

2025/26 Partnership Program Guidelines

(Jan 2025)

This program is not a grant. Matching funds are provided by the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming (MTCG) towards partnerships with industry partners that we manage and execute jointly and that align with RTO7's mandate, goals, target audiences and activities as found in our current business plan and that encourage collaborations, strategic alignment and leveraging of regional resources to create awareness, visitation, and spending.

RTO7's offer of the Partnership Program for 2025/26 is contingent upon Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming (MTCG) approval of RTO7's plan.

Applications will be open from January 31, 2025, until February 28, 2025. A second, and potentially limited, intake will be held later in the year only if funds are not fully allocated in this intake. We highly recommend getting applications in before the deadline, regardless of when your project will occur during the year.

RTO7 reserves the right to limit the number of programs/funds that one stakeholder may receive per year.

You will need to attest in your application to having read these detailed Guidelines. If the documents linked to below do not appear automatically, you may find them in your downloaded documents or reach out to ahogan@rto7.ca.

[Frequently Asked Questions](#)

Application Process

Please contact Alex Hogan (ahogan@rto7.ca) prior to submitting to ensure eligibility of your proposed idea.

- Applications will be open from **January 31, 2025 until February 28, 2025**. 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 RTO7's [sustainable tourism goals](#).
- Complete your application – be sure to **include HST** in your figures.
- If your project is approved (typically you will be notified by the end of March) a [Collaboration Agreement](#) outlining timelines, performance measurement etc. will be signed by you and RTO7.
- RTO7 will send a Request for Reimbursement to you for your share of the project cost. Payment (in the form of an electronic funds transfer, INTERAC e-Transfer or cheque) is due upon receipt of the Request for Reimbursement (*prior* to the project's start). Note that no expenses incurred prior to the signing of the Agreement – or April 1 - will be paid.
- Successful projects will be managed in Basecamp, which allows all parties to track the project's progress.
- Note that all projects must be fully completed (including your completion of a final report within 30 days of completion) by March 31, 2026.

Partner Eligibility

To undertake a Partnership project, applicants must be:

- Established businesses or organizations (with all required operating permits), including
 - private tourism businesses (i.e. consumer facing organizations that have direct access to the

- consumer and rely on that consumer for their income)
 - DMOs (Destination Marketing Organizations), tourism organizations, associations/interest groups or municipalities representing/managing tourism partners in the delivery of a specific project that has direct benefits for the tourism operators
- Capable of demonstrating financial and other capacity to execute the project in partnership (including meeting agreed upon timelines).
- Located within Bruce, Grey & Simcoe Counties
 - organizations outside BruceGreySimcoe (BGS) may apply if there is strong involvement from the relevant BGS stakeholder.
- Joint projects with other RTOs will be considered (keep in mind each RTO has their own structure for Partnership programs).
- Legally registered to operate in Ontario, with all necessary permits in place (federal, provincial, municipal), and there must be no outstanding legal issues that would affect the processing and outcomes of this project and collaboration with RTO7.
- Future funding of partners will require timely completion of the project in question and the final partner report, a high level of responsiveness and communication and demonstration of favourable outcomes from previous funding.
- RTO7 wants to see businesses continue to evolve, to learn from previous projects supported by RTO7 and ultimately, stand on their own, therefore for 2025/26, RTO7 may not support applications that are the same as in previous years.
- Open to the idea of starting on a journey towards economic, social and environmental sustainability. Sustainability isn't a requirement to get funding for 2025/26. However, projects that show they're working to include or improve sustainable practices—using clear and measurable plans—may be prioritized in the application review process. The Partnership Program application process is competitive, and many people apply for the available funds. We welcome applications from all eligible businesses and organizations. No matter where you are in your sustainability efforts, we're here to guide you through the process.

Partner contributions (i.e. matching funds) must

- be cash (provided to RTO7 by EFT, INTERAC e-transfer or cheque).
- NOT be funding from other Ontario Government programs, such as Experience Ontario, or Ontario Government agencies such as Destination Ontario, the Ontario Trillium Fund, OMAFRA or other RTOs.
- Payment in full must be made upon receipt of the Reimbursement Request from RTO7. The project will only commence once full payment has been received. Failure to remit payment in a timely fashion may cause delays.

Note that as part of the application, you will need to attest to having read the Guidelines and relevant Application(s), including all informational links. The [Resource Guide](#) we have compiled contains useful information on many topics and you may wish to bookmark or save this document for future reference.

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 RTO7's Agencies of Record - H Visual Media, Andrea Hamlin Photography, The Aber Group Inc. for digital advertising, MJ Translation - or a subcontractor identified through an RTO7 led procurement process.
- The exception to RTO7 leading the procurement process is for Signage projects, in which the municipality/partner procures for suppliers as long as procurements align with [RTO7](#) procurement requirements.

- Signage (conforming to the [RTO7 Wayfinding Signage Standards & Specifications Manual](#)) 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 RTO7 as soon as possible to allow other projects/stakeholders 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 RTO7 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 BruceGreySimcoe and the Province of Ontario as partners
 - with logos on website with active links back to [BruceGreySimcoe.com](#) and [destinationontario.com](#) respectively
 - with logos on all printed collateral supported through the program
 - with 'Funded in Part by the Province of Ontario' on all digital ads supported through the program and in all press releases related to the project – press releases must be approved by RTO7 and include recognition of the funding from RTO7.
- Tag @BruceGreySimcoe and @ontariotravel using #brucegreysimcoe on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram posts related to the project.
- Complete a free [Typsy training](#) (applicant and at least one front-line staff)
- Maintain a current [operator listing](#) on BruceGreySimcoe.com.
- Sign up for the [RTO7 E-Newsletter](#) (funding updates, announcements, etc.).

Administration Fee

Note: The \$200 Administration Fee will again be waived for 2025/26 unless you cannot accept the Facebook request from The Aber Group if conducting digital or social media advertising.

Environics Analytics postal code analysis will still be provided upon request (free of charge) for project partners. That said, please still review the links to markets and activities that RTO7 targets (below in Data Collection) – note that we are monitoring these, and they are subject to change as new patterns and consumer sentiments emerge.

For a limited time, RTO7 will provide to the primary applicant analysis of postal code data they provide (a minimum of 500 codes per application). For applications involving multiple partners, if desired, additional partners may have their postal code data analyzed at the market rate of \$650.00 per partner (not waived). In some cases, partners wishing to undertake multiple projects may combine their projects where appropriate to avoid incurring multiple administration fees. For questions relating to the Administration Fee, please see the [Administration Fee FAQ](#).

Data Collection

There are project-specific metrics that you are required to commit to tracking and reporting on in your final partner report - these will be dependent on the type of project you are undertaking and your objectives.

There are also a number of broad tourism metrics we encourage you to consider tracking. As data is the backbone of good tourism planning, the metrics that are considered most useful to RTO7 and/or stakeholders are elaborated on [here](#) (Performance Metrics) and [here](#) (Importance of Data).

In addition, Environics Analytics [postal code](#) analysis can be provided upon request (free of charge, provided codes are provided a minimum of 30 days in advance of your campaign) for project partners. The analysis of your postal code data will be useful to you in determining audience targeting for advertising campaigns as well as for future product/experience development. The geographic markets, segments and activities that RTO7 targets are outlined [here](#). Any data that you provide through postal codes will be aggregated across all partners in the longer term to form a clearer, more refined picture of the state of tourism within the region to inform your and our future decision-making.

RTO7 Partnership Program Streams

Video/Image Development

This category includes development of videos and/or imagery through RTO7's respective Agency(ies) of Record (H Visual Media and Andrea Hamlin Photography) that can subsequently be used in advertising of assets/events, etc. e.g. the collateral developed may then be used in the Social Media Advertising Campaign Stream below.

Please note that recruitment videos to be used in advertising for staff and videos related to sustainable tourism are also eligible within this category.

Storytelling

This category provides opportunities for partners to tell their individual and community stories. Stories should have a sustainability (environmental, social, economic) emphasis. Our intent with these stories is to promote spots within the region with capacity for increased visitation, slower times of week/year, responsible visitation, etc. In collaboration with RTO7, you will vet current work samples to procure a qualified writer/influencer that is familiar with the product/experience and locale that the story is about and/or that has a following aligned with RTO7/Partner's target audiences. Stories will be used by all partners (RTO7, the Partner and the Storyteller) and may be made available to Destination Ontario and MTCG.

Digital Advertising

For the purposes of this program, digital advertising includes adwords/search, Facebook/Instagram ads, banner/display ads, etc. to promote assets/events. This category does not include website design, upgrades, etc. Media buys are managed by RTO7's Agency of Record (The Aber Group Inc.).

Please note that while these campaigns will be run through the BruceGreySimcoe Ads Manager (for billing purposes), the campaign will run as sponsored ads on your social media platforms.

Note that this Digital Advertising program (and the Social Media Advertising stream below) may be undertaken in conjunction with the Video/Image Development program if timing permits (separate applications will be required). Please contact us directly to discuss.

Social Media Advertising (Video & Image) Campaign

This category provides access to social media advertising (Meta/Facebook, Instagram) using short videos or images developed through RTO7 or your own approved video/image collateral (priority will be given to videos of 60 seconds or less). Media buys are managed by RTO7's advertising agency, The Aber Group. RTO7 has had great success with this in our BruceGreySimcoe campaigns, and the lower buy-in of this partnership provides partners with a low-risk introduction to the benefits of social media advertising as an effective complement to other forms of advertising.

Note: The Operational Implementation Program ([OIP](#)) offers social media advertising in exchange for

an operator's investment in their operations – if you do not have cash to contribute, and are interested in a modest campaign, you may wish to start by reviewing this program.

Tourism Wayfinding Signage

Funds are available to conduct a signage plan for installation of RTO7 Tourism Wayfinding Signage, and/or to fabricate and install tourism wayfinding, trail and cycling signs. Note that plans and signs must conform to the [RTO7 Wayfinding Signage Standards & Specifications Manual](#) (updated June 2021).

As signage that gets people more efficiently and safely to their destination supports our sustainability objectives, this program has been expanded to allow for support of elements of signage systems that the RTO7 Signage specifications do not address, and that meet the minimum criteria below:

- Provincially recognized and executed in the majority of Ontario's Tourism Regions
- In support of our targeted activities
- Long-lasting, durable construction (RTO7 reserves the right to have an expert review the fabrication specifications to ensure they meet a minimum standard at the expense of the partner)
- Appropriate design for use e.g. if on roadways, legible at driving speed, etc.
- All signage must be installed as per governmental regulations relevant to the installation. RTO7 does not assume any responsibility for the design, fabrication and installation of the signage

Examples of this 'adjunct' signage might include some Bruce Trail signage, Conservation Area signage, Great Lakes Waterfront Trail signage, etc. Contact us for consideration if you think your system may be eligible.

Note that signage projects are most often undertaken by Municipalities or Counties (or by Conservation Authorities or Recreational Organizations) and funding does not apply to any other types/formats of signage or electronic signage. Signage plans are only eligible for those planning to implementing the RTO7 signage system.

Experience Development

This category is typically for larger projects, often in the planning stages. Funding is available for large-scale product/experience development, sustainable tourism destination development plans, for feasibility studies, research and workforce development projects, etc.

Tourism business or destination sustainability certification is also eligible within this category and includes any GSTC-recognized accreditation sustainability standards (e.g. [GreenStep](#)). Not only is certification a business development tool, it also establishes sustainability credibility, recognition and a community/network of likeminded stakeholders for support.

Also eligible within this stream may be other third-party certification programs (on a case by case basis) that address an aspect of sustainability e.g. Rainbow Registered, Rick Hansen, BCorp, LEEDS, etc. Please call us (705-441-2931) for more information.

In addition, funding is available to support partner attendance at [IMPACT Sustainability Travel & Tourism](#) (Ontario Regional Conference) in Waterloo May 4-6, 2025.

Trade Show Booth Space

Tourism operators may apply for reimbursement of up to 50% of eligible trade show booth space costs only to a maximum of \$1,750.

French Translation Services

French language translation by Agency of Record (MJ Translation Inc.) of web and print materials relevant/suited to these markets (e.g. beaches or cycling pages for promotion in Quebec).

Other RTO7 Programs

For a full list of RTO7 Partner Programs, please visit rto7.ca or talk to RTO7 staff about options.

For Bruce County & Simcoe County applicants

Bruce County provides grants to tourism operators through their Spruce the Bruce program. Simcoe County provides grants to municipalities and non-for-profit organizations through the Tourism Simcoe County Tourism Culture & Sport Enhancement Fund (this program closes February 10, 2025). In some cases, RTO7 is able to leverage these grants with RTO7 funding programs. Please contact RTO7 staff and/or [Bruce](#) or [Simcoe](#) County staff for more details.

Applicants should be aware that RTO7, through funding agreements with the Province is bound by the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (Ontario) and that any information provided to the Province in connection with the Project or otherwise in connection with the Agreement may be subject to disclosure in accordance with that Act, as amended from time to time, and that any information provided to RTO7 in connection with their application, project or agreement may be subject to disclosure in accordance with the requirements of that Act. Partners agree to permit RTO7, 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.

PARTNERSHIP PROGRAMS Category	Tourism Wayfinding Signage	Product/Experience Development	Video/Image Production	Digital Advertising	Social Media Advertising	Translation Services	Storytelling	Trade Show
Eligible Partners	Private and non-private sector tourism operators, DMOs, municipalities, and associations with a primary purpose of supporting the tourism industry, general tourism promotion and tourism product development that occurs within BruceGreySimcoe							
Objective	Improve the visitor experience through implementation of RTO7 signage & wayfinding specifications	Enhance development of tourism experiences (products, training, workforce development, ambassador program development, sustainable tourism certifications and research)	To grow visitation by developing competitive collateral offerings for the partner and the BGS website/media	To grow visitation by reaching targets markets where the consumers search most for information about a possible destination	To grow visitation by reaching target markets through social media	To provide French language translation for services in web and print media	To provide stories of experiences and products that disperse tourists to areas that have capacity for growth	To provide assistance to tourism operators in the attendance of product appropriate trade shows
Intake Deadline February 28, 2025								
Participation Partner \$: PF \$:	\$1 : up to a maximum of \$1	\$1 : up to a maximum of: \$1	\$1 : up to a maximum of \$1	\$1 : up to a maximum of \$1	\$1 : up to a maximum of \$1	\$1 : up to a maximum of \$1	\$1 : up to a maximum of \$1	\$1 : up to a maximum of \$1
Example Funding	\$10,000 investment by partner matched by \$10,000 from partnership fund for a total project of \$20,000	\$10,000 investment by partner matched by \$10,000 from partnership fund a total project of \$20,000	\$1,050 investment by partner matched by \$1,050 from partnership fund for a total project of \$2,100	\$15,000 investment by partner matched by \$15,000 from partnership fund for a total project of \$30,000	\$750 investment by partner matched by \$750 from partnership fund for a total project of \$1,500	\$500 investment by partner matched by \$500 from partnership fund for a total project of \$1,000	\$1,000 investment by partner matched by \$1,000 from partnership fund for a total project of \$2,000	\$1,750 investment by partner matched by \$1,750 from partnership fund for a total project of \$3,500
Partners funding Minimum	\$5,000	\$ 5,000 (\$400 Sustainable Tourism Only)	\$ 1,350 (video) \$ 1,075 (image)	\$ 7,500	\$ 750	\$ 350	\$ 500	\$ 500
Maximum	\$75,000	\$10,000	\$ 5,000	\$25,000	\$ 7,500	\$1,000	\$ 5,000	\$1,750
Example initiatives or projects	Implement RTO7 wayfinding signage along trail network or road system.	Research into viability of a new tourism product/experience.	Outfitter videos a canoe/paddle board experience or develops a video to recruit employees	A ski resort develops and advertises a campaign digitally.	An operator promotes an activity through social media.	Translating web pages or material that are suited to the French Language market	DMO develops and implements storytelling of experiences that directs tourists to activities that have capacity for growth	An outfitter rents a booth and attends the Trade Show