

2024-2025

Partnership Fund Guidelines



Introduction

Welcome to the program guidelines for RTO 9's 2024–2025 Partnership Fund program. Included in this guide is information regarding our current program including the following: program rationale, partnership eligibility requirements, funding parameters and the 2024–2025 project initiatives. We have designed this guide to answer your questions about the Partnership Fund, however, if you have further questions, you are encouraged to contact Meg Dabros, Operations Manager at mdabros@region9tourism.ca. Approval of Partnership Funds are dependent upon RTO 9 receiving their 2024–2025 Transfer Payment Agreement from the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport (MTCS).

Program Overview

RTO 9's Partnership Fund initiative is designed to build on existing and introduce new tourism products that enhance the region's diversity of tourism attractions and competitive advantage by supporting the development of visitor experiences in the region. This program's estimated allocation is \$219,000.00 from the MTCS.

The Ministry's and RTO 9's objectives in providing this opportunity are to:

- Enhance tourism across the Province, especially overnight stays.
- Support the RTO as the leader in regional tourism.
- Maximize support for tourism at a regional level by encouraging strong partnerships, expanding the breadth and diversity of funding partners.
- Encourage RTOs to engage industry partners to broaden their financial base to extend reach.
- Support a coordinated approach that aligns planning, product development, investment attraction and workforce development in the region.
- Assure the transparency and accountability of funding through the transfer payment agreement.
- Increase the economic tourism value to the region.

Experiential Tourism

People create meaning through direct experience. The experience includes the people met, the places visited, the activities participated in and the memories created.

The Partnership Fund is not a grant program, it is a Partnership Program that requires a buy-in of 50% of eligible project costs from the applicant. The program is designed to have partners work with RTO 9 to attain mutual benefits by delivering on partnership project objectives. RTO 9 can only enter into partnerships when projects align with their mandate and goals, target audiences, segments and activities as outlined in RTO 9's current Operational Plan. The intent of the Partnership Fund program is to assist new or existing tourism products or experiences, it is not intended to provide year over year funding to organizations. Projects are expected to have a sustainability plan in place for continued growth. Higher priority will be placed on new initiatives that show potential to increase tourism receipts for the region.

Partners must be prepared to commit to and follow through on the collection of jointly determined data related to the project undertaken. The data collected from partners in the form of Project Reports may then be aggregated with other data in the longer term to provide a clearer picture of the state of tourism within the region.

Program Objectives

The Partnership Fund program is an initiative designed with the intent to make the RTO 9 region a premiere travel destination in Ontario. RTO 9 will work with eligible partners that encourage tourism by:

- The creation of new events and festivals within the region that generate new or repeat visitation to South Eastern Ontario.
- Extending the reach, breadth and depth of partnerships between RTO 9 and industry partners.
- Expanding Indigenous tourism product within the region and building relationships with Indigenous operators.
- Designing and installing clear business signage for wayfinding or self-guided tours.

Priority will be given to proposals that:

1. Are submitted from private sector businesses.
2. Promote overnight visits, increasing the length of stay.
3. Include two or more partners that are financially committed to the project, in addition to RTO 9.
4. Have clearly defined and measurable goals *See project categories for additional details.

Partner Eligibility

2024–2025 Funding will only be provided to legal incorporated tourism businesses, tourism businesses with an active CRA Business Number (BN), or Indigenous operators who are 51%+ Indigenous owned and controlled. Examples include those that are established by or under legislation; are federally or provincially incorporated, or have a CRA Business Number (BN), are Indigenous tourism businesses that are incorporated or have a CRA Business Number (BN), or are able to provide a Certificate of Indian Status Registry number or Métis Registry number.

Eligible partners are for-profit or not-for-profit tourism businesses, as well as First Nations tourism businesses who operate within or are developing tourism products within the RTO 9 geographic boundaries. Ineligible businesses include DMO/DMP's, BIA's, Chambers of Commerce, museums, or any other member based associations. Check with Meg Dabros if you are unsure.

For all funding categories, applicant must be prepared to have at least \$2 million General Commercial Liability insurance coverage and will add "Region 9 Regional Tourism Organization" as an additional insured for the full duration of the partnership project.

The project must be located within the region served by RTO 9. See map [here](#). Applicants should discuss their project with their local DMO/DMP before applying and must submit a letter of support from them along with their application. If you are unsure of who your DMO/DMP is, check the list of RTO 9 sub-regional partners [here](#), or reach out to Meg Dabros and she can assist in getting you connected with your local partner.

Applications require full disclosure of all other funding granted to the initiative. Partners are not able to use Ontario grants (Experience Ontario, ReConnect etc.) to fund their portion of the Partnership Fund.

As this program is oversubscribed each year, approved partners will have 30 days from project approval to submit the required documentation, if this time frame is not adhered to, RTO 9 reserves the right to reallocate funding at its discretion.



Project Categories

New Events

50/50 Funding

Having marketable experiences that encourage tourists to come to the region will increase visitor spending and encourage longer stays. These can be one-day events or larger festivals taking place over a period of multiple days or weeks. The key is creating something brand new that will offer a special experience with potential longevity and will get people excited about travelling to South Eastern Ontario. Events or festivals not in their first year of operation will not be considered for funding. Funding can be utilized towards such things as equipment rental, performer fees, workshop facilitators and more.

- Partnering with other tourism businesses will broaden your appeal.
- Curating new and unique experiences will attract visitors to the region.

Development of Indigenous Tourism Product

50/50 Funding

One in every three international visitors to Canada are interested in participating in an authentic Indigenous tourism experience.* This means supporting Indigenous operators in the creation of their tourism business or assisting those who are established enhance their product. This is also an opportunity for non-Indigenous operators to build partnerships with their Indigenous tourism counterparts to collaborate and create a unique visitor experience. Funding in this category may be put towards such things as business planning, branding, website development, contracting of an Indigenous operator and more.

- Be open-minded and collaborative partners to build together to create inclusive experiences.
- Indigenous lead experiences allow Indigenous people to share their experiences and tell their own story, in their own time.

Signage

50/50 Funding

Signage is an important part of your tourism business. If done right, good signage is clear, concise and a valuable part of your branding. It can cause confusion and frustration if visitors are unable to locate your business due to poor or non-existent signage. Signage should be clear and avoid “cognitive overload” with too much information, excessive text or graphics. Funding under this category can include costs associated with the design and installation of building signage, road and directional signage for rural tourism businesses or trail marking. Design proofs must be submitted for approval before production.

- Signage can be used to identify your business to existing visitors, or draw in new ones who may be passing through the area.
- Wayfinding and trail signage can help visitors self-guide when exploring your destination.

Projected Travel Trends

- Access to reliable, high-speed broadband is critical to participating in an increasingly digital economy. Some areas of Ontario remain underserved, placing rural and Indigenous tourism economies at a disadvantage.
- Current and future disruptions to the reliable flow of international visitors – e.g., climate change events, global pandemics, global conflicts – highlight the importance of building sustainable domestic visitor markets.
- Consumer interest in cultural tourism presents opportunities to create innovative, sustainable tourism offerings that engage in intercultural exchange. Indigenous and Francophone tourism sectors are prime examples.
- Canadians dominate nature-based tourism and Ontario attracts more nature-based tourists than any other province.
- Sustainable tourism is a growing preference among travelers but it is also becoming increasingly important to the viability of tourism experiences. Agritourism is an industry ripe for growth, offering Ontario farmers diversified income.
- Cannabis, sports, and film also present several promising opportunities for the future of tourism and hospitality.

*source: <https://www.northernpolicy.ca/upload/documents/presentations/2020/10.-ito-itac-npi-panel-kevin-2020.pdf>



source: [Tourism Industry Association of Ontario's 2022 State of the Ontario Tourism Industry Report](#)

Conditions of Funding

Funding Criteria

Funding is open to tourism-based businesses only within the RTO 9 region. RTO 9 is bound to the funding guidelines as set forth by the MTCS. First and foremost, the funds are only available to partners that are able to provide matching funds. The Ministry uses the following definition of Partner:

In the context of the funding model, ‘partnership’ is defined as the agreement of the RTO to work with one or more entities on a specific project in support of the RTO’s business plan. The RTO is the project lead and the partner contributions ‘flow into’ the RTO – they do not ‘flow through’ to the partner(s).

Partnership Fund projects may receive up to 50% for their eligible project, with a minimum matching contribution of \$1,500.00 and a maximum matching contribution of \$15,000.00.
Costs are inclusive of HST.

Some exceptions to the above matching funds will apply.

All projects must be completed by February 17, 2025.

Ineligible Costs

The following are deemed ineligible by the Ministry:

- Grants and flow-through to other organizations
- Charitable fundraising
- Advocacy
- Donations to political parties or lobby groups
- Capital costs related to permanent structures or acquisitions (except for wayfinding signage)
- Competition prizes, prize money and monies paid to competition participants
- Previously incurred expenses
- Refundable portion of the HST or other refundable expenses
- Expenses that do not directly relate to the application/delivery of the Partnership Fund project
- In-kind donations
- Funds for operational funding, such as salaries and wages
- Alcohol is not a reimbursable expense

Project Expenses/Payments

The Ministry requires that RTO 9 be responsible/accountable for the administration of project funds, meaning that **RTO 9 cannot pay or reimburse the partner directly**. The partner will be invoiced by RTO 9 for their portion of the project. Supplier invoices must be addressed to RTO 9 but sent to the partner for approval before payment by RTO 9. RTO 9 is not required to charge HST on their invoices, however, RTO 9 does reimburse the partner for their share of the HST rebate on project invoices that are received.

Upon receipt of the 50% partnership invoice from RTO 9, partners must submit electronic payment to RTO 9 within 30 days. Projects cannot commence until payment has been received from the partner and proper supporting documentation (contract, disclosure and release statement, and Insurance etc.) has been signed and received by RTO 9.

Please note that all paid work must be completed by third parties, and that suppliers are to have a valid HST registration number, as required by Provincial regulations. Partners can contribute in-kind contributions to the project, but cannot be reimbursed for project expenditures and they must provide cash payment EFT or electronic transfer for their portion of the project budget.

All partnership fund vendor invoices must be made out to RTO 9 as follows:

RTO 9
Re: (Partnership Fund/Event Name)
403-829 Norwest Ave.
Kingston, Ont.
K7P 2N3

Invoices not addressed to RTO 9 cannot be paid. Invoices must be sent to the partner for approval first and then forwarded by the partner to RTO 9 through the partners Basecamp project folder for payment. Invoices received directly from partner vendors to RTO 9 will be rerouted back to partner for approval. RTO 9 will only process payment for invoices for items agreed to and specified in the approved project budget. Changes to project deliverables or budget must be pre-approved by RTO 9 prior to changes being made.

Acknowledgements

In entering into partnership with RTO 9, all recipients are required to acknowledge the support received by RTO 9 and the Ministry, with the use of:

- The Ontario Yours to Discover logo (in Basecamp), on all consumer related materials.
- The Ontario Trillium logo (in Basecamp), on all industry related materials.
- RTO 9 reserves the right to approve all logo placements prior to public release or production.
- Any public announcements/media releases require pre-approval of RTO 9.

Documentation Requirements

- Signed contract and supporting payment are required within 30 days after receipt of contract.
- Invoice payments will not be processed until the supporting payment, signed contract and supporting documents are received.
- Notify RTO 9 within 30 days after your project closes if all the funding will/will not be used.
- Only ask for the amount of funding you require.
- All Invoices and documents must be uploaded into the partners Basecamp folder provided by RTO 9.



Agritourism is an industry ripe for growth, offering Ontario farmers diversified income.

Procurement Policy



RTO's are expected to meet MTCS procurement guidelines as follows:

- Good value for money spent is a priority for RTO 9.
- The Transfer Payment Agreements with the Ministry requires that RTO 9 must undertake a competitive process for purchases of any value.
- The intent of a good tendering process is to ensure:
 - Value for money;
 - The receipt of appropriate services; and,
 - The use of a transparent competitive process to identify the best person/organization to deliver the services/supplies required.
- In carrying out a competitive process RTO 9 will:
 - Develop a clear description of the product/service sought which includes sufficient information up front; and,
 - Apply consistent and objective evaluation criteria to all quotes.
 - Consider best value criteria including bid/project cost, experience, quality, services, etc.

The lowest price does not always mean the best value.
- All processes around any procurement will be documented.
 - Under \$5,000 requires a note to file indicating a 'search' for best value for dollar was completed – i.e.: phone, web, committee review, etc.
 - Where the purchase price exceeds \$5,000, RTO 9 must obtain a minimum of three written quotes.

Request for Proposals (RFP's) should be posted and distributed as widely as possible to ensure multiple submissions by qualified vendors are received by the closing date. RFP closing deadline dates should allow for as much time as possible to encourage qualified vendors to make a submission. RTO 9 considers the RFP period should be no less than 10–14 days and preferably longer.

The partner will permit RTO 9, 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 the purpose intended.

Project Evaluation Criteria

Mandatory for all projects:

- Partner agrees to compliance with RTO 9 procurement policy.
- Partner agrees to incorporate the provided Ontario Logo into their project where applicable.
- Compliance with acknowledgements.
- Proposal is consistent with RTO 9's Operational Plan.
- Compliance with the program accounting, submittal of invoices for payment, documentation and reporting procedures.
- Maximum of one application per intake period per business.

Project Reports

The mid-year and final report (where applicable) will follow the guidelines/ templates provided by RTO 9. The reports will include but are not limited to:

- Partner submitting their report by the date indicated by RTO 9.
- Description of the activities linked to the project description as outline in the application.
- Digital copies of the marketing materials and links to social media marketing /mentions.
- Proof of acknowledgement of RTO 9/MTCS funding support.
- Explanation of any variance between the application and the report.
- Final report for the project is due 30 days after the projects is completed; final invoicing payments will be withheld until the Final Report is received from the partner.
- Budget forecasting by December 1, 2024 for the remaining expenses of the project until February 17, 2025. RTO 9 reserves the right to re-allocate remaining funds to other projects.





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