



2025 - 2026

PARTNERSHIP FUND GUIDELINES



Welcome to the program guidelines for RTO8's 2025–2026 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 2025-2026 project initiatives.

We have designed this guide to answer your questions about the Partnership Fund, however, you are still encouraged to contact Brenda Wood, Executive Director, at brendawood@rto8.com before submitting an application to the program.

Approval of Partnership Funds are dependent upon RTO8 receiving their 2025–2026 Transfer Payment Agreement from the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming (MTCG).

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PROGRAM OVERVIEW

RTO8's Partnership Fund initiative is designed to collaborate with the region's tourism businesses to grow tourism within the Kawarthas Northumberland region. This program's estimated allocation is \$114,000.00 from the MTCG.

The Ministry's and RTO8's objectives in providing this opportunity:

- 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

The Partnership Fund is **not a grant program, it is a Partnership Program that requires a buy-in of eligible project costs from the applicant**. The program is designed to have partners work with RTO8 to attain mutual benefits by delivering on partnership project objectives. RTO8 can only enter into partnerships when projects align with their mandate and goals, target audiences, segments and activities as outlined in RTO8's current Business 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 operators. 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. Final invoice payments may be withheld if you have not submitted your final report.

PARTNERSHIP FUNDING PROGRAM QUICK FACTS

1. Eligible businesses may submit one application which can contain more than one project. Eligible applicants for this year's program based on matched funds of eligible costs are:

- b. For Profit tourism businesses (Incorporated OR with an active CRA Business #)
- c. First Nations tourism businesses (51%+ Indigenous Owned and Controlled).

The categories for support are:

- a. Digital Capacity Building – website development and upgrades, digital brochures, experience-based photography and or videography, consumer to operator direct booking widget
- b. Social media communications plan / calendar, posts creation

3. Professional / Equity Performance Theatre (with ticketed sales) are eligible for digital marketing (40+km distance). Note: Venues and community theatre are not eligible for this program.

4. The following groups are limited to applying for the categories noted below at 40% of eligible costs:

- a. Chambers of Commerce, Business Advisory, Workforce Development Boards, BIA's are eligible for skills based training sessions / educational workshops facilitated by a third party.
- b. Municipalities are eligible for community development / strategic development plans, tourism information kiosks and digital portfolio development for the purpose of investment attraction.

4. Partnership Fund projects require a minimum contribution of \$1,500 and a maximum contribution of \$14,000 from RTO8. Costs are exclusive of HST.

5. There will be one intake period for applications in all categories, opening March 3, 2025 and closing on March 31, 2025.

6. Projects applying for Partnership Funding must take place (and have all invoices submitted for payment) between May 1, 2025 – February 13, 2026.

7. All recipients of funding must be prepared to submit their portion of the funds to RTO8

no less than 30-days prior to the start of their project. If funding is not received by RTO8 prior to 30-days from the start of any portion of the project – the agreement will be cancelled.

8. RTO8 does not accept credit cards or cash payments. Our preference for applicants to pay their portion of funds is via Electronic Fund Transfer (EFT) or Direct Deposit. Cheques will be accepted but the applicant must allow additional time (10-days) to ensure the cheque has cleared the bank.

9. Project invoices from vendors / suppliers / services will only be paid by Direct Deposit to businesses with an active CRA number. Each vendor/supplier/service provider will be required to submit a Direct Deposit form prior to submitting any invoices to RTO8. Invoices will not be paid without receipt of a Direct Deposit form.

10. All invoices must come from a third-party vendor with no invested interest in the project's completion to avoid any conflict of interest. Applicants cannot be reimbursed by RTO8 for payment.

11. Remember – RTO8 pays all invoices. Applicants send their portion of the funds to RTO8 and RTO8 submits payment to the suppliers.



PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

The Partnership Fund program is an initiative designed with the intent to make the RTO8 region a premiere travel destination in Ontario. RTO8 will work with eligible partners that encourage tourism by:

- Expanding Indigenous tourism product within the region and building relationships with Indigenous operators
- Extending the reach, breadth and depth of partnerships between RTO8 and industry partners
- Enhancing market readiness through digital capacity building
- Attracting new investments to the region
- Increasing the skill level of operators
- Creating community development / strategic plans which include a tourism component

PRIORITY WILL BE GIVEN TO PROPOSALS THAT:

- Are submitted from private sector businesses
- Promote overnight visits, increasing the length of stay
- Include two or more partners that are financially committed to the project, in addition to RTO8
- Have clearly defined and measurable goals
- Are new to the Partnership Fund Program and have not received funds from RTO8 within the past three (3) years
- Note: If you have received funding within the past three years and meet the partner eligibility, you may still apply

We may think we can do it all but in most cases we can't. We encourage you to do what you do best and partner for the rest!

PARTNER ELIGIBILITY

2025–2026 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. All applicants must operate within the RTO8 geographic region.

ELIGIBLE PARTNERS INCLUDE:

- For-profit tourism businesses
- First Nations tourism businesses
- Destination Marketing / Management Organizations
- Professional / Equity Theatre (with ticketed sales) Venues and community theatre are not eligible
- Chambers of Commerce, BIA's, Workforce Development Boards, Business Advisory
- Municipalities

For all funding categories, applicant must be prepared to have at least \$2 million General Commercial Liability insurance coverage and will add "Regional Tourism Organization 8" as an additional insured for the full duration of the partnership project.

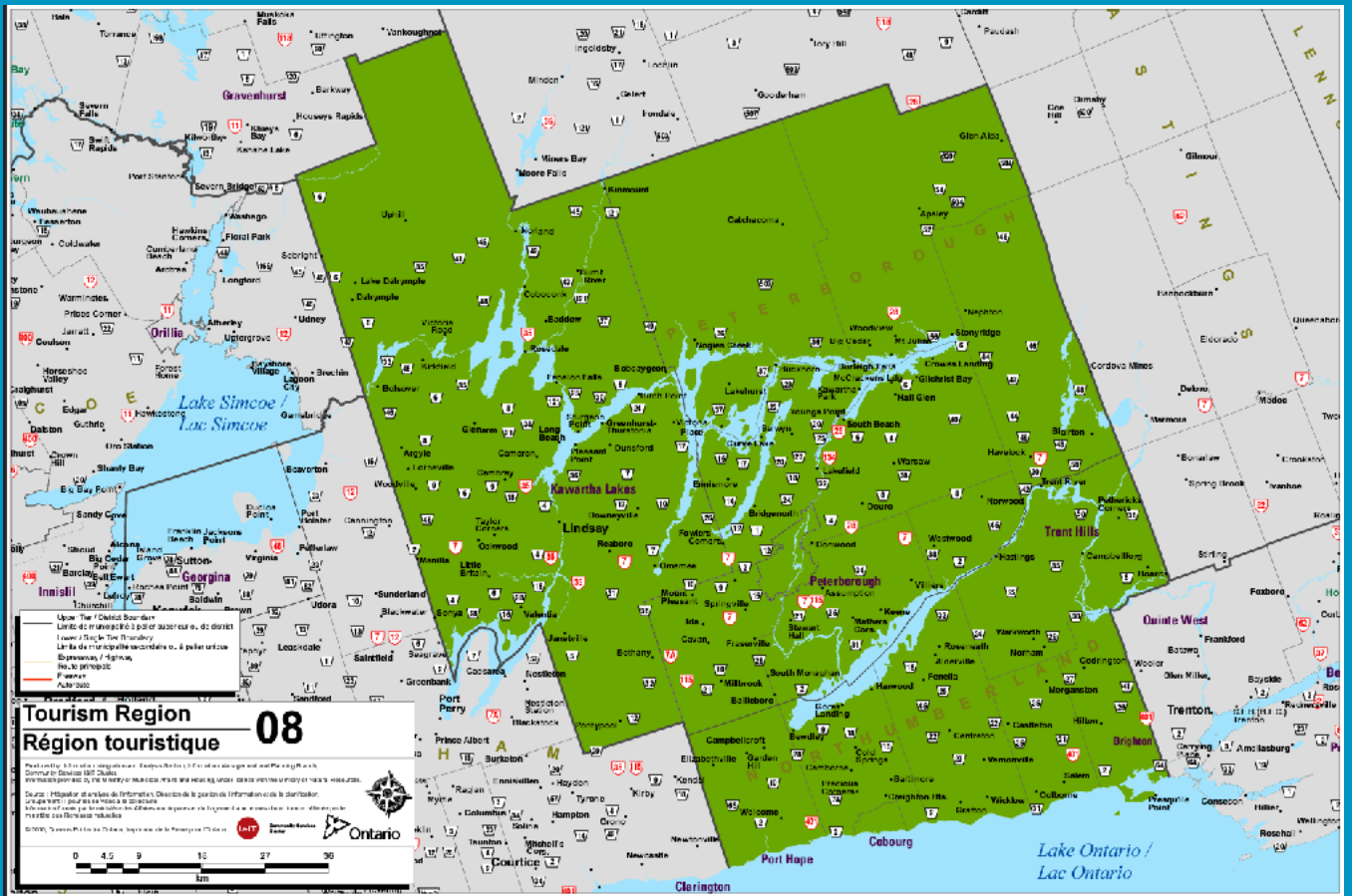


The project must be located within the Kawarthas Northumberland Region. If you are unsure, see map below or for a more detailed version go to rto8.com/map

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 and submit their portion of the project budget, if this time frame is not adhered to, RTO8 reserves the right to reallocate funding at its discretion.



PROJECT CATEGORIES

All applications to the Partnership Fund Program must fit into one of the following four funding categories:

Category 1: *Digital Capacity Building - (50%)*

- Website development and upgrades, digital brochures, consumer to operator direct booking widget
- Social media communications plan / calendar, post creation
- Digital Marketing (40+km)

Category 2: *Photography / Videography - (50%)*

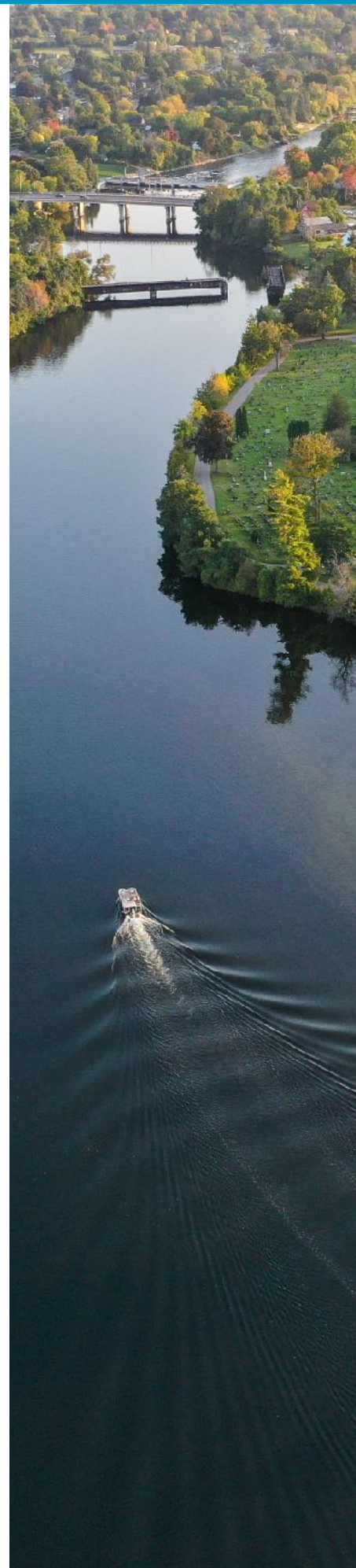
- All photography / videography must be experience based, not product based
- RTO8 requires the use of a RTO8 vetted photographer/videographer for all asset creation
- RTO8 requires rights-free access to all photos/videos created during the project period, which will be shared with Destination Partners and Destination Ontario

Category 3: *Skills Based Training* (only Chambers of Commerce, Business Advisory, Workforce Development Boards and BIA's are eligible for the following:

- In-person or virtual skills based / education training sessions (e.g. AI, succession planning, business plan development, social media, cultural, diversity, customer service etc.)
- Funded at **40%** of eligible costs

Category 4: Municipalities are only eligible for:

- Community development / Strategic development plans
- Tourism Information Kiosks (community or region focused)
- Digital portfolio development for the purpose of investment attraction
- Funded at **40%** of eligible costs



CONDITIONS OF FUNDING

Funding is open to tourism-based businesses only within the RTO8 region. RTO8 is bound to the funding guidelines as set forth by the MTCG. First and foremost, the funds are only available to partners that are able to provide their portion of the funds. The Ministry uses the following definition of a 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).”

INELIGIBLE EXPENSES THROUGH THIS PROGRAM INCLUDE:

- 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 or food

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 \$14,000.00. **Costs are exclusive of HST.** Some exceptions may apply.

All projects must be complete with invoices submitted by February 13th, 2026.

PROJECT EXPENSES/SUPPLIER INVOICE PAYMENTS

The Ministry requires that RTO8 be responsible/accountable for the administration of project funds, meaning that **RTO8 cannot pay or reimburse the partner directly**. The partner will be invoiced by RTO8 for their portion of the project. Supplier invoices must be addressed to RTO8 but sent to the partner for approval before payment by RTO8. RTO8 is not required to charge HST on their invoices, however, RTO8 does pay the full HST on all invoices pertaining to the project that are received.

Upon receipt of the partnership invoice from RTO8 partners must submit **electronic payment** to RTO8 within 30 days of the start of their project. 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 RTO8.

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 payment via EFT or e-transfer for their portion of the project budget.

Invoices not addressed to RTO8 cannot be paid. Invoices must be sent to the partner for approval first and then forwarded by the partner to RTO8 Attn: Brenda Wood (brendawood@rto8.com). Invoices received directly from partner vendors to RTO8 will be rerouted back to partner for approval. RTO8 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 RTO8 prior to changes being made.

All partnership fund vendor/supplier invoices must be made payable to RTO8 at the following billing address:

**RTO8 Re: (Partnership Fund - note Project Name)
P.O. Box 40, Hastings, ON K0L 1Y0**

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In entering into a partnership with RTO8, all recipients are required to acknowledge the support received by RTO8 and the Ministry, with the use of:

- The Ontario Yours to Discover logo, on all customer related materials
- The Ontario Trillium logo. On all industry related materials
- RTO8 reserves the right to approve all logo placements prior to public release or production
- Any public announcements / media releases require pre-approval by RTO8

All logos will be provided to partners upon entering into an agreement with RTO8

DOCUMENTATION REQUIREMENTS

- Signed contract and supporting payment are required within 30 days after receipt of contract
- Proof of 2 million dollar General Liability Insurance naming Regional Tourism Organization 8 as an additional insured for the duration of the project
- Invoice payments will not be processed until the supporting payment, signed contract and supporting documents are received
- Only ask for the amount of funding you require



PROCUREMENT POLICY

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

- Good value for money spent is a priority for RTO8.
- The Transfer Payment Agreements with the Ministry requires that RTO8 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 RTO8 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, RTO8 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. RTO8 considers the RFP period should be no less than 10–14 days and preferably longer.

The partner will permit RTO8, 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.

EVALUATION & REPORTING

MANDATORY FOR ALL PROJECTS:

- Partner agrees to compliance with RTO8 procurement policy.
- Partner agrees to incorporate the provided Ontario Logo into their project where applicable.
- Compliance with acknowledgements.
- Proposal is consistent with RTO8's Business Plan.
- Compliance with the program accounting, submittal of invoices for payment, documentation and reporting procedures.
- Maximum of one application per business.

Submission of a final report is mandatory for all projects. Additional reports include but are not limited to:

- Partner submitting their report by the date indicated by RTO8 within the agreement.
- Description of the activities linked to the project description as outlined in the application.
- Digital copies of the marketing materials and links to social media marketing/ mentions.
- Proof of acknowledgement of RTO8/MTCG 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.

