



## Partnership Funding Program Overview

The 2026/27 Partnership Funding Program is contingent upon the approval of the RTO8 Business Plan and Budget by the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming (MTCG). RTO8 reserves the right to limit the number of programs/funds that one tourism partner may receive per year.

Eligible applicants may submit **one application**, which may include multiple projects. To undertake a partnership project, applicants must fall into one of the following categories:

a) Established for-profit tourism businesses that:

- Are incorporated or have an active CRA Business Number
- Hold all required operating permits
- Have direct access to consumers and rely on consumer spending as their primary source of income

b) Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs), Chambers of Commerce / BIA's that include tourism within their portfolio, or municipalities that represent or manage tourism partners and are delivering a specific project that provides direct benefits to tourism operators. Please note that festivals and events are not eligible.

c) First Nations tourism businesses that are 51% or more Indigenous-owned and controlled

### **Eligible applicants must meet the following criteria:**

- **Regional Presence:** You must be located and actively operating within the RTO8 (Kawarthas Northumberland) region.
- **Demonstrated Capacity:** you must demonstrate that you have the finances and staffing necessary to complete the project on schedule.
- **Legal Standing:** Your business or organization must be legally registered in Ontario, hold all necessary permits (federal, provincial, and municipal), and be free of any legal issues that could hinder project outcomes and collaboration with RTO8.
- **Insured:** your business must be able to provide an insurance certificate with a minimum of 2 million liability coverage.

### **Categories for support in the 2026/27 Partnership Funding Program include:**

a) **Digital Marketing Campaigns (40+km):** bookable consumer experiences that include an overnight stay. Priority will be given to campaigns that include more than one partner.

b) **Signage Improvements:** permanent signage that focuses on assisting the visitor to navigate unfamiliar areas, discover attractions and engage more deeply with the region's identity and stories. This can include wayfinding, heritage/storytelling and new TODS (Tourism-Oriented Directional Signing – on Ontario roadways). Digital billboards and signage are not eligible.

c) **Studies and Strategic Planning:** focusing on Feasibility, Gap Analysis, Asset Inventory and Tourism Development Plans

d) **NEW!! – Ideal for small to medium businesses** -Visual Asset Creation (photo and video), paid digital advertising and website readiness review & action plan. This helps tourism operators access **high-quality**

**visual content, digital advertising, and website guidance** without the complexity of managing agencies, campaigns, or production themselves. RTO8 manages the agency, creative development, and media buying on your behalf. You receive finished assets, campaign results, and insights.

### Application Process

Please contact **Brenda Wood** ([brendawood@rto8.com](mailto:brendawood@rto8.com)) to arrange a meeting to discuss your proposed idea and its eligibility prior to submitting an application. Applications received without a prior consultation with Brenda Wood will not be eligible.

- Applications will be open from Monday February 23, 2026 until Monday April 6, 2026 at 4:30pm. A second, potentially limited intake will be held later in the year only if funds are not fully allocated in this intake.
- Before applying, please read the entire application and review the RTO8 2026/27 Business and Operational Plan.
- Ensure you have met with Brenda Wood to discuss your project and have been informed on how the program works.
- Complete your application.
- Notifications will begin the week of April 27<sup>th</sup>. If approved, an Agreement outlining timelines, performance measurement etc. will be provided to you to review, sign and return to RTO8.

### Partner Contributions & Payment

The Partnership Funding Program is a matched funding model it is **not a grant**. RTO8 acts as the central payor. Successful applicants don't pay vendors directly; instead, you send your portion of matched funds to RTO8, who will reconcile all project payments.

Immediately following funding approval, RTO8 will issue an invoice for the applicant's portion of the eligible project costs. 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.

- All approved applicants 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 without notice.
- Partner contribution must **not be sourced from** other Ontario Government programs or agencies such as Experience Ontario, Ontario Trillium Fund, OMAFRA, Destination Ontario etc.
- Projects applying for Partnership Funding must have all invoices and their final report submitted within 30 days of the project completion. No project, invoicing or final report will be permitted to exceed past March 15, 2027.
- Partnership Fund projects require a minimum partner contribution of \$1,500 and a maximum partner contribution of \$14,000. Contributions will be matched by RTO8. Costs are exclusive of HST.

### Data Collection

Successful applicants are required to track project-specific metrics throughout the project for your final partner report. The scope of data collection is dependent on the type of project you are undertaking and your objectives.

This may include but is not limited to:

- Visitor metrics
- Community metrics
- Project outcomes
- Revenue metrics
- Marketing metrics
- Earned Media
- Anecdotal feedback from Attendees
- Website Analytics

## Project/Partner Requirements

### Project Requirements

- Projects must be conducted by third parties i.e. Partnership funds cannot be used to pay or reimburse partner organizations. Third parties may include one of RTO8's Agencies of Record - or a subcontractor identified through a mutually led procurement process.
- Project invoices from vendors / suppliers / services will **only be paid by RTO8 via 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.
- All invoices must come from a **third-party unaffiliated vendor** with no vested or perceived interest in the applying business or the project's completion to avoid any conflict of interest. **Applicants cannot be reimbursed** by RTO8 for payment.
- The exception to RTO8 leading the procurement process is for signage projects, in which the municipality/partner procures services from a supplier in a process that aligns with RTO8's procurement requirements.
- Signage is the only capital expenditure that is eligible within the Partnership Program.
- If an approved project is delayed/cancelled prior to start, you must advise RTO8 as soon as possible to allow other projects/tourism partners to access funds made available. Any expenses incurred prior to cancellation of a project will be your responsibility.

## Partner Requirements

### You must:

- Have a current website/social media page(s), phone number and email address that are regularly monitored.
- Select one representative only to act as the decision maker and liaison with RTO8 and the Agency of Record or consultant assigned to the project to ensure timely and constructive execution of the project. Failure to provide timely and constructive execution may lead to project cancellation, with costs incurred to date the responsibility of the partner.
- Identify/acknowledge RTO8 and the Province of Ontario as partners (not sponsors) with logos on website with active links back to Kawarthasnorthumberland.ca and on all digital ads supported through the program as well as all press releases related to the project – press releases must be approved by RTO8 and acknowledge the funding support received.
- Tag Kawarthas Northumberland and or RTO8 on any social media platforms related to the project. (Hashtags to be listed in the agreement).
- Sign up for the RTO8 / Kawarthas Northumberland news blasts (funding updates, announcements, etc.).