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Tourism Niagara-on-the-Lake (NOTL) 2026 Partnership Investment Program Guidelines

Tourism Niagara-on-the-Lake (NOTL) is the official Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) for the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake. The DMO leads and builds sustainable tourism by attracting high-yield, low-impact, multi-day, year-round visitors to the Town.

Niagara-on-the-Lake is a truly unique destination in Ontario, offering a mix of historic charm, stunning landscapes, world-class wineries, and vibrant cultural experiences. Visitors are drawn to its charming 19th-century streets, culinary delights, arts and theatre scene, including the famous Shaw Festival Theatre, and easy access from major cities like Toronto and Niagara Falls. All of these elements make it a memorable place to explore, whether for a day trip or a longer getaway.

Tourism NOTL will provide an opportunity to all tourism-related businesses in Niagara-on-the-Lake to participate in the Partnership Program. Tourism NOTL will consider applications from all organizations with **new or enhanced** projects that promote tourism activity and employment in the Town, while ensuring there is a diversity of program initiatives that focus on the development of investments that support innovative, scalable, and long-term sustainable activations. This includes:

- Destination development - Improving local attractions and experiences
- Marketing innovation - Creative ways to promote the town
- Community collaboration - Working together with local businesses and groups
- Sustainable tourism growth - Growing tourism in a way that protects the environment and community

The value of partnerships among industry sectors cannot be overstated. Strong partnerships and a coordinated approach to product development, marketing, and collaboration are essential to the future sustainability and increased competitiveness of tourism in NOTL and Niagara Region.

Tourism NOTL Vision

Niagara-on-the-Lake is an extraordinary wine country destination, known for its natural beauty and unrivaled heritage and cultural experiences.

Tourism NOTL Mission

We unite our partners and lead with collaboration, creativity, and integrity to tell Niagara-on-the-Lake's story, and steward a thriving, sustainable visitor economy that benefits residents, businesses, and guests.

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2. Objectives

The Tourism NOTL Partnership Investment Program aims to:

- Support projects that enhance Niagara-on-the-Lake's position as a premier travel destination.
- Encourage collaboration among tourism partners, businesses, and organizations.
- Foster innovation in tourism experiences, marketing, and product development.
- Strengthen off-season tourism and drive year-round visitation.
- Promote sustainable, inclusive, and responsible tourism practices.

3. Funding Streams

Applicants may apply under one of the following categories:

A. Marketing & Promotion

Support for innovative marketing initiatives that attract new audiences or promote shoulder-season visits. The goal is to help local tourism partners stand out in a competitive marketplace and extend the visitor season by reaching new demographics, using creative storytelling, and collaborating across sectors. Eligible projects may include:

1. Digital Marketing Campaigns

Projects that use online channels to target specific audiences or promote seasonal experiences. Examples could include:

- Paid social media campaigns highlighting themed getaways.
- Geo-targeted ads that encourage day trips during quieter months.
- Campaigns that leverage user-generated content to promote authentic visitor stories.

2. Influencer and Media Partnerships

Collaborations with influencers, travel writers, videographers, or media outlets that align with Niagara-on-the-Lake's destination image. Examples could include:

- Hosting travel influencers for curated experiences that generate high-quality photography, video, or social content.
- Partnering with lifestyle or culinary media to feature NOTL in seasonal travel editorials or online series.
- Coordinated media fam tours that promote new experiences or annual events.

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3. Content Creation and Storytelling

Develop professional-quality marketing assets and materials that enhance our destination storytelling and can be shared across partner channels. Examples could include:

- Producing short videos that spotlight local artisans, chefs, musicians, or historic sites.
- Creating refreshed photography for digital marketing or website updates.
- Developing editorial features, blogs, or mini-documentaries around specific tourism themes such as sustainability, romance, or cultural heritage.

4. Cross-Promotional Campaigns

Collaborative marketing among multiple local partners to create integrated experiences and stronger visitor value propositions. Examples could include:

- Joint promotions between accommodations, restaurants, and attractions under a unified seasonal theme
- Itineraries that link experiences across sectors (culinary, arts, nature, retail) for extended stays.
- Shared marketing tools or digital platforms that cross-promote partners' offers.

5. New Market Development

Efforts to reach untapped or emerging audience segments and position Niagara-on-the-Lake as a year-round destination. Examples could include:

- Marketing to corporate or incentive travel planners during fall and winter.
- Targeting diverse demographics such as multicultural travelers, young professionals, LGBTQ+ visitors, or families seeking experiential travel.
- Showcasing accessible and inclusive tourism options for visitors with different abilities or needs.

Funding Priorities and Impact

Projects under this category should demonstrate:

- A clear strategy to attract new visitors or strengthen shoulder season visitation.
- Alignment with Tourism NOTL's marketing goals and destination positioning.
- Innovation and creativity in messaging, channels, or partnerships.
- Collaborative benefits, such as shared outcomes among tourism operators.
- Measurable results, such as audience reach, website traffic, social engagement, or visitation increases.

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B. Event Development and Support

Designed to support the creation, enhancement, or expansion of tourism-related events that attract visitors, enrich the visitor experience, and contribute to Niagara-on-the-Lake's economy and cultural vibrancy.

Tourism NOTL recognizes that signature events and unique programming are critical to attract both local and regional visitors, generating overnight stays, and creating memorable experiences that encourage repeat visitation. This category supports events that are innovative, inclusive, and aligned with the destination's brand. Eligible Initiatives May Include:

1. New Event Creation

Funding to develop and launch new tourism-focused events that bring visitors to the community. Examples could include:

- A spring culinary festival highlighting local farms and wineries.
- A niche cultural celebration showcasing arts and heritage.

2. Event Expansion or Enhancement

Support for existing events to grow attendance, improve infrastructure, or elevate the visitor experience. Examples could include:

- Adding new programming.
- Upgrading staging or sound systems.
- Integrate digital ticketing or marketing tools to improve accessibility and efficiency.

3. Seasonal and Shoulder-Season Activation

Projects that encourage visitation during the shoulder season to help extend the tourism season beyond the traditional summer months. Examples could include:

- Winter markets
- Fall harvest celebrations
- Themed pop-up experiences that draw visitors during slower periods.

4. Community and Partner Collaboration

Initiatives that involve multiple local stakeholders to increase the event's reach, impact, and economic benefits. Examples could include:

- Collaboration between wineries, accommodations, restaurants, and retail businesses to offer an integrated visitor experience tied to a festival or event.

5. Innovation and Experiential Engagement

Funding for fun, engaging, or hands-on event experiences that make visitors enjoy their visit more and want to share it with others. Examples could include:

- Interactive culinary workshops
- Guided heritage tours

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- Live performance experiences encourage participation and engagement.

Funding Priorities and Impact

Events funded under this category should demonstrate the following:

- A clear strategy to attract new and repeat visitors.
- Alignment with Tourism NOTL's destination marketing and tourism objectives.
- Potential for economic impact, including increased overnight stays, local spending, or visitor engagement.
- Collaboration with other local partners to maximize community benefit.
- Innovation and creativity that differentiate the event and strengthen Niagara-on-the-Lake's tourism brand.

C. Capacity Building

The Capacity Building funding stream is designed to strengthen the long-term resilience, capabilities, and sustainability of Niagara-on-the-Lake's tourism businesses and organizations. This category focuses on initiatives that improve internal systems, workforce skills, operational efficiency, and the overall ability to deliver high-quality visitor experiences consistently.

By supporting capacity-building projects, Tourism NOTL aims to ensure that local tourism operators are prepared for the evolving market, adaptable to change, and positioned for sustainable growth that benefits both the community and the visitor economy. Eligible initiatives could include:

1. Business resilience

Helping a business become more stable and adaptable to challenges. Examples could include:

- Creating an emergency plan.
- Improving online sales tools.
- Upgrading systems so the business can handle disruptions (like weather events or market shifts).

2. Workforce training

Improving staff skills or service quality. Examples could include:

- Hosting hospitality or customer service workshops
- Digital marketing training
- Wine knowledge certification for staff.

3. Accessibility

Making your business or experience more welcoming to people with disabilities or mobility challenges. Improving signage, offering sensory-friendly experiences, or updating your website to meet accessibility standards.

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4. Sustainability

Reducing environmental impact or promoting eco-friendly practices.

Example: Eliminating single-use plastics, implementing recycling programs, energy-efficient lighting, or promoting local, sustainable products.

Funding Priorities and Expected Impact

Projects funded under Capacity Building should demonstrate clear potential to:

- Enhance Service Quality - Staff training and operational improvements that lead to better visitor experiences and higher satisfaction.
- Increase Business Resilience - Businesses are better prepared to respond to market fluctuations, seasonal changes, or unexpected challenges.
- Expand Market Reach - Accessibility and inclusive practices attract a broader range of visitors.
- Promote Sustainability - Eco-friendly operations reduce costs and strengthen Niagara-on-the-Lake's reputation as a responsible destination.

4. **Eligibility**

All organizations applying to the Partnership Investment Program must meet the following:

Eligible Applicants

- Tourism-related businesses, Non-profits, BIA's, event organizers, attraction operators, and organizations located within the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Ineligible Applicants

- Individuals.
- Organizations with outstanding financial obligations to Tourism NOTL.
- Regular operating costs, including regular staff wages
- Debt retirement, deficit reduction, depreciation, of financing charges
- Retroactive payments (costs incurred before the Partnership Program approval date)
- Secondary allocations (allocation of funds to other organizations, including supporting fundraising activities for other organizations)
- Activities that primarily serve the membership or purposes of religious organizations • Expenses not directly related to the project

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5. Funding Details

Subject to available funds and the number of applications, the Partnership Investment Program Committee will attempt to extend funds to as many applicants as possible. The **TOTAL** amount in the fund for disbursement is \$150,000.

Number of applications: One active project per applicant at a time.

Incorporating the Tourism NOTL Logo will increase rating points

Tourism NOTL reserves the right to partially fund applications based on available budget and alignment with program goals.

6. Eligible Expenses

Eligible expenses include, but are not limited to:

- Marketing and promotional materials
- Professional services (designers, videographers, consultants)
- Event logistics and production costs
- Equipment rentals or materials directly related to project delivery
- Staff or contractor time (specific to the project)

Ineligible expenses:

- Ongoing operational costs (e.g., rent, utilities, salaries unrelated to the project)
- Alcohol, prizes, or gifts
- Debt repayment or fundraising costs

Please note: It is not the intention or mandate of the Partnership Investment Program to provide ongoing operational funding to any organization in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

7. Application Process

Step 1: Review Guidelines

Applicants are encouraged to read the full program guidelines to ensure eligibility and alignment with Tourism NOTL's priorities.

Step 2: Submit Application

Complete and submit the Partnership Investment Program Application Form by the deadline outlined in the guidelines by email to kathy@niagaraonthelake.com.

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Step 3: Evaluation

Applications will be reviewed by the Partnership Investment Program Committee, comprised of Tourism NOTL staff, Tourism NOTL Board of Directors, and selected Tourism NOTL Stakeholders.

Step 4: Notification

Applicants will be notified of funding decisions within 30 days of the deadline. Successful applicants will receive a formal agreement outlining funding terms.

Step 5: Reporting

Recipients must submit a Final Report within 30 days of project completion, including:

- Reporting on project outcomes, including deliverables and results, number of people engaged, testimonials, etc.
- A final financial statement outlining expenditures and a copy of receipts for expenses covered by the program.
- Summary of the project and the impact on the community.
- Photos of the project or event with permission for them to be shared on the Tourism NOTL's website and social media, promotional materials, or media coverage.

Failure to submit a report may impact future eligibility.

8. Evaluation Criteria

Applications will be evaluated based on the following:

<u>Criteria</u>	<u>Weight</u>
Alignment with Tourism NOTL priorities	25%
Innovation and creativity	20%
Potential impact on visitor experience and economic growth	25%
Feasibility and project readiness	15%
Collaboration and community benefit	15%

Program awards may be lower than the requested amount, depending on demand for the program and applications received.

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9. Application Deadlines

The program does not operate on a rolling intake. Applications will be accepted only during the established submission window, noted below.

Applications Open: May 4, 2026 Applications Close: June 12, 2026, no later than 4:00 pm

Early submission is encouraged. Successful applicants will receive a formal agreement outlining funding terms.

10. How to Apply

Required Documents

- Completed Application Form
- Project Budget (with itemized revenue and expenses, including other contributions, in excel format)
- Letters of support (optional but encouraged)

Submit all materials to:

kathy@niagaraonthelake.com

11. Contact Information

For questions or assistance, please contact:

Kathy Weiss, CEO

Tourism NOTL

kathy@niagaraonthelake.com

905-468-1950 ext. 504

12. Terms and Conditions

- Funding decisions are final and subject to available budget.
- Tourism NOTL reserves the right to adjust funding allocations or decline applications that do not meet program intent.
- Recipients agree to acknowledge Tourism NOTL in all project communications and promotional materials.
- Any unused funds must be returned to Tourism NOTL within 60 days of project completion.