2. Capital costs related to permanent structures or acquisitions (materials, labour, motorized vehicles, land acquisition, purchase of equipment for project construction, etc.)
3. Existing operational expenses (staff labour, rent, current/ongoing marketing)
4. Grants and flow-through to other organizations. Funds given to other organizations for operational funding, such as salaries and wages
5. Charitable fundraising
6. Donations to political parties or lobby groups. Funds used for advocacy work, fundraising, or hiring a lobbyist
7. Prize money, competition prizes and monies paid to competition participants
8. Expenses that do not relate directly to the delivery of the Funding Agreement
9. Funding from Ontario government programs, such as Experience Ontario, or Ontario government agencies, such as the Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership Corporation, or other RTOs
10. Alcohol expenses (wine, beer, spirits) are not eligible
11. Refundable portion of the Harmonized Sales Tax (HST) or other refundable expenses (e.g., security deposits, etc.)
12. Previously incurred expenses

*This is not an exhaustive list. Should you have any questions please consult the TPN.

General Criteria

1. The Ministry strictly prohibits ‘flow through’ funding to any Applicant. *Flow through involves the applicant invoicing TPN for the requested funds.* Cheques **will not** be issued to an Applicant.
2. The partnership project should not begin without prior discussion with the TPN and TPN cannot enter into agreements with potential partners prior to receiving approval from the Ministry. (Applications for past or closing activities will not be considered).
3. **Funding may not be used to offset existing operational and marketing activities of an Applicant.**
4. The activities being funded by the TPN must be completed and invoiced prior to March 31st 2026.
5. Generally, the TPN is the lead and has the project management responsibility for any given project.
6. Under exceptional cases, where the TPN is not the lead or project manager, it must be actively involved in the planning, governance and oversight of the project which will ensure that the project is strategically aligned with the TPN business plan and the Ministry accountability requirements.
7. Procurement, whether goods or services, should follow all Ministry & TPN purchasing guidelines. Where the purchase price exceeds \$5,000, the TPN and/or Applicant, will at a minimum, obtain at

- least, three written quotes.
8. Projects/events to be aligned with activities in TPN's business plan (see appendix).
 9. Projects/events must align to the corresponding DMO's overall marketing strategy (where applicable).
 10. The project/event/activity must represent:
 - o Something new, or
 - o Adding an enhancement or something incremental to an existing project/event/activity
 11. Maximum amounts – Individual projects will be restricted to a maximum TPN contribution of 50% of the projects overall budget, with a limit of \$75,000 being contributed by the TPN.
 12. The Partner (Applicant) must be in good standing with the TPN in respect to any outstanding invoices or outstanding reports due.
 13. Applicant submissions must clearly disclose if the proposal will benefit any private business interests of any TPN Board, Committee members or staff.
 14. The application must demonstrate the long-term tourism objectives and financial sustainability. Applications for a project/initiative that has previously obtained TPN funding, must identify a clear 3-year exit strategy to ensure the Applicant is not dependent on TPN funding.
 15. Where applicable, Applicants should indicate the intention to reapply for 2026/27.

BUDGETS and INTAKE DATES

TPN will accept applications at any time, however the following the guidelines will be applied for the fiscal period of April 01, 2025 – March 31, 2026.

Intake Dates - beginning April 1st 2025

- Intake dates apply to initiatives occurring between April 30th 2025 and March 31st 2026.
- TPN will accept applications commencing April 17th 2025.
- All applications received by May 29th will be reviewed, and successful projects (pending Ministry acceptance) will be selected no later than June 30th.
- Applications may continue being submitted after the first intake closes, with a second intake commencing August 18th and closing September 30th 2025. Successful projects will be selected by November 15th 2025.

**TPN reserves the right to modify the dates mentioned above.*

APPLICATION PROCESS

Applications must clearly define project deliverables, roles, responsibilities, resource requirements, timelines, economic impact, tourism benefits and relevant key performance metrics in addition to a detailed budget outlining all sources of funding and which expenses are to be supported by the TPN. The submission of an application does not guarantee funding.

STEP #1 – Applicant

1. Meet with the TPN to discuss and review any potential project ideas.
2. Complete and submit application forms and budget.
 - 2.1. Application must clearly outline TPN's role in the project
 - 2.2. The budget must clearly indicate which expenses the TPN will be supporting.

STEP #2 – TPN

1. Meets and consults with the Applicant on any potential projects before the application is submitted.
2. TPN staff will review and evaluate each application and recommend those projects to the Marketing and Partnership Committee for alignment.
3. Ensures that the initiative aligns with the TPN strategy and contains eligible activity and expenses.
4. Continues to consult with the Applicant to identify and document roles and activities.
5. Works with the Applicant to undertake a procurement process for any expenses in excess of \$5,000, which must be in place prior to the project starting.
6. Establishes 'Terms and Conditions' as part of the Funding Agreement

7. Submits application to Marketing & Partnership committee and MTCG Regional Advisor to review and evaluate applications.
8. TPN and its committee will assess applications based on their quality and strength using the evaluation criteria outlined below.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

- The project aligns one (or more) of the Ministry pillars (Workforce Development, Product Development, Investment Attraction, Industry Advancement or Marketing) and is eligible under current guidelines
- The project is clearly defined and outlines what the Applicant expects to achieve
- The applicant has the capacity (track record, enough staff, collaborators, etc.) to deliver against the project and has alignment from the local DMO
- The applicant has outlined how the TPN will be involved in the project
- The project is going to drive shoulder-/off-season visitation
- The project (or the portion of the overall project that is part of the application) is focused on, promoting tourism (+40 kms) or employment.
- The applicant is collaborating or promoting other partners to attract visitors, increase their length of stay, repeat visitation and/or additional spending.
- The project supports overnight visitation (based on number of activities/stops, length of event, and/or partnerships with hotels)
- The applicant has outlined what success looks like, how they are going to measure it (clearly defined KPIs) and has committed to reporting results to TPN
- The applicant has a plan to continue this initiative through self-funding (exit strategy)
- The program/initiative would not occur without the assistance of the TPN
- The project will further the objectives of TPN, which includes alignment with TPN's Business and Strategic Plans

STEP #3 – Funding Agreement

If all the steps above have been approved, the Applicant will be required to sign a TPN Funding Agreement, which will outline the “*Terms and Conditions*” as well as the defined roles between the TPN and Applicant to undertake project/event/activity partnership.

Disbursement of funds cannot take place until both parties sign the Funding Agreement and all conditions are met.

Standard Conditions

1. Confirmation and proof of other funding (if applicable) needs to be in place *within 30 days* of the project/event.
2. Confirmation and proof of insurance requirements (if applicable) need to be in place before funds are released.
3. TPN will develop a project schedule with key milestones (from the application details) and dates to be achieved by the applicant. **Failure to comply to the agreed upon timelines, will render the agreement null and void.**
4. A copy of the approved Budget indicating the expenses which TPN will be supporting.
5. A copy of the Performance Measurements/ Metrics, as agreed to in the application form.
6. Detailed list of opportunities and participation for TPN
7. The Applicant will seek written approval, prior to public distribution, of all:
 - a. TPN & Ministry logo placements
 - b. Acknowledgement of support from
 - i. TPN
 - ii. Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming
8. Procurement documentation must be completed and on file prior to starting the project.

Supplier Information

The Applicant is responsible to ensure confirmation and proof that any supplier connected with this project has:

- (a) A valid registered HST number
- (b) WSIB coverage as required by provincial regulations.

STEP #4 – PARTNERSHIP FUNDING FINANCIAL PROCESS

***Option #1 Partner (Applicant) Invoicing**

1. The TPN will invoice the Applicant for their portion of the project/event **PLUS HST**
2. Funds must be on deposit with the TPN one day in advance of work starting and before the payment of any invoices submitted.
3. TPN will use Applicant and TPN partnership funds to pay ALL invoices to the maximum value of the project. (invoices in surplus of the agreement will be the responsibility of the Applicant)

***Option #2 TPN and Applicant Shared Invoicing**

1. The TPN will pay invoices direct to the vendors for its portion of the agreed upon expenses.
2. The Applicant will pay the remaining invoices direct to the vendors
3. The Applicant will provide proof of payment (invoices and cheque stubs/EFT remittances, etc) to TPN no later than 30 days following the project conclusion.
4. The Applicant will reimburse TPN for any overpayment of funds

PAYMENT OF INVOICES

Disbursement cannot take place until both parties sign the Funding Agreement and all conditions are met.

- The TPN will only fund those items agreed to and specified in the approved budget.
- TPN will pay invoices direct to the vendors in full or partial to the **maximum** of the Funding Agreement
- The TPN will not manage the supplier. Invoices are to be directed to the Applicant for approval (with signature) prior to submission to the TPN for payment.
- Should there be an overpayment, the Applicant agrees to repay the TPN to ensure the project stays within the approved maximum project funding.
- TPN will not provide reimbursement to the Applicant for invoices that have already been paid.

FINAL REPORT

The Final Report will follow the guidelines/templates provided by the TPN and will include but not be limited to:

1. Applicant to complete TPN's *Final Report* within 30 business days following the project/event/activity.
2. Description of the activities linked to the Project Description as outlined in the application.
3. Proof of acknowledgment of TPN and Ministry funding support
4. Signed Attestation that the project was completed as outlined in the Funding Agreement.
5. Report on performance measures/metrics as indicated in the application and agreement.
6. Final expenditures and revenues, with an explanation of any variances between anticipated expenditures/achievements and actuals.
7. **Copies** of all marketing collateral produced, including hard copies of materials developed, URLs etc.
8. The Regional impact of the initiative.
9. Any other details that may be requested by the TPN.
10. The Applicant will not be eligible for future funding if a report is not submitted.

PROCUREMENT

Ministry Procurement Rules

The TPN is expected to meet Ministry procurement guidelines as follows:

Tendering for Goods and Services and Disposal of Assets

1. The TPN will manage the Initiative wisely and prudently achieving value for money.
2. The TPN will supervise the purchase of all supplies, equipment, and services, including any advertising-related services, purchased with the Funding through an appropriate competitive

- process.
3. Where the purchase price exceeds \$5,000, the Applicant/TPN will, at a minimum, obtain at least three written quotes unless the TPN can demonstrate that the supplies, equipment or services the TPN is purchasing is specialized and is not readily available.
 4. Where the purchase price exceeds \$25,000, the Applicant/TPN will issue a Request for Proposal.
 5. In carrying out a competitive process, the Applicant/TPN must:
 - a. Develop a clear description of the product/service which includes sufficient details concerning the requirements; and
 - b. Apply consistent, transparent and objective evaluation criteria.

The TPN will not, without the Provinces prior written consent sell, lease or otherwise dispose of any assets purchased with the Funding, the purchase price of which exceeds \$5,000.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In accepting public funding from the Government of Ontario, all recipients are required to acknowledge the financial assistance they receive with the use of:

- The **“Ontario Yours to Discover” logo on all consumer materials, including all materials produced as a part of partnership projects** (such as consumer websites, social media sites, advertising campaign materials, brochures, etc.)
- The **Ontario trillium logo on industry only related materials** (such as industry websites, newsletters, training sessions and materials, image bank, reports, etc.)

Ontario Yours to Discover logo



Ontario trillium logo



In addition, the **“The Tourism Partnership of Niagara”** logo is to be displayed on all consumer materials (such as consumer websites, social media sites, advertising campaign materials, brochures, etc.)



OTHER GENERAL

The Applicant will permit the TPN, if required, to verify/audit information submitted (at the discretion of the Province) to ensure that it is complete and accurate, and that funds were used for purpose(s) intended.

Applicants should be aware that the TPN, through funding agreements with the Province, is bound by the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, R.S.O. 1990, c.f 31, as amended from time to time, and that any information provided to the TPN in connection with their application may be subject to disclosure in accordance with the requirements of that Act.

