



NORTHERN ONTARIO

# Travel Information Centre Project



Ontario 



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# Travel Information Centre Project

## CONTENTS

<b>03</b>	Executive Summary
<b>04</b>	Background
<b>05</b>	Objectives
<b>06-13</b>	Northern Ontario Sub-regions
<b>14-31</b>	Northern Ontario Travel Information Centres and their Priorities for Assistance
15-21 .....	Year-Round
22-31 .....	Seasonal
<b>32-33</b>	Ontario Travel Information Centres (OTICs)
<b>34</b>	Information Not Known / TIC Hub
<b>36-39</b>	Best Practices
<b>40-46</b>	Recommended Priorities in Support of Northern Ontario TICs
<b>47</b>	Trip Finder

**Prepared by:** Forrest Consulting in partnership with Destination Ontario, Destination Northern Ontario, the Northern Ontario Sub-Regions and DMO's and the region's Travel Information Centres (January 2025)

## Executive Summary

This Northern Ontario Travel Information Centre refresh document was prepared by Forrest Consulting of Northern Ontario in partnership with Destination Northern Ontario (DNO), the Northern Ontario sub-regions, Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) and Travel information Centre (TIC) managers. In-depth discussions took place with all these informants. In addition, the 2014 Northern Ontario Wayfinding Plan, the 2018 Northern Ontario Travel Information Project plan and the 2024 Algoma report on the TIC survey project were heavily referenced in the creation of this plan.

This refresh project also aligns closely with DNO's 2023-28 Post-Pandemic Focus plan which identified the need to set the foundation for improved visitor services in Northern Ontario. It identified such key activities as providing better wayfinding and touch points, improving opportunities to recruit summer employees, providing training opportunities and attaining and maintaining a superior standard for visitor services.

The provision of timely access to accurate information for visitors and staff was the number one priority among the TIC managers. They pointed to difficulties that they had encountered in using the DNO TIC online Hub or their lack of awareness of it and asked for a more accurate and responsive tool such as touch screen kiosks that provided information on all Northern Ontario for both visitors and staff. They had suggestions as well for interim measures such as providing a simplified database to the TICs and loading more information on the devices used to administer visitor surveys in the North.

The need for better signage was identified by several TICs as the task of enhancing signage in Northern Ontario, while significantly enhanced since the 2018 TIC project, still had some gaps such as gateway signage, community signage and some TIC signage.

A gap that was noted in the 2014 plan still exists; namely that the TICs face challenges in showing their ROI to the funders and the municipalities or organizations they serve. Very basic steps such as accurate visitor tracking were missing in many

cases. DNO initiated a program of providing devices loaded with questions about origin of visitors, length of stay, favourite activities and spending, among other questions to the TICs. The program worked well until the pandemic but, post COVID, numbers have steadily declined. Recommendations are provided to address this.



The provision of Northern Ontario branded uniform pieces such as vests, t-shirts, caps, neckerchiefs and/or badges that invited visitors to speak with a Northern Ontario local was the third area of priority. TIC managers saw the provision of these items as a way of initiating conversations between staff and visitors, helping alleviate staff concerns about having appropriate work wear and celebrating the North.

The need for timely access to the right kind of training continues to be an important issue for the TICs while it was acknowledged that provision of the touch screen kiosks would help to improve access to training on an ongoing basis. As DNO has a workforce development and industry training department, Tourism Excellence North (TEN), there is an opportunity to survey the TICs regarding their training needs and potentially provide more targeted TIC training.

Finally, some TIC managers expressed the desire to network with other centre managers to share best practices and other issues. This document provides some suggestions in this regard, such as potentially offering awards for TIC innovation, including the TICs in DNO's newsletter distribution and topics and DNO hosting virtual meetings of TIC managers.

## Background and Introduction

The following will give a brief description of the background of this Northern Ontario Travel Information Centre Refresh project.

The Northern Ontario Wayfinding Study completed in 2014 provided several recommendations in relation to Travel Information Centres in the North. These recommendations were reviewed and addressed in the Destination Northern Travel Information Centre Project 2018. This Destination Northern Ontario Travel Information Centre Project Refresh 2024 builds upon the recommendations of the 2014 and 2018 plans and the Algoma 2024 visitor survey final report as well as the recommendations from multiple key informants and an examination of best practices and trends in the business of providing information to travellers.



It also aligns with the direction of the Destination Northern Ontario Post-Pandemic Action Plan 2023-2028 which identified the need to “set the foundation for improved visitor services and product quality across the region”. Key activities were:

- **Enhance** and **support** travel information services through extended summer employment opportunities, consumer touch points and wayfinding tools;
- **Foster** a culture of excellence among visitor service ambassadors through training opportunities; and
- **Leverage** opportunities through other pillar programming and partnerships to maintain a superior standard for visitor services and product quality.

Northern Ontario is home to two Ontario Travel Information Centres, one at Pigeon River near Thunder Bay and the other in Sault Ste. Marie which is operated year-round. In addition, the region has several other full-time centres, but the majority are seasonal. As noted in the 2018 report, several RTICs/TICs had closed in the past few years including one in Sudbury and one in North Bay. By the time of the preparation of this “refresh” report, several others in the North had shut their doors.

## Objectives

The objectives of this 2024 refresh of the 2018 Destination Northern Ontario Travel Information Centre Project is to conduct research locally, regionally, nationally and internationally to provide Destination Northern Ontario with recommendations for a TIC strategy for the entire region, taking into consideration what has been accomplished and what has changed since the 2018 plan was prepared. The objective of the refresh is also to enable DNO to better prioritize the services it provides to the Northern Ontario TICS.

The objective of the individual TICs continues to be to drive economic growth in the community operating the TIC.

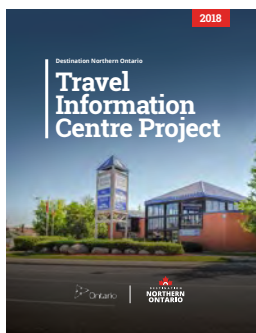
## Scope of Work and Methodology

The key reason for the TIC plan refresh is to look at changes in the operation of Northern Ontario's TICs, post COVID, and to recommend ways that DNO can best help its regional TICs in the most efficient manner.

The approach taken for this report involved research locally, regionally, nationally and internationally as well as an in-depth review of the **2018 Travel Information Centre Project** document and the 2014 Northern Ontario Wayfinding Plan. On the international level, the information was sourced from TIC reports and studies conducted in various countries. Articles and other sources were also reviewed to understand the global trends in TICs.

The 2018 plan pared down the list of 122 Northern Ontario TICs cited in the 2014 Northern Ontario Wayfinding Study to 47 full-time, seasonal or dual function TICs in Northern Ontario. This refresh report used the TICs listed on the DNO TIC Hub to identify 30 TICs. For the 2018 report, a definition sheet was created, and this guided the creation of a database of TICs in the North. As was the case in 2018, many but not all the TICs responded to requests for information. These TICs are however, still identified in this document.

**This refresh highlights recommendations for an enhanced visitor experience** which the TICs could implement with the support of Destination Northern Ontario and other funders. The guiding principle is to streamline the supports that DNO provides to result in the maximum benefit to the TICs while ensuring the efficiency of DNO's services.



> **2018 Travel Information Centre Project**



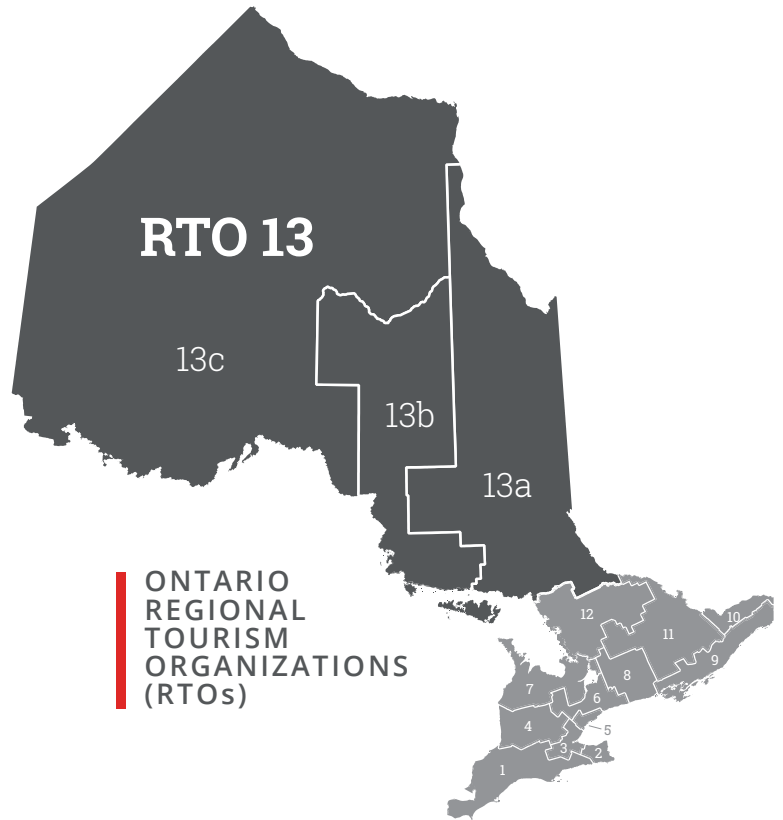


## The Sub-Regions and their TICs

**The 2018 TIC plan** noted that:

*“The three DMOs interact with the TICs in their region quite differently. From the discussions with the DMOs, historically there was more commonality in their support to the TICs. Board decisions influenced this change, particularly in 13A and the interaction with the local TICs is now quite different, region to region”.*

**This has not changed since the 2018 report.**



# SUNSET COUNTRY

Ontario, Canada

[visitsunsetcountry.com](http://visitsunsetcountry.com)

## Ontario's Sunset Country

A listing of Ontario's Sunset Country's Travel Information Centres can be found on their website under the "More" section of the site. Clicking through, the listings include organizations that are not Travel Information Centres, although they are Sunset Country members that do not fit in other categories of membership. These include the Highway 105 Tourism and Marketing Board and the Dryden Trailblazer Tourism Association which uses Municipal Accommodation Tax (MAT) funds to advance the City of Dryden as a tourist destination. It does not operate a Travel Information Centre, but it does provide some links to tourist information.

Some other links do not lead directly to the information on the TIC itself but rather to a

municipal site and it can be challenging to find where the information on the TIC is.



Several links, however, take people directly to the TIC information such as the one that leads to the Sioux Lookout Information Centre and the Lake of the Woods Discovery Centre.

Beyond this, Sunset Country does not provide any other services to its TICs.

Algoma Country provides the iPads to administer visitor surveys to visitors to the Sunset Country Lake of the Woods Discovery Centre TIC, the Dryden TIC, the Red Lake Heritage Centre and the Sioux Narrows Northwestern Ontario Sportfishing Centre. These are considered the four key TICs in Sunset Country.





[superiorcountry.ca](http://superiorcountry.ca)

## Ontario's Superior Country

Ontario's Superior Country launched a new website in January 2025. Additions are planned for the site including a listing of the region's TICs. When interviewed in the fall of 2024, the Executive Director of Superior Country stated that when they are listed on the new site, there will likely be a reduction in details due to the difficulty in keeping information current.

Superior Country used to apply for Federal funding for summer students for its member municipalities but found the time required to undertake the administrative functions such as payroll was

prohibitive. As well, the municipalities tended to prioritize services for citizens such as pools and arenas higher than the TICs when allocating summer student resources.

Superior Country continues to participate in the customer service training program offered by TEN by sending a staff member to talk about the region. The Executive Director did say that he questioned the value of the program not because of the content but because of the method of delivery; namely, he does not feel that online training works well for young people.



The idea of a FAM tour for the region's TIC counsellors, on the other hand, resonated very well with him, stating that it should be DNO's number one priority when serving the North's TICs. Superior Country would be willing to organize the entire FAM on DNO's behalf for an admin fee, to have staff on the tour and to promote the tour to encourage optimal attendance. When Superior Country organized FAM tours for its TICs in the past, it was challenging to get participants as the municipalities did not want to close their TICs for the time of the tour. As well, some students would back out at the last minute for various reasons. The solution would be to make participation in the FAM a requirement of the job if the municipalities got onside with that idea.

Superior Country has designated three Northern Ontario TICs as Lake Superior Circle Tour passport stamp locations. This is a "pay to participate" program which brings increased traffic to the TICs – Terry Fox, Terrace Bay and Wawa.



The TIC Hub has never been a priority at Superior Country. Staff were aware of its existence but found it difficult to access and they were no assurance that the information was up to date.

If DNO were to develop a Northern Ontario tourism video, Superior Country feels that would be useful for training TIC staff, especially those that are brought on board after the FAM. The video could be adapted for use in kiosks which they feel is the way of the future for TICs given how difficult it often is to recruit sufficient staff.

In Superior Country there is a trend among municipalities, with a few exceptions, of valuing their TICs less and less. There may be an opportunity to change municipalities' perceptions of the worth of the TICs by commissioning an economic impact assessment of Northern Ontario's TICs using attendance data that the TICs gather. Superior Country undertook a simple economic impact assessment recently that conservatively put the impact of the Nipigon TIC (now closed) visitors at \$60,000 for the local businesses.





[algomacountry.com](http://algomacountry.com)

## Algoma Country

It is easy to find information on the region's TICs on this website with a tab on the home page. Algoma has five year-round TICs: the Sault Ste. Marie OTIC, their own office, the Blind River TIC, the Gilles Gagnon Welcome Centre in Hearst and the Elliot Lake Welcome Centre. The Batchewana Bay Tourist Centre is also year-round but only provides washrooms.

The seasonal TICs are at the Spanish Municipal Marina, in Wawa adjacent to the goose statue, in the museum in Chapleau, at White River by the Winnie the Pooh Park and in Iron Bridge at the museum. The listings provide the location, dates and times, and phone number of the centres.

Algoma provides several services to its eight "official" TICs (Blind River, Hearst, Elliot Lake, Wawa, Spanish, Chapleau, White River and Iron Bridge) and also has a cooperative relationship with its OTIC.

Algoma has taken responsibility for applying for TIC staff through the Summer Experience Program (SEP) for the past 49 years. They apply for funding, handle the payroll and the reporting.

They also administer DNO's visitor survey but planned to meet with the TICs at the end of the season to see what could be done to improve participation which has declined since COVID.



## Northeastern Ontario

Northeastern Ontario provides its TICs with its publications as well as other TICs in the province and beyond. There are 53 TICs that receive these materials as follows:

1. Bainsville - Ontario Travel Information Centre
2. Hawkesbury - Ontario Travel Information Centre
3. Barrie - Ontario Travel Information Centre
4. Madawaska Valley Visitor Centre
5. Belleville Chamber of Commerce
6. Town of Blind River
7. Brandon Tourism
8. Buckhorn District Tourist Association Welcome Centre
9. Burk's Falls Welcome Centre
10. Tourism Burlington
11. Chapleau Museum Tourist Information Centre
12. Dryden Travel Information Centre
13. Almaguin Highlands Information Center
14. The Fort Frances Museum
15. Tourism Goderich
16. Gravenhurst Visitor Information
17. Havelock Tourism Centre
18. Gilles Gagnon Welcome Centre
19. Ignace Regional Travel Information Centre
20. Kapuskasing Welcome Centre & Museum
21. Tourism Kenora
22. Latchford Information Centre
23. AGS Sykes
24. Tourism London
25. Longlac Tourist Information Centre
26. Township of Manitouwadge
27. Mattawa Tourist Information
28. Midland Tourism
29. Kiosque touristique de Moonbeam
30. Pigeon River - Ontario Travel Information Centre
31. Temiskaming Shores & Area Chamber of Commerce
32. Niagara Falls - Ontario Travel Information Centre
33. Nipigon Tourist Information Centre
34. Parry Sound Area Visitor Information Centre
35. Tourist Information Centre Penetanguishene
36. Perth Tourism Visitor Information Centre
37. Peterborough & the Kawarthas Tourism
38. Sarnia - Ontario Travel Information Centre
39. Renfrew Visitor Information Centre
40. Algoma Kinniwabi Travel Association
41. Sault Ste. Marie - Ontario Travel Information Centre
42. Tourisme Shawinigan
43. The Terry Fox Monument & Tourist Information Centre
44. Chamber of Commerce Tourist Information Center Sioux Lookout
45. Spanish Municipal Marina / Town of Spanish
46. Temagami and District Chamber of Commerce
47. Township of Terrace Bay
48. Thunder Bay Pagoda
49. Tourism Timmins
50. Toronto - Ontario Travel Information Centre
51. Wawa Tourist Information Centre
52. Township of White River
53. Highlands East Visitor Information Centre
54. Tilbury - Ontario Travel Information Centre

NeONT does not, however, provide training, FAM trips, funding or grant application support for students/staff, human resources support or publications apart from their own.



*Northeastern  
Ontario*  
CANADA

[northeasternontario.com](http://northeasternontario.com)



# Northern Ontario Travel Information Centres and their Priorities for Assistance



## YEAR-ROUND TRAVEL INFORMATION CENTRES: 8

- 01 Blind River Travel Information Centre
- 02 Dryden Tourist Information Centre/Max the Moose
- 03 Ear Falls Tourism Information Centre
- 04 Gilles Gagnon Welcome Centre, Hearst
- 05 Kenora – Lake of the Woods Discovery Centre
- 06 Terry Fox Travel Information Centre, Thunder Bay
- 07 Timmins Convention Bureau and Visitor Welcome Centre
- 08 Red Lake Regional Heritage Centre



YEAR-ROUND



01

## Blind River Travel Information Centre

Karen Bittner, Director of Facilities and Community Services

📞 705-227-0141 / ✉ karen.bittner@blindriver.ca

The Blind River Travel Information Centre operates year-round, seven days a week. In the summer, the hours are 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. and in the fall 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. with bathrooms kept open until 6 p.m. September to May, the centre is open 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. but closed on weekends. Two full time staff are employed as well as summer students.

Besides washrooms and travel information services, the centre provides Wi-Fi (albeit the service is poor, and they are looking for funding to improve the service), a gift shop, consignment goods from local artisans, cold drinks and toiletries.

Since COVID the centre has been completely renovated to become an energy-efficient, year-round operating facility and its number of visitors has increased significantly, due mainly to the availability of full-time staff which ensures more seamless service. Another less positive change since COVID is that people are less inclined to want to participate in surveys that collect information on their city/town of residence, travel intentions and other data. Data is collected, however, informally through conversations with the clientele.

It is municipally funded and communications with municipal government, administration and citizens is frequent via reports and social media. Support by the municipality is strong.

Training for staff includes online health and safety courses, other online courses including personal development.

Staff are encouraged to interact with other departments and entities such as the museum, art gallery, arena and festival organizers to ensure that there are no silos and that they have current information. Recruitment of staff tends to be easy and there is usually a waiting list. Bittner states that the key to a good TIC operation is having full time staff who know the community well.

Signage directing travellers to the centre is very good.

Challenges identified included finding to offset the costs of providing winter services and the poor quality of the internet service. In addition, seasonal students face challenges in the price of affordable workwear so the provision of a Northern Ontario branded vest and/or t-shirt would be welcome.

Management is aware of the Destination Northern Ontario TIC Hub but do not use it as it is cumbersome to access through Dropbox, and the reliability of the information is questionable as it tends to be out of date.

YEAR-ROUND

### Priorities for Destination Northern Ontario assistance:

- Help in accessing support to fund students in off season
- Branded vests and/or t-shirts, caps, buttons: "Ask a Northern Ontario Local!"
- Video to inform staff and visitors about services and amenities in Northern Ontario that could also be used for visitors

02

**Dryden Tourist Information Centre/Max the Moose**

Tyler Peacock, Economic Development Manager, City of Dryden

📞 807-216-5159 / ✉ t.peacock@dryden.ca

The Dryden Tourist Information Centre is co-located with the local art gallery and is adjacent to the popular Max the Moose statue which tends to draw people into the centre and gallery. The centre operates year-round but with only one summer student, so it is not open every day of the week. In the off-season there is no one dedicated to the travel information function, but information is still available.

The number of visitors is not tracked but, since COVID, it has been observed there have been fewer Americans, even post-pandemic but the numbers are improving. Several tourism projects including trails development, dock improvements and a tag fish program are underway in the community. Sports tourism is rebounding and the City recently took over the operation of a golf course.

The centre enjoys good support from the Municipal government and has strong

communications with the mayor and councillors. The TIC is recognized by them as an economic driver.

Currently, staff are trained in health and safety, onboarding, communications and things for tourists to do in Dryden. Gamification is being considered for future training as this is a very popular trend.

The greatest challenges facing the Dryden TIC are staffing, location, accessibility and lack of wayfinding.

Management is aware of the Destination Northern Ontario TIC Hub but has never used it due to its lack of ease of accessibility (Dropbox) and out of date information.

The need for a new TIC co-located with a cultural and heritage centre has been identified in the Dryden Strategic Plan.

**Priorities for Destination Northern Ontario assistance:**

- Self-serve kiosks for visitors and staff training
- Northern Ontario branded uniforms and signage
- Regional FAM tour for staff (would help organize).



03

### Ear Falls Tourism Information Centre

Kimberly Ballance, Clerk Treasurer, Administrator, Town of Ear Falls

📞 807-222-3624 ext. 27 / ✉️ k.ballance@ear-falls.com

This centre is housed in the Ear Falls Government building and is co-located with the Ear Falls and District Museum. The Government building is open 200 days a year, but the museum and TIC were only open on Wednesdays in 2023 and even more randomly in 2024. In 2023, 99 visitors signed in between May and November with approximately half of them being from Ear Falls itself (49/99). In 2024, 19 visitors signed in between June and September. These statistics do not include school groups. A sign is placed in the building foyer when the centre and museum are open. There is also a digital sign.

The building provides free WiFi, washrooms, rental space, special events, and public

computers. The members of the local government are supportive of the centre and cognizant of the value of tourism. However, most travel counselling services are offered by the local businesses who are given racks with brochures. They are also on the On This Spot app.

The municipality including the TIC face many challenges when trying to recruit student staff as many young people prefer to work for the mill or the mines, both of which offer higher wages and the service sector which offers more flexibility. In 2024 they posted 10 positions and only filled 3. They are considering hiring fewer students at a higher wage. Those that are recruited for the TIC are trained in basic customer service.

#### Priorities for Destination Northern Ontario assistance:

- Northern Ontario tourism social media templates, for example, ones that promote fishing tournaments, music festivals and Canada Day celebrations.

04

### Gilles Gagnon Welcome Centre, Hearst

Mireille Morrissette, Director of Economic Development

*(on parental leave until November 2025)*

📞 705-362-4341, ext. 1502 / ✉️ mmorrissette@hearst.ca

This municipally run centre, located on Highway 11 East in Hearst is normally a year-round facility but due to parental leaves by staff it will not be open until the fall of 2025. A sign at the centre will direct visitors to the Municipal office building in the meantime and will also have a QR code for visitors to access more information.

With other tenants in the TIC building, there is strong municipal support for its operation. It is an attractive site with a refurbished sign provided by DNO and is well positioned for visibility.

Staff are provided training in customer service and given a tour of the town. Generally, staff's knowledge of Hearst's tourism assets is strong as they are locals. Recruitment can be challenging at times.

#### Priorities for Destination Northern Ontario assistance:

- A video on tourism assets in Northern Ontario for the students and visitors
- A workshop on social media
- Uniforms for staff ("Ask a Northern Ontario local")

05

**Kenora – Lake of the Woods Discovery Centre**

Josh Nelson, Tourism Development Officer

📞 807-467-2986 / ✉️ jnelson@kenora.ca

With the closure of the Ontario Travel Information Centre at the Manitoba/Ontario border, this centre has become a more important resource for visitors than before, with visitor numbers for 2024 forecasted to be in the 23,000 range. Kenora's key markets are Manitoba, nearby U.S. states and Western Canada.

Municipally run and with strong municipal support, the centre offers, in addition to tourist counselling and washrooms, exhibits including Science North travelling exhibits, accommodation reservation services, special events, self serve kiosks (display stands, not video) and a picnic area. It operates seven days a week from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. from May long weekend to Labour Day, from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Sundays to Thursdays in the summer and 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays.

Staff training is quite thorough and includes all necessary municipal training, a full day focused on the tourism handbook and a planning exercise to create an itinerary of tourism activities to share with the other staff. In addition, staff are encouraged to document every question they were not able to answer for future reference.

The greatest challenge that the centre faces comes because of the closure of the Ontario TIC at the Manitoba border, particularly in light of the fact that signage at the closed centre directs visitors to the Lake of the Woods TIC. This has necessitated acquiring more Ontario focused literature including maps and paying for the shipping costs as well as experiencing more wear and tear on the centre's facilities, particularly the washrooms.

**Priorities for Destination Northern Ontario assistance:**

- ➔ Having a kiosk containing current from all Northern Ontario's communities would be of greatest assistance to the centre. Asking visitors to enter some data, perhaps simply where they are travelling from, to access the information would be an efficient way to track visitor origins as well.



06

## Terry Fox Travel Information Centre, Thunder Bay

Jennifer Grundy, Coordinator, Convention and Visitor Services, Tourism Thunder Bay

📞 807-625-2149 / ✉️ Jennifer.grundy@thunderbay.ca

The Terry Fox Travel Information Centre, located on the site of the striking monument that pays tribute to the end of Terry Fox's famous run across Canada, is open year-round, seven days a week except in the winter months when this TIC is closed on statutory holidays. The site also boasts spectacular views of Lake Superior.

The Terry Fox Centre provides public washrooms which are available inside during operating hours, and outside vaulted washrooms are accessible after hours. There is ample onsite parking.

Since COVID, Thunder Bay has seen more people heading outdoors for things like hiking and biking to keep their distance. There's also been an increase in visitors from nearby areas, as people chose local trips over traveling farther.

Their visitor numbers initially dropped after the pandemic, but they've seen an increase in visitors from Northwestern Ontario and Manitoba. While numbers continue to rise each year, they are still seeing a slight decrease in U.S. travelers.

The Terry Fox Information Centre welcomes about 75,000 visitors each year. In the peak season, staff help around 400-500 people a day, and during the off-season, it's about 50-100. They see more visitors in the summer, and their hours are also longer during that time.

Management estimates that the level of support for its two TICs (Terry Fox and the Pagoda) is around a 7 or 8. There is solid backing from the community but sometimes funding and resources can be tight.

That said, local businesses and tourism groups are very committed to supporting tourism in the area.

The support from the City is somewhat lower. The City provides funding and other resources, but these can be limited by budget restrictions. Municipal leaders do see the value of the centres, but there is room for more investment.

They gather the same visitor information at both Tourism Information Centres in Thunder Bay. This includes details such as where visitors are coming from, their mode of travel, where they're staying, and more. They use this data to support and improve our marketing efforts.

They provide a range of training opportunities for their full-time and seasonal staff, including corporate orientation, health and safety training, WHMIS training, in-house sessions, and a full-day city tour. They encourage their full-time staff to keep up with training year-round and make sure to take part in any relevant training that comes up.

A few of the main challenges faced by the TICs in Thunder Bay include staffing, dealing with the large number of visitors during peak season, making sure they have enough staff available and interested in working to keep up with demand, and staying on top of changing visitor needs. They also have to make sure they are offering the most current information, providing excellent customer service, and managing with limited staff resources in the off-season.

YEAR-ROUND

### Priorities for Destination Northern Ontario assistance:

- Help with staffing, offering additional staff training
- Funding for technical upgrades (touch screen kiosks)
- Encouraging TICs to share tips and resources.





07

### Timmins Convention Bureau and Visitor Welcome Centre

Lacey Rigg, Coordinator of Meetings, Conventions and Sports Tourism

📞 705-360-2600 / ✉️ lacey.rigg@timmins.ca

This is a municipally run, year 'round TIC whose sole staff is the Tourism Manager. At the time of this interview (December 2024) the operation was in the process of moving to the other side of the building it has been housed in and will be near the Timmins Economic Development Corporation. As such, it is seeing more walk in traffic. Previously, it was co-located with the Timmins Museum. Its hours are weekdays 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. It is not open weekends due to lack of staffing. Travel information and washrooms are the only services it provides.

Both the City councillors and residents are supportive of the TIC and recognize its value.

Staffing is the biggest challenge facing this TIC, but it cannot compete with the mining industry which pays much more than they can.

#### Priorities for Destination Northern Ontario assistance:

- List all the Northern Ontario TICs on its website (not in the Hub) with locations, dates and hours of operation and ensure that this information is kept up to date
- Provide Northern Ontario swag in the form of t-shirts, caps, vests and/or buttons
- Touch screen kiosk which would feature things to see and do for visitors across the North.
- Wayfinding: help fund the purchase of DNO branded brochure racks.

08

## Red Lake Regional Heritage Centre

Trevor Osmond, Director

📞 807-335-0102 (cell) / ✉ heritage@redlake.ca

This is a charitable organisation that operates under the umbrella of the Municipality of Red Lake. Misfortune struck the centre in 2019 when a storm blew the roof off, and it didn't open again until 2023. The year 2017 was the centre's best-ever year for attendance and 2018 was its second best. 2024 was on track to be the best year for attendance ever in the history of the centre. This was a year that saw the centre host a multitude of activities including rentals, church groups and extensive programming and events.

The centre is a stand-alone building located next a park which contains the old museum building, a walking path, memorial trees, a bench and water fountain. It is also the site of the Norsemen Festival and Canada Day. It is known as a community hub.

In addition to travel information, washrooms and WiFi, the centre provides limited ticket sales, displays and interpretation, a gift shop, special events, and rental space.

It has a very supportive board of directors, and the community views it as an asset.

They use the iPad survey provided by Destination Northern Ontario to track visitor numbers and patterns and they also physically count visitors.

The biggest challenge facing the centre is the lack of staff; there is usually only the director and the curator available as staff. They strive to keep the racks full of relevant information but don't always have the time to ensure that all information is available. They would also like to have a stronger relationship with lodge owners/operators in the area who should be interested in referring visitors to them in their "down" times. They applied to NOHFC for funds for an intern to work on this but have had no success in recruiting anyone.

### Priorities for Destination Northern Ontario assistance:

- ➔ Touch screen kiosk showcasing all of Northern Ontario (great asset)
- ➔ Wayfinding: new sign to advertise the TIC





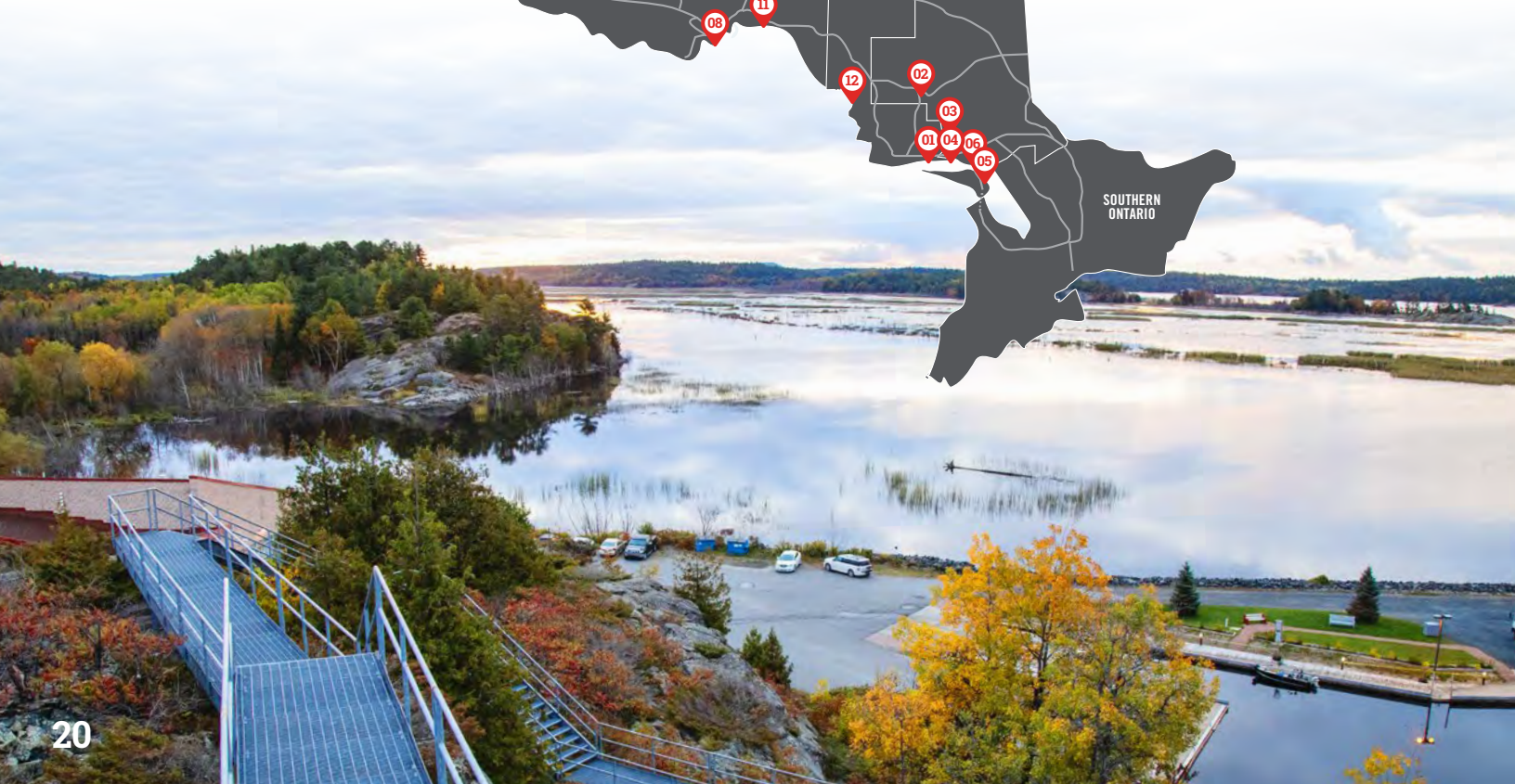


# SEASONAL TRAVEL INFORMATION CENTRES: 12

- 01 Bruce Mines Museum – Travel Information Centre
- 02 Chapleau Travel Information Centre
- 03 Elliot Lake Welcome Centre
- 04 Iron Bridge Travel Information Centre and Museum
- 05 Manitoulin Island Travel Information Centre
- 06 Spanish Municipal Marina
- 07 Nestor Falls Travel Information Centre
- 08 The Pagoda Tourist Information Centre, Thunder Bay
- 09 Sioux Narrows Tourist Information Centre
- 10 Temagami and District Chamber of Commerce and Travel Information Centre
- 11 Terrace Bay Tourist Information Centre
- 12 Wawa Travel information Centre



SEASONAL





01

## Bruce Mines Museum – Travel Information Centre

Ron Smith, President, Bruce Mines Historical Society

📞 705-785-2429 / ✉️ rasmithcqe@gmail.com

Travel information centre services in Bruce Mines are co-located with the local museum. It is an 1894 building which is not winterized therefore both operations are seasonal, usually June to September. Recently the society took over a local church and they will have their archives placed in there as the building is heated. There is potential to move both the TIC and museum to the church. Staffing is mostly volunteers although they did have summer students on staff in 2024 through Canada Summer Jobs and hope to repeat this in 2025. Visitors do not typically come in just for travel information but rather to access washrooms and visit the museum. The travel information side of things is not a big priority but people in the building are knowledgeable and enjoy answering visitors' questions.

The TIC/museum provides washrooms and travel information only. The Wi-Fi service is spotty and therefore reserved for staff and volunteers.

The staff and volunteers do track visitor numbers and reported that numbers were higher in 2024 than in 2023.

They have had visitors from all 50 U.S. States and all Canadian provinces. They track origins, names and the number in the party.

The volunteer base for operations is good but has diminished since COVID.

The town provides tax relief in support of the operation. Donations and services in kind are also sought out.

Training includes dealing with the public. Most staff and volunteers are local, so they know the town and area well. It is challenging to train some of the students in conversing with the public.

Management, volunteers and staff have no knowledge of the Destination Northern Ontario TIC Hub.

The greatest challenges faced by the Bruce Mines TIC are as follows:

- Funding
- Difficulty in finding student workers
- Poor Wi-Fi

### Priorities for Destination Northern Ontario assistance:

- ➔ T-shirts, vests, caps – "Ask a Northern Ontario Local!"
- ➔ Training video for employees/volunteers that could double as an informational video for visitors in a touch screen kiosk
- ➔ FAM tour has potential but video more practical

02

**Chapleau Travel Information Centre**

Carol Ouellette, Supervisor, Leisure and Culture

☎ 705-864-0154

This is a municipally run TIC which operates in the same building as the local museum. In 2024, the TIC operated for six weeks in the summer. Staff (students) keep track of the number of visitors. They take advantage of the training that Algoma provides and administer a survey (also provided by Algoma) to visitors.

Brochures are also available in the municipal office.

There is no longer an economic development office in the town, but they are looking at hiring an EDO.

No further information is available as repeated requests for information on challenges, needs and other issues were not responded to.

03

**Elliot Lake Welcome Centre**

Steve Antunes, Economic Development Officer

☎ 705.848.2287 ext. 2107 / ✉ santunes@city.elliottlake.on.ca

This TIC is in the Trailhead pavilion which is at the corner of Highway 17 and Highway 108, about 23 kilometres from the City of Elliot Lake. The pavilion is the starting point of the Deer Trail Driving Tour. The facility is rented from The Township of the North Shore by the city and the rental agreement is in place for another three years. It is expected that the agreement will be renewed if desired.

The municipal government is highly supportive of the centre and its value to the community.

The welcome centre was open in July and August in 2024. In 2023, it was only open on weekends. A longer season for 2025 is being considered. The centre sees an average of about 30 people visit per day even in inclement weather. Many have stopped to use the washroom facilities, have a picnic or take a hike or walk. The site also offers a dog run, ample parking and access to refreshments.

The centre is staffed by local paid ambassadors. They are of an older demographic, reflective of the city's population, the largest segment of which is 65+. Many have a sales or hospitality background, and all have strong local knowledge so not a lot of formal training is required. Staff track the visitor counts and origins through engagement with them.

Signage advising travellers of the pavilion is extensive, with 14 billboards within an eight kilometre stretch on either direction.

The most significant challenges facing the TIC is the distance from the City of Elliot Lake, making conversion challenging, and the difficulty in attracting some younger workers.

Centre management and staff are not aware of the Destination Northern Ontario TIC Hub.

**Priorities for Destination Northern Ontario assistance:**

- Kiosk(s) with promotional videos
- FAM tour for the TIC ambassadors

04

**Iron Bridge travel Information Centre and Museum**

Amber Burgler, Deputy Clerk/Managing Day to Day Operations in Planning and Economic Development

📞 705-843-2033 / ✉️ amber@huronshores.ca

This seasonal travel information centre is co-located with the Iron Bridge Historical Museum on James Street. The building was closed during COVID but numbers have rebounded well. New children's programming in the museum has served to boost visitation and even more programming is planned for next season.

Municipal and community support for the TIC and museum is quite good and the museum is recognized as the town's only real indoor attraction.

The centre surveys visitors through the survey tool provided by Destination Northern Ontario and Algoma Country. As such, they have a good handle on origin of visitors, party size, reasons for travelling etc.

They apply for students for the TIC to Canada Summer Jobs and train them in WSIB, customer service and health and safety. They are incorporating new software into their training mix.

Besides the museum, travel information and washrooms, the centre provides a farmers'

market, picnic area, recycling drop off. They have no Wi-Fi They would like to incorporate cold beverages and souvenirs for sale in their offering.

They are in the process of completing their recreation master plan and would like to share that with DNO to determine where there may be synergies. They are also completing a grant application for plan to repurpose their arena,

97% of the tax base is residents. They would like to build additional economic development activities including tourism.

The town's greatest need and its priority for DNO assistance is wayfinding signage. The welcome signs are dated and in bad repair (there are six of these). They also need a sign indicating that there is a travel information centre in the museum. They feel that enhancement of their signage would indicate to visitors that they are a welcoming community.

They have no knowledge of the Destination Northern Ontario TIC Hub.

SEASONAL





05

**Manitoulin Island Travel Information Centre**

Lisa Hallaert, Information Centre Manager

📞 705-862-2538 / ✉️ lhallaert@townofnemi.on.ca

This centre is strategically located near the bridge at Little Current and operates seven days a week from May to October, hosting about 8,000 visitors. It is supported by three local municipalities and has strong support from the island's business communities.

Besides washrooms and travel counselling, the centre offers computer stations, displays and interpretation, free Wi-Fi, a gift store, picnic area, rental space and special events.

Visitor origins and interests are captured by entering the information into a book. Staff are trained in customer service. Being mainly locals, they have strong local knowledge. The centre's biggest challenge is recruiting staff although this is getting easier. Accessing information from the communities remains an ongoing issue.

Staff have no knowledge of the Destination Northern Ontario TIC Hub.

**Priorities for Destination Northern Ontario assistance:**

- Touch screen kiosk
- Wayfinding (TIC signage – completed in 2024)

06

**Spanish Municipal Marina**

Pam Lortie, CAO/Clerk-Treasurer, Town of Spanish

📞 705-844-2300 / ✉️ pamlortie@townofspanish.com

This municipally run, seasonal Travel Information Centre is located within the Town of Spanish's marina. The TIC is open June 23 to September 7, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. and after September 7, on weekends. From May 17 to June and in September, the hours are 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.

In 2023, they added a tuck shop with t-shirts and other souvenir items and had a staff person dedicated to that operation. They have also added bike rentals, supported by the bike shop in Elliot Lake. This has been very popular. The TIC/marina building also offers showers, saunas, coffee, free Wi-Fi, washrooms, gym access and marina facilities and services. Their Wi-Fi is very reliable.

The hiring of a youth intern enhanced their ability to offer the bike rentals and the running of the tuck shop.

Using the iPad provided by Algoma, they track visitor statistics. Usage of the building including the TIC is good. They also record information on their boaters including name of boater, origin, boat size, etc.

Training provided includes Boating Ontario and the TIC training provided by Algoma.

Their biggest challenge is having the time to manage all their operations effectively.

They have no awareness of the Destination Northern Ontario TIC Hub.

**Priorities for Destination Northern Ontario assistance:**

- Information on other regions of the North, easily accessed (via a kiosk) – of great value

07

### Nestor Falls Travel Information Centre

→ Refer to [Sioux Narrows Tourist Information Centre \(below\)](#).

08

### The Pagoda Tourist Information Centre, Thunder Bay

→ Refer to [Terry Fox Travel Information Centre](#)

The Pagoda Tourist Information Centre is Canada’s oldest operating TIC; however, it only sees about 8 visitors per day to use its services or a total of 1500 people per season. In light of this, consideration is being given to contracting out its TIC services in combination with retail services such as a gift shop. The Pagoda was closed during the early part of the pandemic, but over the past two of summers, management has worked to extend hours to align with waterfront businesses on the North side.

It is located near the city’s transit hub and is a short walk to the marina. It is also situated in the heart of Downtown Thunder Bay North, with free public Wi-Fi available.

At a minimum, the Pagoda operates May to September and if they have students that are available, they always like to try to extend Pagoda dates.

See also [“Terry Fox Travel Information Centre”](#).

09

### Sioux Narrows Tourist Information Centre

Heather Gropp, Economic Development Officer

☎ 807-226-5241 ext. 209 / ✉ [hgropp@snnf.ca](mailto:hgropp@snnf.ca)

The Sioux Narrows Tourist Information Centre is co-located in Sioux Narrows with the Northern Ontario Sportfishing Centre in the Town of Sioux Narrows. It is located on Highway 71. Town operates a second TIC in nearby Nestor Falls. In 2024, the centres were open May 15 to Thanksgiving, seven days a week in July and August and five or six days a week in May, June, September and October. The hours are 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Besides washrooms and travel counselling the centre offers charging stations, displays and interpretation, free Wi-Fi, a gift store, picnic area and special events. The Nestor Falls centre offers travel counselling, a picnic area, Wi-Fi and washrooms. The playground in the Sioux Narrows Centre’s yard has been completely redone and there are new displays in the Sport Fishing Center.

Recruitment goes smoothly for staffing at both centres. The municipality is supportive of the two centres and strives for continuous improvement. Training includes municipal courses, customer service and OTEC Service Excellence program.

They have no knowledge of the Destination Northern Ontario TIC Hub.

#### Priorities for Destination Northern Ontario assistance:

→ Touch screen kiosk that could help inform visitors of Northern Ontario’s tourism offerings, plan their trip and check into the Northern Ontario Portal.

10

**Temagami and District Chamber of Commerce & Travel Information Centre**

Stephanie Wagner, President, Temagami and District Chamber of Commerce

Amber Nussey, Administrator

📞 705- 569-3344 / ✉ info@temagamiinformation.com

Housed in the Temagami Historic Train Station, this centre shares space with the Temagami Community Foundation and Living Temagami. The TIC was located at the back of the building which is owned by the Town of Temagami. A decision regarding the location of the three tenants was made on January 9, 2025, and the TIC was scheduled to relocate to the south side (front door) of the building on March 1, 2025.

The TIC had one student on staff this summer and the TIC manager, who works three days a week, also assists with the provision of travel counselling. The centre is open year-round both with a shortened schedule in the winter. In the summer, the centre is open 35 hours a week from the last weekend in June or July 1 until the last weekend of August. They are looking to extend that season in 2025. In the winter, they are often closed but do offer TIC services Tuesday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. There is a community market in the building's parking lot on Saturdays from the last weekend in June until the last weekend in August. Visitation is from 100 to 250 people a day on Saturdays and 40 to 150 people on weekdays.

The TIC provides washrooms, travel counselling, a popular gift store, special event space and ample parking. They are a bus stop for Ontario Northland and are a drop off spot for packages to be taken to their destination by bus. Their Wi-fi is not very reliable and they have no self-serve kiosks.

The town has incurred the loss of some businesses and services since the 2018 TIC plan was developed including their auto repair and bait and tackle shops, bakery, bank and physician although there is a nurse practitioner.

They say they would benefit the most from some coaching regarding TIC layouts, services and staff training. The Chamber President has experienced the Fast Track to Success program and feels it could be very beneficial to their TIC. Uniforms would also be welcomed as would wayfinding signage.

A virtual meeting with TIC managers once or twice a year would be helpful and a touch screen kiosk with Northern Ontario travel information would be as well.

**Priorities for Destination Northern Ontario assistance:**

- Fast Track to Success for their TIC operation and training
- Uniforms
- Signage
- Networking with other TICs
- Touch screen kiosk



11

**Terrace Bay Tourist Information Centre**

Stacy Moffat, Special Projects Coordinator

📞 807-825-3315 ext. 7106 / cell: 807-228-2470 / ✉️ spc@terracebay.ca

Located right on the Trans Canada Highway, this Municipally run centre recently extended its dates of operation from the May long weekend to Thanksgiving Monday with its hours being 8:30 or 9:00 a.m. to 5 p.m. While the centre has expanded its season and has shown strong numbers since the end of the pandemic, the town itself has undergone some less positive changes with business closures in the downtown plaza. The town does have an extensive wayfinding program.

The centre provides reliable free Wi-Fi, a gift store, picnic area and washrooms.

Staff wear articles of branded clothing from the gift shop. Staff are trained on day-to-day operations of the centre and on what is available for visitors in the community. They collect data on their visitors and had 1942 responses to their survey in 2024.

The municipal council has discussed making the centre a year-round facility, but nothing has been decided yet.

Cutbacks to student funding presents an ongoing challenge to the centre.

They have no awareness of the Destination Northern Ontario TIC Hub.

**Priorities for Destination Northern Ontario assistance:**

- ➔ A tool that would enhance the staff and visitor knowledge of the region – top priority
- ➔ Training in 2SLGBTQUIA+ friendliness would also be an asset.

SEASONAL



12

**Wawa Travel information Centre**

Alex Patterson, Director of Community Services and Tourism

📞 705-856-2244 ext. 242 / ✉ apatterson@wawa.cc

Home of the famous Wawa giant goose, the Wawa Tourist Information Centre is a busy spot, serving, on average, 20,000 visitors a month. The centre is municipally owned and operated not far from the downtown, on Mission Road. It is highly visible from the Trans Canada Highway.

The Centre is showing signs of age but with the start of the MAT tax program in April 2025, there will be more funding available to address this as well as staffing.

Closed during COVID but still offering roving travel counselling services, the centre has seen the origin of its visitors evolve after the pandemic. Prior to COVID, about 50% of Wawa's visitors were American, 25% from Southern Ontario and 25% from other locations. Now approximately 50% are from Southern Ontario, with 25% Americans and 25% other visitors. They see a lot of Lake Superior Circle tour travellers at the centre, and many have commented that the centre is open when others are not even though the centre's season has been shortened from the May long weekend to Thanksgiving to the first week of June through to the last week of September. This is due to financial issues along with difficulties in finding students to work earlier.

In the peak season the centre is open 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. and in the shoulder months (June and September) the hours are 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Consideration is being given to hiring older counsellors and local senior citizens have asked about volunteering at the centre.

The changes that have been made to the centre's retail operation has been key to the centre's ability to stay open during challenging financial times for the municipality. A total of 32 artists and craftspeople from the community and region were recruited to provide local products for sale in the centre, raising revenues from \$20,000 to \$100,00 per year.

Besides the gift store, the centre has reliable Wi-Fi, washrooms (which are not AODA compliant), a picnic area and, of course, the goose which is a major attraction.

Management has done an excellent job of enhancing the ways that visitors are counted, adding counters to the centre, the goose area and the parking lot. This enables them to accurately track not only just numbers but peak usage times and economic impact.



Training of staff is extensive, including health and safety, de-escalation and conflict resolution, customer service and local and area fam tours. They track any complaints about the service provided at the centre and take steps to address the issues. They would like to have access to a standard training package and to have more opportunity to train the students in their local Indigenous connections. They try to hire two returning students and two new students each year.

The biggest challenges for the centre are twofold. First the Province has dramatically cut its support of the North's travel information centres, leaving it to them to provide such important services as washrooms and Ontario

maps with no financial support even though providing these services represents a significant financial burden to the Municipality. Second, for reasons that are not clear, many grant programs state that Travel Information Centres are ineligible for funding, making it challenging to make infrastructure enhancements such as AODA compliant washrooms.

Destination Northern Ontario can help by advocating for more Provincial support and changes to the rules that deem TICs as being ineligible for financial assistance. They would also be interested in having information for visitors in the form of a Northern Ontario video provided as well as badges for the staff that encourage visitors to "Talk to A Local."

**Priorities for Destination Northern Ontario assistance:**

- Touch screen kiosk with information for staff and visitors
- "Talk to a Northern Ontario Local" badges



**CLOSED TRAVEL INFORMATION CENTRES**

**Batchawana Travel Information Centre**

Washrooms are still operational year-round.

**Fort Frances Tourism Information Centre**

This centre received financial support for several years from Destination Northern Ontario in consideration of its strategic position adjacent to the Canada/U.S. border in Fort Frances, but it has now been closed.

**Geraldton Interpretive Centre**

This centre, which consistently saw some 1100 visitors per season was sold to Greenstone Mine which will use the site for mining.

**Longlac Tourist Information Centre**

This centre, which hosted about 1300 people per season was closed by town council prior to the 2024 operating season to save on costs. However, the washrooms remained open to the public in July and August.

**Nipigon Tourist Information Centre**

Closed since 2021. Note that there are plans to construct a Parks Canada/Lake Superior National Marine Conservation Centre, but timelines are not certain.



# Ontario Travel Information Centres (OTICs)



PROVINCIALY OPERATED TRAVEL INFORMATION CENTRES: **9**

Director, Garlene Kubisheskie

✉ garlene.kubisheskie@ontario.ca

(5 YEAR-ROUND / 4 SEASONAL) Effective June 1, 2024 – Updated August 26, 2024

## YEAR-ROUND: **5**

Travel Information Centre	Address	Hours
<b>Bainville</b> ✉ ontariotravel.bainville@ontario.ca ☎ 613-347-3498 / Fax: 613-347-3435	22064 North Service Road K0C 1E0 (Hwy 401 Westbound 1 km west of Ontario/ Quebec Border)	Daily: 9 am – 5 pm
<b>Niagara Falls</b> ✉ ontariotravel.niagarafalls@ontario.ca ☎ 905-358-3221 / Fax: 905-358-6441	5355 Stanley Ave. L2E 7C2	Monday to Saturday: 9 am – 5 pm
<b>Sault Ste. Marie</b> ✉ ontariotravel.ssm@ontario.ca ☎ 705-945-6941 / Fax: 705-945-6943	261 Queen St. West P6A 1A3	Tuesday to Saturday: 9 am – 5 pm Effective September 2nd – Monday to Saturday 9 am – 5 pm
<b>Tilbury</b> ✉ ontariotravel.tilbury@ontario.ca ☎ 519-682-9501 / Fax: 519-682-9115	62 Highway 401 Eastbound Tilbury, Ontario N0P 2L0 ⚠ Canada Post Deliveries for Tilbury to be sent to Windsor Travel Centre	Tuesday to Saturday: 9 am – 5 pm
<b>Toronto – Union Station</b> ✉ ontariotravel.toronto@ontario.ca ☎ 416-314-5899 / Fax: 416- 314-5901	65 Front Street West, Toronto Union Station, Main Floor M5J 1E6 (Next to Skywalk/York Street Entrance)  ⚠ Regular mail and small packages can be sent to 65 Front St West. <b>LARGE packages &amp; deliveries</b> must be sent to the Barrie Centre (address above) clearly marked for TORONTO – UNION STATION	Tuesday to Saturday: 9 am – 5 pm

## SEASONAL: 4

Travel Information Centre	Address	Hours
<b>Barrie</b> ✉ ontariotravel.barrie@ontario.ca ☎ 705-725-7280 Toll Free: 1-800-567-1140 Fax: (705) 725-7285	(Hwy 400 & Mapleview Dr. East) 21 Mapleview Drive East L4N 9A9 ⚠ TORONTO UNION large deliveries should be sent to this address marked UNION	As of June 4, 2024: Tuesday to Thursday: 9am – 5pm Mid-October to June 2025: CLOSED
<b>Hawkesbury</b> ✉ ontariotravel.hawkesbury@ontario.ca ☎ 613-674-2000 / Fax: 613-674-2689	777 Highway 417, RR # 1 Chute a Blondeau K0B 1B0	As of June 5, 2024: Wednesday to Sunday: 9am – 5pm Labour Day to June 2025: CLOSED
<b>Pigeon River</b> ✉ ontariotravel.pigeonriver@ontario.ca ☎ 807-964- 2094 / Fax: 807-964-2029	7671 Hwy 61 (at US/Canada Border) Neebing P7L 0A2	As of June 5, 2024: Wednesday to Sunday: 9am – 5pm Labour Day to June 2025: CLOSED
<b>Windsor</b> ✉ ontariotravel.windsor@ontario.ca ☎ 519-973-1338 / Fax: 519-973-1341	110 Park St. East N9A 3A9	As of June 4, 2024: Tuesday to Thursday: 9am – 5pm Labour Day to June 2025: CLOSED



**Please do not send mail to these locations during the off-season.** It will unfortunately be returned as Canada Post will not hold it until opening day.



## Information Not Known

The following TICs did not respond to several requests for information:

- **Cochrane Travel Information**
- **Mattawa Information Centre** (however, it is known from an initial discussion that a redesign of the centre's dated gateway sign is required. For follow up in 2025).
- **Temiskaming Shores Travel Information Centre**
- **White River Travel Information Centre**

## TIC Online Hub

The 2018 Travel Information Centre Project recommended the creation of an online TIC Hub, a web portal, hosted on the DNO website that would serve as an online resource for TIC staff in the North.

It was recommended that it also have a separate section for TIC managers that would serve as a toolkit information on funding options, training documentation and Human Resources tools including job descriptions and performance evaluations.

The TIC Hub was developed in 2019 and hosted on the DNO website using Dropbox and a single login. Instructions on how to keep the inventories up to date was included.

Because there is a single login, it is not known how many TICs have been using the Hub to access information and to update their information. In discussions with the sub-regional leads and the TIC staff, however, it appears that the Hub is not much known therefore not much used. In training delivered annually to TIC staff through DNO and TEN, the Hub is not mentioned as a resource. There was only the 2018 plan in the managers' section.

The 2018 project document noted that online information on destinations in the North is hard to find as "the websites all vary in content, design and ease of use"; hence, the need for a comprehensive hub of information.

From the 2024 in depth interviews of TIC managers, the TIC Hub has not seen uptake from the TICs, and it is time consuming for DNO staff to ensure the information is up to date. In addition, there have been few/no resources for managers entered into the Hub beyond the 2018 plan itself. Some documents were recently updated and added to the Hub.

It is recommended that the Hub be removed from the DNO site and any resources for managers be housed in the "Resources" section of the DNO site. To ensure that TIC staff have access to information that is as accessible and current as possible, it is further recommended that the sub-regional leads be asked to provide a list of links to their recommended sites that provide the best possible information for visitors on their sub-region. TIC staff who have access to computers or a phone can load the links from all the sub-regions onto their computers and/or phones. Those few who may not have access to computers or a phone can still provide of the list to visitors. This is offered as a short-term solution while the logistics of providing touch screen kiosks to the TICs are fleshed out.



# Washrooms

Northern Ontario TIC operators report that washrooms are a major reason for travellers to want to visit a Travel Information Centre. With fewer centres open and only eight operating year-round, the availability of washrooms is a matter of great concern. However, washroom facilities are offered by the Ontario Ministry of Transportation across the North, alleviating this issue, at least to some extent.

## Northern Ontario – MTO Rest Areas with Washroom Facilities

**TOTAL: 19 FACILITIES\***

(Source: Ontario 511)

\*Year-round rest area on Highway 527 at junction of Hwy. 811 to open soon. No date set yet. Additionally, MTO is currently undertaking a Rest Area project expansion, with several new locations planned. They recommend directing the traveling public to the Ontario 511 site for the most up-to-date information regarding Rest Areas. TIC sites are not intended for public access and should not be advertised as Rest Areas.

Name	Hwy	Direction	Location	Type	Operating Dates	Truck Parking	Lavatory	Barrier Free
Airport Park Rest Area	11	NB	500 m. S. of Majalati Rd., Iroquois Falls	Rest Area	May 15-Nov. 15	•	•	
Argon Park	17	EB	38 km. W. of Jct. 11/17, between Raith and Upsala	Picnic Park	Year-round	•	•	•
Atlantic Arctic Watershed	11	SB	70.4 km. W. of Jct. 11/17	Rest Area	Year-round	•	•	
Batchawana TIC	17	EB	61 km. W. of Sault Ste. Marie, 2.5 km. E. of hwy. 563	TIC but not operational	Year-round	•	•	•
Blind River TIC	17	WB	2 km. E. of Blind River	Picnic Park	Year-round	•	•	•
Brake Check Area	11	SB	2.4 km. N. of Jct. 11/17, Algonquin Avenue intersection	Rest Area	Year-round	•	•	•
Bunny Lake	71	NB	16 km. N of Sioux Narrows	Picnic Park	Victoria Day to Thanksgiving	•	•	•
Eagle Lake	17	EB	.6 km. E. of Hwy. 105, Vermillion Bay	Picnic Park	Victoria Day to Thanksgiving	•	•	•
Klotz Lake	11	WB	34.8 km. W of Jct. 625/11	Picnic Park	Victoria Day to Thanksgiving	•	•	•
Little Joe Lake Rest Area	17	EB	55 km. E. of Kenora	Rest Area	Victoria Day to Thanksgiving	•	•	
Lodge Lake	17	EB	44 km. E. of Ignace, Hwy. 17/599	Picnic Park	Year-round	•	•	•
Manitouwadge	17	WB	Jct. 17/614	Rest Area	Year-round	•	•	
Marathon	17	EB	4 km. E. of Peninsula Road, Marathon	TIC Lay-by Area	Year-round	•	•	
Mississauga River Park	17	WB	12.5 W. of Blind River	Picnic Park	May-October	•	•	•
Nipissing Lookout	17	WB	16 km. W. of North Bay	Picnic Park	May-October	•	•	•
Pearl	11	SB	.9 km. W. of Pearl Yard	Picnic Park	Victoria Day to Thanksgiving	•	•	•
Ryland Rest Area	11	WB	8 km. E. of Hwy. 663	Rest Area	Year-round	•	•	
Wawa TIC	101	SB	2 km. S. of Wawa	TIC	Year-round	•	•	•
Wild Goose Park	11	WB	26 km. W. of former 584 & 11, Shuniah	Picnic Park	Victoria Day - Thanksgiving	•	•	•





# Best Practices

## Our TransCanada Link

A Road to the Soo in '52



**A TOWN WITHOUT A ROAD OUT**  
Prior to 1950 and the opening of the highway, the townspeople of Wawa traveled to and from their hometown via steamboat on Lake Superior (until 1940) or the Algoma Central Railway (after 1952).

From as early as 1920, residents of Wawa were promised "a road out" by provincial and federal officials (usually just before an election). These same politicians were making the same promises to other communities as well. For many years delegates from both Chapleau and Wawa signed separate petitions and met with highway officials to plead their arguments for requiring the highway through their communities. For decades, however, Chapleau businessmen were pushing for the highway to come through their railway town. Wawa residents pressed for the more scenic route north through the city of Sault Ste. Marie.

By 1950 the highway stretched 10 km north of Sault Ste. Marie to Montreal River. During the Depression of the 1930s, hundreds of men worked on this section of roadway, one foot at a time for 18 cents a day. During World War II, construction crews of conscientious objectors helped push the road to the Agawa River. There it stopped, near the base of the Agawa Promontory, only 40 km from Wawa. The mountain of an ancient Precambrian rock was deemed impassable. Known as "The Gap", the landscape from Agawa to Wawa was defined as too rugged and the rock as too hard. A portion of the Agawa Hill is shown to the right. It was easier to navigate the highway through the Rocky Mountains. Western engineers were able to follow the east-west river valleys and blast through the softer sedimentary formations of the geologically younger western mountain range.



You are standing at the site of the completion of the last link of the Lake Superior section of the Trans-Canada Highway. It was officially opened for traffic on September 17, 1960.



### OPERATION MICHIPICOTEN

In 1951, a publicity campaign known as "Operation Michipicoten" attempted to open the eyes of the media and southern politicians to the remoteness of the isolated Wawa townships. Four men accompanied by two dogs followed the directions on a 1955 surveying map from Wawa to Montreal River. They made regular reports via a portable radio and made the rugged overland trip in 17 days. (Left: veterinarian John Owen, Denis Baker, Edward Hyman, George Kestell, and Paul Villeneuve.)

Then the real battle started. Agawa like "a road to the Soo in '52" and "Out of the sticks in '50" became regular clients for residents alike who were excited by the endless possibilities promised by "a road out".

### CLOSING THE GAP

A rough 40-kilometre route from Agawa to Wawa was finally cut through the rock and vast forests of eastern Lake Superior in 1959. Unfortunately this "road" was so rough around the edges that a trip to Sault Ste. Marie took 8 hours.

In December of 1959 the first cars from Wawa made the daring journey to the South. No bridge across the Old woman River means that creative Wawa travelers constructed a homemade log bridge.

### OFFICIAL OPENING

September 17, 1960, will be the red-letter day in Wawa's future history for it marked the official opening of the magnificent Lake Superior Highway. Premier Frost, Transport Minister Hoan, the Hon. Fred Clark, Hon. Diego Cifuentes, Harry Lyons M.P., and several other Members of Parliament journeyed to Wawa to officiate at the impressive ribbon-cutting and dedication ceremonies. Even the steady downpour of rain failed to dampen the enthusiasm of the thousands, including many neighbours from south of the border, who came to help celebrate another milestone in the long and romantic history of Wawa and Michipicoten? (Agawa "Survival: Land of the Big Cooner," published 1962)



Agawa Hill





## Best Practices

### WAWA TRAVEL INFORMATION CENTRE SHOWCASING THE TOWN'S ARTISTS

Faced with financial challenges, the Wawa Tourist Information Centre decided to diversify its retail offering with great success.

The municipality's Director of Community Services approached a number of local artists to provide local, handmade items for sale in the centre in exchange for a 30% commission. Today, a total of 32 of these micro businesses offer their wares in the centre and revenues have increased from \$25,000 to \$100,000 per year, becoming an important economic development tool for the artists and raising much-needed funds for the centre.

Rules are in place to ensure that all the items provided represent the town and the region. For example, a local soap maker utilizes local natural product in the production of the soaps. Shoppers often express an interest in meeting the artists and often are able to do so, enabling visitors to have an authentic local connection and thus enhancing their Wawa experience overall.



*From a visitor's perspective, the tourism information centre (TIC) plays a big role in getting to Wawa. For many visitors, it is their introduction to the community and sets the foundation for positive visitor experiences by providing warm, welcoming, and personalized information so visitors can make the most of their time, along with aligning the visitor's interests with reasons to stay longer. The local food, crafts, and art on sale at the TIC help to create a sense of place, add cultural value, and show community pride.*

— Wawa 5-year tourism plan 2023





## Best Practices



📷 Outdoor Interpretive Panels

### BLIND RIVER TRAVEL INFORMATION CENTRE: GETTING IT RIGHT THE SECOND TIME

When the time came to fix what was ailing the Blind River Travel Information Centre, there was a lot to fix.

“The facility was embarrassing. Deteriorating, grungy, and it was the first thing that people would see when they pulled into town. It created a terrible impression while we worked so hard to improve our other recreation and tourism assets in Blind River”, says Karen Bittner, the town’s Director of Facilities and Community Services.

The town’s leadership put a lot of thought into what would ensure that the rejuvenated TIC would meet the needs of a variety of travellers while acting as a source of both pride and revenues for the town itself. Safety, convenience and aesthetics were all taken into account during the planning phase. The consensus was that, this time, they would “do it right”. The updated strategy aligned with many studies, as well as aims to reduce burden on local ratepayers.

The refurbished TIC is now a landmark in the town and will be proudly sharing a parking lot with the new Comfort Inn and Suites that will be opening in 2027. Accessibility was top of mind in planning the facility itself as well as the new sidewalks, made of asphalt

and concrete. There is a bicycle repair area with a pump and a potable water dispenser just outside the building as well as a picnic spot, benches, pet friendly green spaces and an RV dumping site. Inside, in addition to the travel information and friendly travel counsellors, there are local crafts and souvenirs for sale along with a beverage fridge and local caramel corn and artisan chocolate bars. Staff have a fresh water station available for thirsty dogs that are out for a walk. The TIC, including washrooms, is open 365 days a year, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. in the summer and 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. in the winter. Two full time staff members and seasonal students make it all happen.

The town estimates that there are as many visitors enjoying the outside areas of the TIC as go inside. In light of this, fun and informative interpretive panels have been placed in strategic locations around the building.

Blind River has shown that old dogs can learn new tricks; it is a progressive rural Northern Ontario community willing to learn and evolve with market trends and ever-changing traveller needs.

# Best Practices



## TERRY FOX TRAVEL INFORMATION CENTRE POP UPS & ACTIVATION

In the summer of 2024, the City of Thunder Bay's Terry Fox Travel Information Centre hosted a Thunder Bay Border Cats pop up and an activation day.

This turned out to be very well received. After participating in a Destination Northern Ontario Best Practices Mission and seeing hotel staff in Duluth, Minnesota wearing Bentleyville, the local festival of lights, t-shirts, Tourism Thunder Bay's Coordinator of Convention and Visitor Services decided to give it a try at home. They partnered with the Thunder Bay Border Cats Baseball team, and their staff wore their t-shirts on game days throughout the summer. They also organized an activation day with their mascot, Boomer, and a few players visiting the Terry Fox Centre. It was a big hit, and they are now looking to connect with other local sports teams and events for similar partnerships next year. They're also hoping to wear Thunder Wolves Hockey jerseys in the winter.



# Recommended Priorities for Destination Northern Ontario in Support of Northern Ontario TICs

The proposed priorities for Destination Northern Ontario have been drawn from the 2014 Northern Ontario Wayfinding Plan, the 2018 Northern Ontario Travel Information Centre Plan, the Algoma Kinniwabi Travel Association 2024 iPad Distribution Final Report and the 2024 plan refresh for Northern Ontario research which included in depth interviews with TIC managers and DMO leaders and desk research to draw out trends, best practices and lessons learned.

This section provides recommendations in several different categories; however, the top priorities have been made clear; namely access to timely information on tourism assets across Northern Ontario (for both staff and visitors), wayfinding and staffing (including recruitment and retention but in particular, training).

## As stated in the 2018 plan:

*"The needs of the visitor sometimes differ from the mandate of the local TIC as the visitor is seeking broader regional information... Some communities do work together; however, the overall knowledge of other TICs in the North appears limited".*

## RECOMMENDATION #1



### Timely access to accurate information for visitors and staff

The 2014 Northern Ontario Wayfinding Strategy recommended that TIC staff be provided with "fewer, better tools" with which TIC staff can serve their visitors. In response, Destination Northern Ontario provided a number of these tools to the staff.

However, the recommendations to provide more QR codes on materials and to develop self-serve kiosks have not yet been implemented and need to be considered as part of the TIC plan refresh implementation. These tools will be especially important for Northern Ontario's TICs as the issue of staffing the centres continues to be a problem.

The provision of touch screen kiosks with information on all of Northern Ontario is recommended as the number one priority.



A modern touchscreen kiosk solution is clearly a top priority for travel information centres in Northern Ontario. The kiosk would provide an interactive and user-friendly interface for visitors to access information about regional attractions, events, and travel itineraries. It will also serve as a training platform for travel centre staff.

Information Centres are hampered in serving visitors by limited availability of information. Traditional brochures often lack the necessary detail or interactivity for today's travellers.

Printed materials can become outdated quickly, leading to inaccurate information and opening hours and staff availability can limit visitor access to information.

The kiosks would ideally feature interactive maps, visualising local points of interest, landmarks, and transportation options. They would also have multimedia content, showcasing videos, photos, and virtual tours of attractions and itineraries and cater to a diverse range of travellers with various language needs. They would link to DNO's Whereabouts operator database for managing all business profiles, and the portal for videos and itineraries.

Importantly they would have the capacity for real-time updates, ensuring that information is accurate and up to date at all times,

It is recognized that developing the touch screen kiosks for the Northern Ontario TICs may take some time. In the meantime, it is recommended that a simplified database of Northern Ontario TICs, using the information gathered in this plan refresh and input from the DMOs be developed.



↑ Modern Touch-screen Kiosk

Housed on the DNO website, provided to the sub-regions and DMOs for posting on their websites and provided in hard copy to the TICs, this database would contain the TIC name, location, phone number, operating days and hours and services provided. This would be a helpful interim step. It is recommended that the Hub be taken down from the DNO website as it is not used by the TICs.

It has also been suggested that the iPads used in the TIC surveys administered by Algoma Country could also be used as a valuable source of information if they are loaded with publications and browser bookmarks with links to relevant tourism websites.



**RECOMMENDATION #2**



**Enhance Wayfinding**

Ten years later, many of the recommendations of the 2014 Northern Ontario Tourism Wayfinding Strategy still resonate with respect to both signage and travel information centres.

As a follow-up to recommendations made in the strategy, Destination Northern Ontario applied to FedNor for funds in support of a Northern Ontario bilingual community wayfinding program for visitors. Approved and underway in June 2017, the partnership enabled Destination Northern Ontario to offer 2/3rds of the funding required to its regional wayfinding partners. Ultimately, \$1,275,000 was made available for wayfinding for visitors in Northern Ontario.

**A comprehensive program of attractive and informative wayfinding signs was put in place in the following communities:**

- Atikokan
- Blind River
- East Ferris
- Greenstone
- Hearst
- Kenora
- Nipigon
- Red Rock
- Sault Ste. Marie
- Schreiber
- Sioux Lookout
- Temiskaming Shores
- Terrace Bay
- Thessalon
- Thunder Bay
- Timmins
- Wawa
- White River

From word of mouth, it is clear that the provision of these signs has served to greatly enhance the visitor experience in these communities. Given that the TICs in Fort Frances and Nipigon and two in Greenstone have now been closed, good signage is especially important to direct and reassure visitors.

This project was the recipient of a TIAO Award of Excellence in 2018.

A missing piece, however, is the provision of gateway signage, another recommendation of the strategy. These signs were to be placed “on the highway at entrance points to a region or sub-region, gateway signs provide a welcoming

landmark for regions and set the tone for other wayfinding signage through their shape, color and typography. Often these are customized to reflect a cultural aspect of the place”. This opportunity needs to be explored moving forward.

**The locations of the gateway signs would be:**

- Pigeon River, South of Thunder Bay
- Highway 69, North of the French River
- Manitoba/Ontario border
- Mattawa, coming from Ottawa
- South of North Bay on Highway 11

**This can be achieved through Canadian TODS**

**Area Profile Signs:**

King’s Highways - Special high-graphics board with optional programmable information or icon tab. Offset to fence line.

**To be eligible for signing as an area profile sign, the operation must:**

- identify a single sponsor responsible for the sign
- show that the sponsor has drafted a current and comprehensive tourism marketing strategy that considers Destination Ontario market research and regional (i.e., RTOs) marketing priorities.
- demonstrate that the sign supports existing/ established marketing priorities of the region
- demonstrate that the application is based on cooperative efforts of local/regional tourism authorities and represents consensus of same (while RTO participation is not a requirement, MTCS strongly encourages applicants to consider opportunities for collaboration.)
- demonstrate involvement of (and endorsement by) local MTCS staff

**The Themed Area Must**

- have a set of cultural, physical, and social characteristics that create a sense of regional identity
- contain an adequate tourism infrastructure to support tourism development (including all utilities, roads, business services, and other social services necessary to support tourism businesses and to cater to tourists’ needs)
- be larger than just one community or attraction
- contain existing attractions, or have the potential to support the development of sufficient attractions to draw tourists

**Note:** Static tabs (panel) will be permitted to feature a destination’s corresponding RTO name or logo below the Area Profile Sign.

Two additional Area Profile Signs, 1 in each direction, will be permitted where space permits to provide a total of 2 English signs and 2 French signs. This will be permitted across the province, both in and outside of French Language designated areas.

Bilingual signing is available.

In addition to this, several TICs indicated that they require signage; namely, Red Lake, Dryden, Manitoulin Island, Mattawa, Temagami, Timmins and Iron Bridge. This can be addressed through the DNO partnership program or the DNO NOTIS signage refurbishment program. The Manitoulin sign was completed in 2024.





**RECOMMENDATION #3**

**“Ask A Northern Ontario Local” Swag**

Many TIC managers indicated that they would appreciate the provision of themed swag items for the TIC staff including caps, t-shirts, vests, neckerchiefs and/or buttons in that they would both help to contribute to unified look and feel across the North, but they could also alleviate concerns among students about accessing affordable and professional work clothing.

They also liked the idea of using these items to encourage visitors to “speak with a local”. There are countless websites that provide tips on how to meet and engage with locals while on vacation.

**States The Meticulous Traveler** ([www.themeticuloustraveler.com](http://www.themeticuloustraveler.com)).

*“Locals provide insight into an area that infinite online research could never.”*

**This was echoed by the 2014 Northern Ontario Wayfinding Plan which said:**

*“Especially in remote areas, visitors are looking for reassurance that they’re in the right place or headed in the right direction, and information to make their experience more enjoyable.*

*Of all the information we’ve covered so far in this report, the most important wayfinding channel is the friendly face at the visitor’s centre. That person needs to be supported with education, funding and current information.”*



The centre managers who were interviewed expressed some frustration in their ability to train or encourage students, especially new recruits, to approach and greet visitors. Having the information clearly stated on an article of clothing and/or a badge should help to alleviate at least some of this.

**RECOMMENDATION #4**



## Tracking and Measuring Return on Investment for the TIC Operator and Funders

In interviews and through the Algoma survey of TICs who survey their visitors, travel information centre managers spoke of the difficulty in persuading their municipal governments of their value. This was also referenced in the 2018 TIC plan.

The TIC managers said that the funding/ budget/cost of operations without immediate proof of ROI was often hard to justify to their municipal councils. It was determined through the 2018 TIC plan that surveying visitors to determine their trip details including expenditures so that TICs could report results to councils could best address this issue.

However, participation in the Northern Ontario TIC survey of visitors continues to decline. TIC Centre managers spoke of “survey fatigue” post COVID and the reluctance of visitors to provide information to “government or organizations”.

Asked how to address this, the managers told Algoma that in 2025, the Northern Ontario

Visitor Survey should be shorter with 10 questions or less, requiring an analysis of what is needed in the way of information instead of what is wanted. It was also

suggested that paper copies be provided with hard copies of surveys being entered manually into the survey instrument by staff. The digital survey option would still be offered. Incentives for visitors to complete the survey should be discussed.

These recommendations should be pursued as should the prominent posting of a QR code that would lead a visitor to the new survey in prime locations. Mention of incentives, if it is decided to offer these, should be included in the posting.



## RECOMMENDATION #5



### Training

The 2014 Northern Ontario Wayfinding strategy stated that *“making it easy to recruit, train and retain summer help was identified as a major hurdle, and a significant need”*.

The 2014 Northern Ontario Wayfinding strategy stated that “making it easy to recruit, train and retain summer help was identified as a major hurdle, and a significant need”. This issue remains a problem in Northern Ontario, particularly in communities where well-paying mining jobs are available to students.

The 2018 TIC plan identified that staffing and training issues were still problematic. The 2018 strategy again pointed to this as an issue as did the 2024 Algoma report on the surveying of visitors through the TICs.

The TIC operators who administer surveys to visitors though Algoma recommended to Algoma that training be scheduled earlier before the start dates for the TICs and that DNO/TEN explore TICs’ training needs and re-develop sessions as appropriate.

## RECOMMENDATION #6



### Northern Ontario TIC Networking

Many TIC managers expressed interest in being able to communicate with other TICs, but most said that they lack sufficient time to do so independently. Options to enhance communications among TIC managers include:

- Feature occasional TIC stories (best practices, challenges, trends, etc.) and ensure all TICs are on circulation list
- Form TIC team and meet quarterly, share minutes with all TICs, invite their input
- Add annual TIC award category to Northern Ontario Tourism Industry Leader awards



A large, light gray graphic of a person's silhouette is centered on the page. It consists of a rounded rectangle with a smaller rounded rectangle inside, representing a head and torso. The text is overlaid on this graphic.

**TIC Inventory Atlas  
Placeholder**









#### Our Websites

**Destination Northern Ontario** / [destinationnorthernontario.ca](http://destinationnorthernontario.ca)

**Tourism Excellence North** / [tourismexcellencenorth.ca](http://tourismexcellencenorth.ca)

**Domestic Marketing** / [northernontario.travel](http://northernontario.travel)

**International Travel Trade** / [northernontarioitt.com](http://northernontarioitt.com)

#### Contact Us

**T:** 705.575.9779

**E:** [info@destinationnorthernontario.ca](mailto:info@destinationnorthernontario.ca)

#### More Information

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