

Tourism Northern Ontario

WAYFINDING

STRATEGY DOCUMENT



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People get lost. We fix that.™



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PURPOSE OF THIS PROJECT

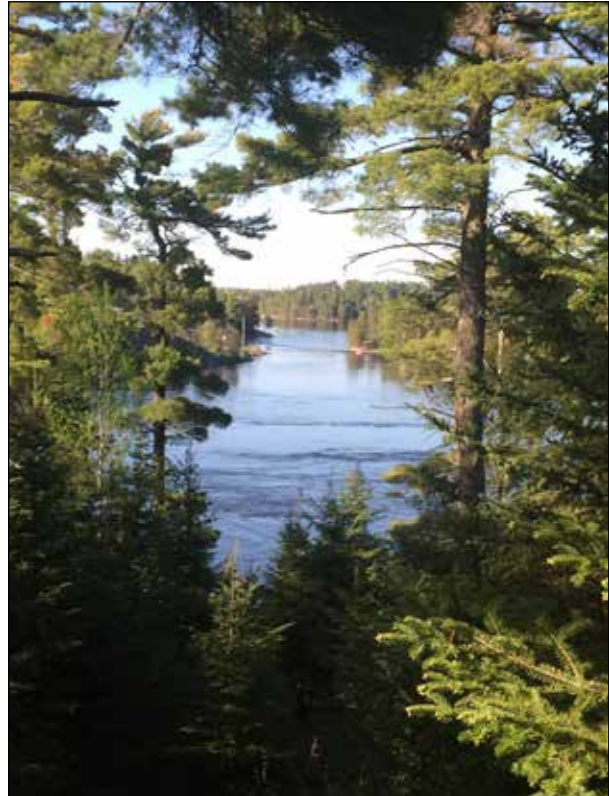
Discovering Ontario: A Report on the

Future of Tourism commissioned 13 external studies to better understand the broader issues that impact tourism and to help inform the recommendations of the Discovering Ontario report. Each external study examined a particular issue, from global trends to the impact of festivals on the economy. Each helped inform the recommendations in the report.

One of the reports was the Ontario Wayfinding Research Study, which recommended an Ontario-wide wayfinding strategy. The report recommended that the province of Ontario provide funding for local feasibility studies and wayfinding strategies, with eligibility targeted to municipalities, counties, registered tourism organizations, etc. to assist regions in improving wayfinding in Ontario that is consistent with other provincial initiatives such as the TODS/Logo program. In doing this, the following objectives would be fulfilled:

- Foster collaboration by allowing only one designated “applicant” per region.
- Phased approach with pilot programs to demonstrate success/best practices.
- Build in flexibility to accommodate highly diverse local contexts.

The report stated that “This combination of leadership and support will ensure that the Province uses targeted investment to enhance prospects for successful and collaborative wayfinding initiatives.”



Springtime on the Tunnel Bridge Trail, Kenora

This will help lead to an improved wayfinding system in Northern Ontario by:

- Ensuring that there is an effective visitor wayfinding system in place.
- Providing consistent and reinforced wayfinding via multiple channels.
- Using best practice design guidelines to guide wayfinding program features.
- Ensuring that wayfinding initiatives are consistent with MTO and TODS/Logo programs.
- Coordinating local, regional and provincial stakeholder wayfinding efforts.
- Leveraging private sector and community investment and technology.

This project was completed with the support of:



“Our region is only as good as the stories that are told about it.”



Example of current vehicular wayfinding in Sault Ste. Marie

Corbin Design was selected as the consultant to develop the Northern Ontario tourism wayfinding strategy.

This strategy will play a vital role in determining wayfinding requirements across Northern Ontario: what can realistically be accomplished, identify roles and responsibilities, respect jurisdictions, encourage collaboration, as well as clearly identify an implementation plan, required budgets and how to leverage funding opportunities.

This strategy looks at wayfinding from a broad viewpoint including physical signage, digital wayfinding, visitor information centres, border issues and any other identified related areas of concern.

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We thank them all for their passion and commitment to improving tourism outcomes in Northern Ontario.

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Channels

The means by which visitors to Northern Ontario receive wayfinding information. These include print, digital and signage media, as well as verbal instructions and training programs for Visitor Centre staff.

Northern Ontario

A general term that refers to either the entirety of tourism organizations within RTO 13 or the physical geographic boundaries of RTO 13.

RTO

Regional Tourism Organization

Stakeholder

An individual with interest in enhancing the visitor experience who has participated in the research process for this strategy, or who intends to participate in the realization of its recommendations.

Standards

Graphic documents showing the design, functional intent and specifications for wayfinding channels.

Tourism Operator

An organization or individual involved in a tourism field that will apply the recommendations in this strategy to their business or event. This includes Visitor Centre staff who are trained to share wayfinding information.

Visitor Centre

Any place where a visitor to Northern Ontario can access tourism or wayfinding information, whether or not they're sponsored or maintained by RTOs.

Wayfinding

Direction for People in Motion. The process of developing and sharing logical and orderly information, via multiple channels, to help people find their way to a destination.

HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

The intent of this strategy is to document the disconnects observed between Northern Ontario organizations, Tourism Operators and visitors. We then make broad recommendations on ways to improve wayfinding communications throughout RTO 13. These recommendations are meant to improve the experience of visitors coming to the region, however they are not specific enough to direct visitors to a destination's "front door." These recommendations will result in defined, prioritized projects to address specific wayfinding tactics (see the summary on page 39).

There are two entities for which this strategy is intended:

1. The RTO, TNO, and sub-regions that set standards for communications to visitors, and
2. Tourism Operators who provide specific information to visitors on a daily basis.

In most cases, we have not specified which entities are responsible for planning, funding or implementing these recommendations. Rather, this document defines how wayfinding is most effectively managed, and what changes should be made to bring Northern Ontario closer to the ideal. While we realize that some of the recommendations may be issues that have been discussed and debated for years, we've added them to this document to restate their importance to the visitor experience.

The emphasis of this strategy is to coordinate all communications that contain wayfinding information, and define the individual communications that contain a Northern Ontario "seal of approval." That is, those materials that are most consistently updated, and can be seen as a singular authoritative resource for visitor information whether in signage, printed or digital form.

Once the strategy is discussed and adopted, specific projects will be identified to build standards for the wayfinding channels reviewed in this document.



Visitors are presented with a number of sources for information. These need to be well-organized and current.

Use fewer, better tools
to communicate wayfinding
information to visitors.

GOALS OF THE PROGRAM

1. Increase the **length of stay** of visitors to Northern Ontario
2. Increase **visitor receipts** in Northern Ontario
3. Increase **visitor satisfaction** and thus encourage positive word of mouth and return visits
4. Assure **consistency** across all communication channels

WAYFINDING METRICS

While there are no known Canadian metrics that reflect the success of civic wayfinding, a pilot program could be developed to gather this information as a result of this study. The metrics that follow were assembled from a variety of sources throughout the US and UK.

Asheville, North Carolina

The Convention and Visitors Bureau reports that, of 4076 people surveyed:

- 87% responded that they would explore further if signage and kiosks provided direction to additional attractions.
- 11% stated they would definitely extend their trip by one additional overnight night stay, if new or additional destinations were discovered.
- 70% stated they would consider extending their trip.
- 11% of visitors = 85,241 additional overnight stays in a 3 year period.

Camden New Jersey - Waterfront

- 30% increase in visitation since installation of their wayfinding program.
- Secondary Destinations (those without sufficient visitors to warrant an appearance on vehicular guide signs) tend to see the greatest benefit.
- Wayfinding creates “repeat visitation” by increasing awareness of the depth of destinations.

Lancaster, Pennsylvania

- After installing a city-wide vehicular and pedestrian wayfinding system, attendance at five major destinations in the city increased by 10% in one year.
- The City recorded that name recognition for secondary destinations such as the Art Museum and Central Market increased as a result of the program.

British Research Firm O2 Travel

- Britons annually spend 22 million hours lost while on holiday due to a reluctance to run up data charges while in foreign countries.
- Only 14% of British tourists carry their smartphones with them; the rest choose to leave them in their hotel room.

INTRODUCTION



MTO signs are designed to communicate quickly, allowing drivers to make a decision in advance of the point at which they need to turn or continue straight.



These signs on St. Joseph Island are overloaded with information, causing drivers to stop to read and make a decision. This is not only frustrating, but also can be a safety hazard on busier roads.

Many of the destinations on this sign should be removed, and the owners educated on how best to direct visitors using other communications.

Q. What is wayfinding?

A. **Direction for People in Motion**

Q. What is it NOT?

A. **Tourism marketing, promotion or advertising**

The primary objective of a wayfinding system is to move people through space to their destination. In order to do this, a visitor needs to navigate a logical progression of orderly information, which becomes more detailed as they approach their destination. Once they reach it, they should also be able to orient themselves and simply navigate to other points of interest or need (such as a public washroom).

Much of the confusion visitors experience comes from a basic misunderstanding: when businesses or destinations see directional signage as “advertising,” signs get cluttered; when cluttered, there’s too much information for a visitor to take in quickly, so the signs get ignored. The resulting effect is the exact opposite of the original intent; so it’s important to understand that a desire to add more signs is rarely if ever the correct answer to a wayfinding problem.

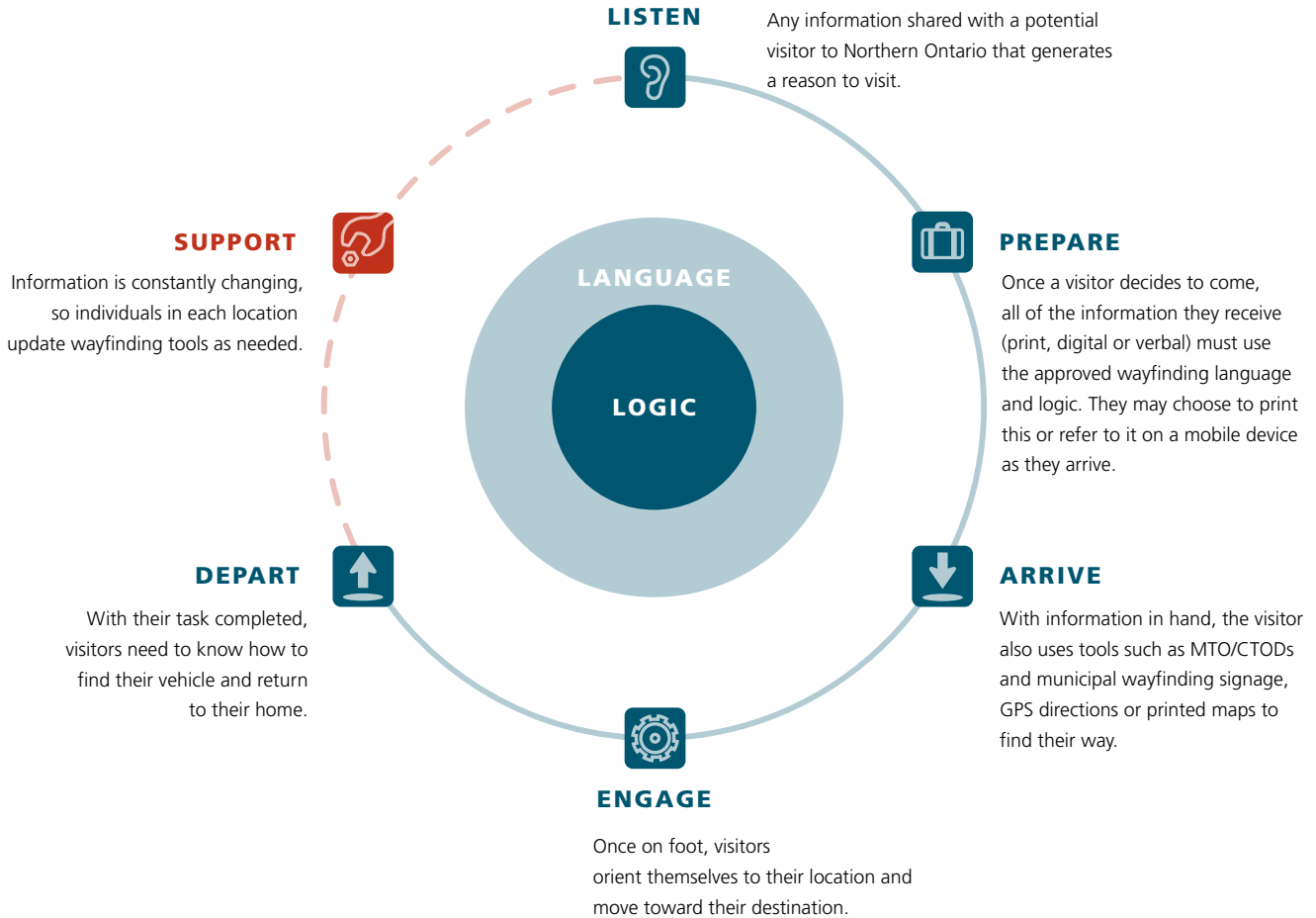
In order to accomplish its objective, a wayfinding system must be simple, clear and effective for residents and visitors. On the next few pages, we’ll explain what a wayfinding system entails.

How do people find their way?

JOURNEY MAP

Visitors to Northern Ontario go through each of the steps in the journey noted below. A wayfinding system uses **simplified logic** to describe how to navigate, and **consistent language** to provide directions.

Each step in this journey involves communications via a variety of channels. The next page outlines those channels, and describes how investments in standardization will enhance the experience of both stakeholders and visitors.



What tools do they use?

WAYFINDING CHANNELS





There are a number of ways that we communicate wayfinding information to Northern Ontario’s visitors. The goal of this strategy is to assure consistency across each of these channels, so that everyone is speaking “from the same page” as they communicate with visitors.

It begins with developing standards for **language** and **logic**, the basis for understanding geography and orienting visitors. A consistent map is the embodiment of those standards, and appears in all channels.

This study demonstrates the ways that channels are currently used by the RTOs. Here, we’ve created an overview of available channels and recommendations for investment on the part of organizations in Northern Ontario and tourism operators to improve the visitor experience.

Fewer, better resources will help simplify information and provide a more consistent experience for all.

When Northern Ontario invests in: ... **tourism operators can access:** ... **and visitors experience:**

When Northern Ontario invests in:	... tourism operators can access:	... and visitors experience:
Standards:		
Consistent language	Correct language	Better, more simplified and more consistent information
Simplified logic	Easy to use logic	
Mapping: graphic standards, applied to all wayfinding channels	Electronic map files, available for editing as needed	
 Digital Tools:		
RTO managed or endorsed Websites:	Correct informational hierarchy:	Access to information on any device
- Mobile enabled	- Available on multiple platforms	Consistent functionality
- Reservation engine	- Built-in functionality	Awareness, cost savings
- Itinerary planner	- Benefits of product packaging	Complete information
- Free & enhanced listings	- Choice of investment level	
 Printed Materials:		
Free & enhanced listings	Choice of investment level	Complete information
Advertising opportunities/QR code	Single advertising investment	Awareness of opportunities/more info
Visitor Centre Kiosk	Fewer, better resources for visitors	Most current, relevant information
Materials distribution plan	Order/stock RTO-approved materials	
 Wayfinding Signage:		
Advocacy with MTO, CTODS	Understand rules, regulations	Consistent information on highways
Municipal signage standards	Signage “toolkit”	Complete information in municipalities
Guidance for planning, design	Understand, plan, design program	Less getting lost
Pricing, implementation guidelines	Raise funds, implement	
Share success stories, examples	Advice from peers	
 Staff Training Programs:		
Point of Purchase information centre	Simplified information	Better information, easily accessed
Programs for Visitor Centre staff	Educational resources	Consistent Visitor Centre experience
Summer intern support	Access to seasonal helpers	Friendly guidance by trained staff

To whom are we speaking?

WAYFINDING AUDIENCES

Northern Ontario Visitors: Who are they?

American/International tourists

- Relatively small segment of visitors
- Higher number in 13b and 13c
- New Money: Higher yield since they pay for meals, lodging, purchase goods and services
- Average receipts of \$375/day while in Northern Ontario

Canadian tourists

- By far the majority of visitors, especially in 13a, 13c
- Near locals who stay with friends/relatives in private homes, cottages or campgrounds
- Contribute the majority of revenue based on purchases made while in Northern Ontario
- Attend festivals, events and attractions at a higher rate than American tourists.

Why do they come?

Over 50% for outdoor activities:

- Fishing dominates; Hunting a smaller segment
 - Strongly focused on the chosen activity
 - Tend not to engage in other activities
 - Predominantly male, average age 52 years
- Nature-based activity second
 - Multi-dimensional tourists
 - Open to other activities while in Northern Ontario: partial to sporting events and music festivals
 - Approaches gender parity, average age 44 years
- Touring is also a large segment
 - Dependent on weather, road conditions, short season
 - Predominantly male, average age 42 years
 - 10% cultural activity attendance (festivals, events).

Where do they go?

a. Fishing/Hunting:			
13a: 42%	13b: 13%		13c: 49%
b. Nature/Active Outdoors:			
13a: 51%	13b: 20%		13c: 37%
c. Culture/Events/Conventions:			
13a: 46%	13b: 20%		13c: 38%



What problems do they experience?

- Passports are required for re-entry into the U.S.;
- Border restrictions problems for international visitors;
- Often have difficulty understanding the distances required for travel, and the amount of time it takes to move between urban centres and/or rural destinations;
- Weather can inhibit visibility of wayfinding information;
- Aging municipal wayfinding systems are sometimes out of date and/or have experienced degradation due to harsh weather conditions;
- Overwhelming information available online and in print that gives conflicting wayfinding information;
- Operators not providing a full/fair exchange on the dollar;
- Lack of clarity by Tourism Operators regarding the correct division of space in RTO 13: promoting Tourism Associations, which are less well defined in terms of wayfinding; and
- Lack of coordination between RTOs and Tourism Operators regarding the information required for wayfinding, and how wayfinding works.

Source:
Overview of Tourism Opportunities for Northern Ontario (RTO 13)
 July 2014

What do they need to know?

INFORMATION HIERARCHY

The Regional Tourism Organizations (RTOs) were designed to pave the way for a stronger, more competitive tourism industry. There are 13 RTOs throughout Ontario; they exist to provide leadership and coordination to tourism stakeholders within their region.

This is the foundational **logic** of Northern Ontario, which becomes part of the **language** we use to provide direction to visitors throughout our region. By understanding and using these levels as we communicate, we encourage a more consistent visitor experience.

A visitor that understands the basic logic of their location is empowered to navigate on their own, using whatever channels they choose. Our job is to make sure that the information they receive is relevant, accurate and simple.

Of the five levels listed below, Level 3 is comprised of organizations that have been created to *promote* specific areas to visitors. As such, they have limited wayfinding value since their boundaries are difficult to define. Accurate wayfinding information begins with Levels 1 and 2, with Level 3 used as supporting information.

HIERARCHY LEVEL	EXAMPLES	NOTES
1 Tourism Region	Northern Ontario	RTO 13
2 Tourism Sub-Region	Northeastern Ontario Algoma Country* Northwest Ontario	RTO 13a RTO 13b RTO 13c
3 Tourism Association	Sunset Country Lake of the Woods North of Superior Travel Ass'n. Manitoulin and the Islands etc.	These exist to establish marketing efforts for specific areas and activities. While they represent physical divisions of space, they have limited wayfinding value since their boundaries are difficult for the traveller to define.
4 Municipality/ Unincorporated Rural Area	Atikokan Blind River Fort Frances Moosonee St. Charles Sudbury Wawa, etc.	These political subdivisions are identified by defined boundaries and supported with MTO signage. They generally appear in most other wayfinding channels such as Google maps, Websites, GPS, printed maps, etc.
5 Destination/Attraction	Prince Arthur's Landing St. Joseph Island Kakabeka Falls Science North Algoma Central Railway, etc.	Includes for-profit and not-for profit entities: natural attractions, event spaces, entertainment destinations, central business districts, lodging, outdoor activities, airports, etc.

*Officially referred to as Sault Ste. Marie Algoma

OBSERVATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

OBSERVATION

RTO 13 Culture

Because the hierarchy noted on the previous page has been established for a relatively short period of time, the culture hasn't fully completed its transition.

Level 3 is the most confusing to visitors because boundaries are undefined/overlapping, and they represent "signature landscapes" rather than hard-edged geographic areas.

Visitor Centres

At the time of this study, there are 122 seasonally active visitor centres across Northern Ontario. They range in size from the large Ontario Tourism Information Centre (OTIC) at the Sault border to small operations in more remote areas of our region. Consequently there is a large variation in the type of information available at each.

However, the Visitor Centre's operational size does not change the expectation of the visitor when seeking answers. The most effective and trusted way to share information is to have a person local to the area available to answer questions. Research in all areas of Northern Ontario showed that the basic questions are the most frequently asked:

- "How far is it to our final destination?"
- "Where can we stay in the local area?"
- "What should we do while we're here?"
- "Can you recommend a place to eat?"
- "How far is it to the next gas station?"

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.

RECOMMENDATION

The structure for this transition is in place, and has been for some time. Use this strategy document to build tools for awareness and education at all levels.

Use Northeastern Ontario, Algoma Country or Northwest Ontario as the starting point for wayfinding. Use the Tourism Association name only as secondary to more well-defined spaces.

The most efficient investment that can be made for wayfinding would be to **re-open the OTIC Visitor Centres that have been closed**, and keep them open for the balance of the primary tourist season in each area.

The second most efficient investment would be for each RTO to **support Visitor Centres with summer students** in locations that are warranted. Making it easy to recruit, train and retain summer help was identified as a major hurdle, and a significant need.

Build a set of tools for training that can be easily shared with all Visitor Centre staff:










- Training materials and practices modeled on those required for the busiest OTIC staff
- **Identify fewer, better tools** that Visitor Centre staff can use as an introduction to the RTO and the local area. In some cases these materials have already been produced and are updated regularly. It's simply a matter of identifying them and featuring them for individuals entering the Visitor Centre.
- Design and produce a "point of purchase" style display to stock these materials: either freestanding or counter top mounted.
- On this display, locate QR codes or Web addresses so visitors with smartphones can easily access more information.
- Within each Visitor Centre, provide a wall-mounted map of RTO 13 and sub-regions for easy reference.
- Consider designing a self-serve unmanned kiosk information booth as a possible alternative to manned Visitor Centres.

Fewer, better tools for wayfinding

RECOMMENDATION

We've identified the following tools for inclusion in a proposed "point of purchase" style display at Visitor Centres. Note that several gaps need to be addressed.

These should be the most current, authoritative, comprehensive and relevant resources for visitor information.

Level	Print	Web	Mobile
Province	Best of Ontario guide 	ontariotravel.net 	Discover ON Mobile App 
RTO 13	Does not exist	northernontario.travel 	Does not exist
RTO 13A	"Legendary" Guides (3 total) 	northeasternontario.com 	Does not exist
RTO 13B	Algoma 2014 Travel Guide 	algomacountry.com 	Does not exist
RTO 13C	Does not exist	visitnorthwestontario.com 	Does not exist

OBSERVATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

OBSERVATION

Border Crossings

In order to attract visitors from the U.S. and other countries, information required for border crossings is critical to a positive experience. This information is available in multiple forms, multiple channels. Much of it was last updated in 2007, when changes to identification requirements were implemented.

We learned from Canadian Border Patrol that visitors crossing into Canada need to have a defined destination and timeline in mind in order to pass through. For those who come to Canada for the day (to shop in Sault Ste. Marie, for example), they'll need to have complete information prior to their crossing attempt.

Wayfinding Signage

Signage is the most visible, the most logical and the most extensive embodiment of wayfinding in Northern Ontario. In our research, signage was consistently mentioned as the most frustrating aspect in supporting the visitor experience, because of the bureaucratic and regulatory restrictions tied to signage on provincial highways, municipalities and rural areas.

The **MTO** is viewed as not supportive of tourism to municipalities. In creating "bypass" corridors for trucking, potential tourism traffic is diverted away from downtowns. For instance from the Manitoba border, eastbound traffic on Highway 17 splits just west of Kenora. While this is admittedly more efficient from a transportation standpoint, it puts Kenora tourism at a disadvantage.

An effort is underway by the **Ontario Business Improvement Area Association** (OBIAA) to create a consistent brand that indicates the presence of a downtown business or shopping district. We understand that the OBIAA is currently negotiating ways to incorporate this icon into MTO and TODS signage.

Note that these would only direct to downtowns that participate in the OBIAA program, not shopping districts that typically include hotels or "big box" stores.

RECOMMENDATION

With the assistance of Canadian and U.S. Border Control, find the most concise, authoritative border crossing summary for both Canadian and U.S. citizens. Use it exclusively in printed materials and online. Place this information prominently at points of border crossing, such as in airports, Visitor Centres, U.S. Welcome Centers, etc.

Rather than create and host the information on their own Websites, tourism sites should link to resources such as Canada Border Services Agency (<http://www.cbsa-asfc.gc.ca/>) or the US Department of Homeland Security (dhs.gov). This will ensure that updated information is always provided. Include links on tourism Website home pages.

Continue to build connections with entities that regulate signage in Ontario. By raising awareness of the specific issues that limit stakeholders in Northern Ontario, they can represent the interests and specialized needs of tourism operators and visitors. Communicate progress via email newsletters and in-person presentations. Encourage stakeholders to participate as well.

Continue to petition MTO to change language at points of decision: This sign should read "17 EAST BYPASS Thunder Bay" and "17 EAST Thunder Bay via Downtown Kenora."



Work with MTO and CTODS to add these icons to provincial highway signage, indicating an exit to a downtown business or shopping district. Promote in multiple channels and visitor guides.



Wayfinding signage standards

OBSERVATION

Wayfinding Signage, *continued*

The **Canada Tourist Oriented Directional Signs** (CTODS) program is cited as the most difficult to understand or change. Stakeholders in Northern Ontario largely view it as created for Southern Ontario, not taking into account the scale, distance or seasonal nature of most Northern attractions and destinations.

Complete results of the survey conducted as part of our research process are located in Appendix B of this document. In summary, there were three primary CTODS issues mentioned:

1. Becoming a qualified destination
2. Cost/time investment for operators
3. Long lead times for signage installation/replacement

Staff at TODS are restricted in how much change can be expected from CTODS, since this is a contractual arrangement with a third-party provider, initiated at the federal level. Research and meetings between TODS and TNO, the Tourism Industry Association and various RTOs have taken place to propose amendments to the guidelines, making them more viable for Northern Ontario operators; final decisions are expected by the end of 2014.



Since there is no appropriate standard in place, municipalities have “pirated” the CTODS program, creating wayfinding systems that take over at the boundaries of a city where the CTODS program ends. These are inconsistent and in many cases outdated. Many rely too heavily on the TODS definition of qualifying destinations for inclusion on their own signage systems.

RECOMMENDATION



This Website describes all requirements for inclusion in the CTODS program, and provides links to resources: <http://www.mtc.gov.on.ca/en/tourism/tods.shtml>. TNO and the subregions must participate fully in the development of guidelines for CTODS, advocating for the needs of Northern Ontario operators. Build awareness of changes and educate stakeholders using digital tools.

Work with TODS to amend the standards to include:

- Special consideration for identifying natural features that don't meet current requirements;
- Customizable community sign panels that indicate when a visitor has entered or left; and
- OBIAA sign panels added to existing TODS signs and/or trailblazers leading to downtown.



Develop municipal standards for wayfinding signage that meet the needs of tourism operators, regulatory requirements of the MTO, are adaptable for each community and appear consistently for visitors to Northern Ontario. A complete description of suggested standards can be found in the **Sign Type Hierarchy** section of this document.

OBSERVATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

OBSERVATION

RECOMMENDATION

Wayfinding Signage, *continued*

In the North, individuals have much more responsibility than in the South: due to limited budgets, one person manages the same workload as do teams of people in the south. This results in less time to completely understand how CTODS works, what the restrictions and requirements mean to a given business, etc.

Coordinate with staff in local municipalities to provide summaries of CTODS opportunities and restrictions.

Where businesses have closed or chosen to no longer participate, often signs are empty. These “orphan” TODS sign give the negative impression that there are no tourism destinations in the area.

Create a consistent sign panel that provides opportunities for more information (such as www.ontariotravel.net, or a DMO or TNO Web address), when these signs would otherwise be empty.

Due to the expense and availability of TODS signs, many operators choose instead to place billboards along provincial highways, which are less expensive and have fewer restrictions. MTO enforcement of unapproved billboards is lax. This creates clutter along high speed roadways, but nonetheless is an effective way to promote or direct to a business. Wayfinding standards for billboards should be included in a future signage standards design.



Communities have created Tourism Routes, supported by TODS signage, in order to attract visitors to their downtown areas. In Thunder Bay, which has two distinct downtown districts, there are three separate tourism routes that appear on Highway 17 and direct people to attractions. These were originally established to minimize the confusion that street name changes cause for visitors, a legacy from the merging of two cities in the 1970s.



We learned that in the past, these were supported in other media, but were ultimately not maintained by marketing organizations. No current information on tourism routes or attractions is present at Thunder Bay Visitor Centres.

Tourism Routes are important visitor amenities; once established, it is relatively inexpensive to promote them in multiple channels so that visitors can choose to use them to find attractions and destinations. Include guidelines for establishing tourist routes so municipalities understand why and how to do this. Where routes are no longer supported, remove the signage to reduce visitor confusion as a last resort.

Access to technology tools

OBSERVATION

Trail Signage

Various municipalities have instituted signage standards for walking, cycling or driving routes that vary greatly. As a visitor walking through an unfamiliar and often remote environment, signage elements that inform, orient and direct do not consistently appear.



These existing trail system signs work with varying degrees of success. Most lack key information important to hikers or cyclists.

RECOMMENDATION

Develop standards for trail signage as part of the overall RTO 13 Wayfinding Signage Standards program. Include the following sign types:

- Trailblazers along roadways to parking areas and trailheads;
- Monument signs at entry points;
- Informational kiosk at trailheads and intersections, including a map directory that indicates the entire area, individual trail names, destinations for loops, level of difficulty and natural features;
- Distance markers in kilometers and miles;
- Pedestrian signs that indicate distance to natural features, trail terminal points or intersections;
- Signs placed along routes to indicate the trail name, reinforcing that visitors are still on the trail; and
- Regulatory and safety information: how trails can be used, where cycling is not allowed, pets on trails, courteous use of trails and information regarding encounters with wild animals or natural features.

*Recommendations for wayfinding signage can be found in the **Sign Type Hierarchy** section of this document.*

Access to Technology

Because much of Northern Ontario is remote, use of technology to aid in wayfinding can be difficult:

- International visitors either do not have data plans activated for Canada, or incur expensive fees when accessing data. This causes them to turn off their data plans, which negates the use of many of the digital tools created for them.
- Canadian visitors cycle between Rogers and Bell systems as they move across Northern Ontario, incurring roaming charges when outside of their provider networks.
- Mobile applications for visitors rely on data service to provide accurate information, and do not work in areas with limited service.
- Some websites have awkward interfaces when viewed on a smartphone or other mobile device.
- Many visitors rely on GPS technology rather than cellular plans to navigate.

Optimize Websites to work efficiently on multiple platforms and devices.

Incorporate the functionality to “cache” information in a mobile application so that visitors can still use the app while their data plans are inactive.

Tourism product providers should consider GPS modules as a potential digital development tool. Currently the Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Clubs offers this option for purchase on their Website.

OBSERVATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

OBSERVATION

Websites

There is an almost limitless amount of information available to potential visitors to Northern Ontario. Most of it is created by individual tourism operators, associations, Web developers, organizations promoting products or digital tools for purchase, etc. Much of it is legitimate and provides useful information. Some of it does not.

Visitors need a way to cut through the clutter to find those few authoritative and “RTO approved” resources for the best and most current information.

Mobile applications

While these do exist to some extent in Northern Ontario, most operators have decided that the initial expense of developing such tools is enough of a barrier to keep them from moving ahead. Ongoing costs for maintenance as operating systems change, staff time and expense for updating information regularly, and the realities of connectivity in the North have further limited the use of these tools.

In order to recoup development costs, most mobile apps created for tourism are pay-to-play only, which limits the information they contain, and their effectiveness for visitors.

Stakeholder Participation

For tourism operators, there are multiple digital tools requiring investment of either time or dollars for participation. Providers receive frequent solicitations, but often have limited budgets. They are unsure as to where to invest their dollars for maximum impact.

RECOMMENDATION

We can't recommend that any of these Web resources be monitored, changed or taken down. This would be an almost impossible task and require resources beyond what most tourism organizations could manage.

However, by maintaining the resources featured on page 13 of this document, you can assure that these selected digital tools are updated consistently, appear higher in search engine results, are promoted more aggressively than other sites, and have consistent functional features such as reservation systems or trip planners. Standards for an RTO 13 “Seal of Approval” should be developed to ensure the integrity of these communications: relevant content, optimized for multiple search engines and platforms, with sufficient annual funding.

While we see this as a lower priority than other wayfinding tools, consider creating a template for mobile applications that could be customized for a given destination. Absent that, the Discover ON mobile app aggregates events and destinations based on the current location of the user; this could be the tool on which Northern Ontario operators increasingly rely, since the infrastructure has already been created (note that this only helps a visitor while physically in Ontario, not as a pre-planning tool).

Carefully consider whether: an app fits the needs of audiences; budgets exist for initial development/promotion; there are implications for membership-based DMO funding sources; maintenance is supported.

Bundle packages that include placement in digital tools such as Websites, mobile apps, GPS modules and the like. Since many digital tools can draw on the same data set, these bundles can maximize efficiency for developers and exposure for tourism operators. If possible, include printed materials in the bundle as well.

Provide an online “broker page” so tourism operators have one place to go to participate in digital information created and maintained by RTOs.

Other wayfinding channels

OBSERVATION

Printed Information

One common theme observed at Visitors Centres across Northern Ontario is that, regardless of the other channels being used by visitors, they almost always carry a printed reference with them as well. **This means that the information they receive must be consistent with signage, GPS information and other mobile tools.**

Visitor Centres are loosely organized and inconsistent. Visitors are presented with an overwhelming amount of information that ranges from very broad topics to much more specific information. For them, it's like finding a needle in a haystack. This also causes them to rely more on Visitor Centre staff who may be excessively busy or unavailable at certain times of the year.

Much of the information available in printed form is also available to download for free as Adobe PDF documents. The cost of shipping information, especially internationally, is an increasing burden on tourism organizations.

Many of the available printed resources are supported by paid listings or advertising revenues which limits their effectiveness for visitors. Most of them contain wayfinding information that is customized to the businesses that have chosen to participate, but do not include every local business listing.

Mapping

As the embodiment of wayfinding information, there are a tremendous variety of maps that have been created for publications. Used at different scales, with varying levels of detail, these are usually developed by individual tourism operators.

In each case, they are "reinventing the wheel" with respect to mapping, which results in increased costs for operators and wayfinding inconsistency for users.

RECOMMENDATION

Financially support the development of printed visitor guides as a supplement to other wayfinding channels. At the RTO level, develop standards for funding and organizing visitor guides so that key information appears consistently: a central map, for instance, or information about crossing the border on the inside front cover.

Develop a TNO "Point of Purchase" display that contains the resources recommended on page 13 of this document. Provide an online ordering tool so that tourism operators can re-order printed materials as needed, and receive email notices as materials are updated.

Make all printed resources available in PDF format via a QR code or Web address that's placed on the "Point of Purchase" display. Visitors with smartphones will be able to download the information and take it with them.

All RTO printed materials should contain complete listings of local businesses in each category as a baseline, with the opportunity for tourism operators to purchase an enhanced listing. This will provide the most comprehensive visitor resource.

Create a single wayfinding map standard for all TNO and sub-region supported communications. Assure that the graphic standards apply equally to printed, digital and signage applications.

Note that these will be targeted at tourism audiences, and will not be designed to replace typical street maps, which are useful for local residents.

WAYFINDING SIGN TYPE HIERARCHY

Ministry of Transportation - MTO

This entity is responsible for transport infrastructure and related law in Ontario. As such, they specify standards for all signage on MTO controlled roadways.



Wayfinding Sign Type Hierarchy

Tourist-Oriented Directional Sign - CTODS

As part of the MTO, the CTODS program provides a cost-effective system of standard signs on major roads to direct traffic to qualified tourism-oriented operations.



WAYFINDING SIGN TYPE HIERARCHY

Regional Wayfinding

A consolidated approach to wayfinding unifies a region both verbally and visually, and gives visitors the tools they need to navigate successfully. A program was created originally for Bruce County and then adopted for all of RTO 7. This could be used as the basis for wayfinding signage system design for RTO 13.



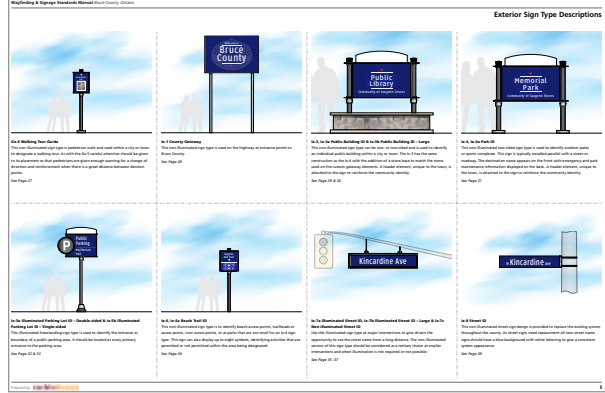
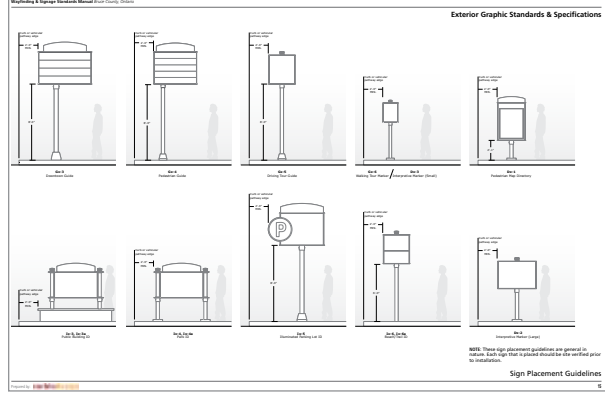
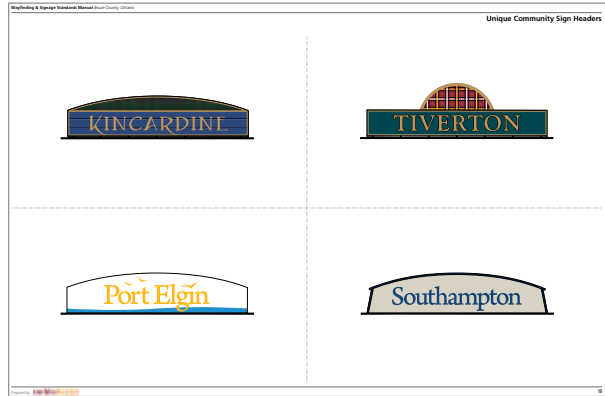
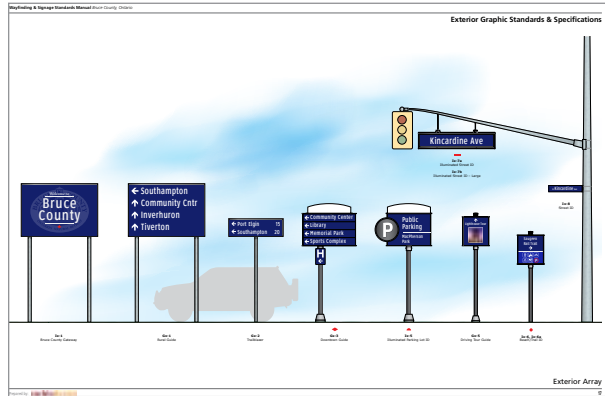
Gateway signs along MTO controlled roadways welcome visitors to the province (above) and specific tourism regions.



Consider updating this sign to welcome visitors to Northwest Ontario as the Tourism Region.


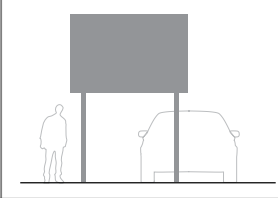
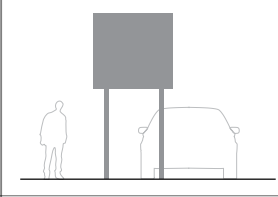
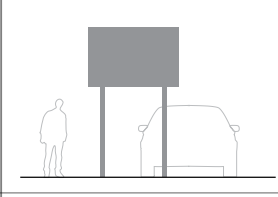
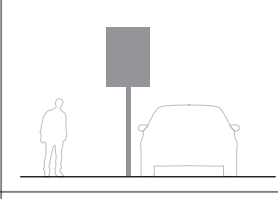
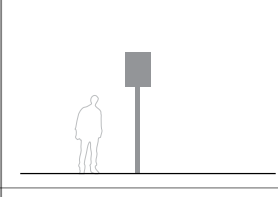
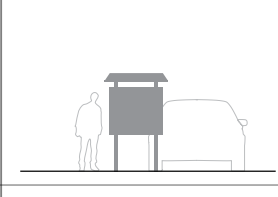
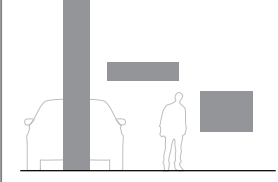


A Pedestrian Map Kiosk gives visitors information on a variety of things to see and do throughout the region.



Note that if FedNor funds are used as part of a wayfinding signage program, the agency requires equal accommodation for French and English language signage.

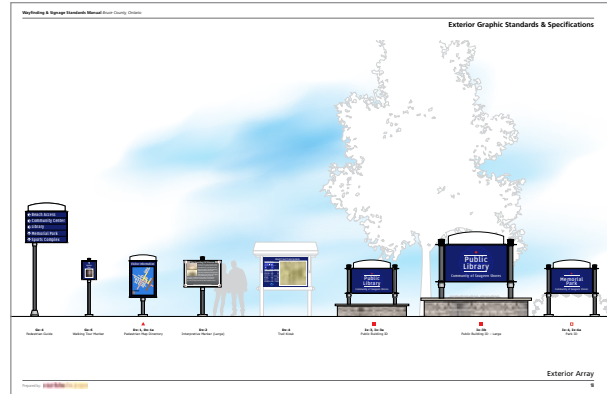
Regional Wayfinding Signage

Sign type	Sign type diagram	Budget cost	Sign type description
Gateway		\$5,000 – \$50,000	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.
Primary Vehicular Guide		\$3,500 – \$5,000	This sign is designed for high-speed roadways and directs to other regions, municipalities, natural areas and not-for-profit regional destinations. This sign would have an emblem or panel with the regional identity.
Exit Ramp Guide		\$3,000 – \$4,000	Located at highway exit ramps, these guide signs provide directions to regions and municipalities, natural areas, business districts and not-for-profit regional destinations.
Secondary Vehicular Guide		\$3,000 – \$4,500	This sign is similar to the Primary Vehicular Guide, but is used on lower-speed roadways. Because of the decreased speed, this sign can be smaller in scale, using smaller typography. It may also incorporate a customized element to identify a specific village or district.
Vehicular Trailblazer		\$2,000 – \$3,500	Use this sign when directing to a district area or downtown, or to direct to a major destination that is outside of the region. This sign type typically directs to one destination and is located before key decision points, reinforcing that the driver is on the correct path.
Tourism Route Guide		\$1,750 – \$2,500	Tour guide signs act like Trailblazers. They provide confirmation for the visitor that they are still on the tourism route, or they provide direction when at a decision point.
Pedestrian Map Kiosk		\$3,500 – \$5,500	Used in pedestrian areas, such as trail heads, parks, and boat launches, this sign uses colors, fonts and graphics that match the rest of the regional wayfinding system. The purpose of the sign is to orient the visitor relative to other destinations, typically through the use of a map or a combination of map and destination directions.
Regional Information Centres		\$\$ – \$\$\$	Identification for these buildings/locations should consistently use the international symbol for information and either be visible from the primary roadways, or provide trailblazing signage to the Centre. Many Centres already have existing signage that identifies the facility.


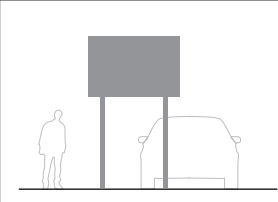
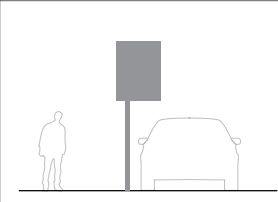
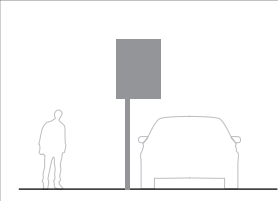
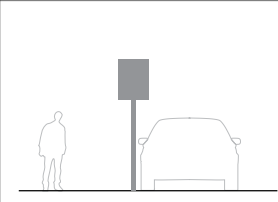
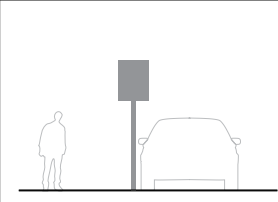
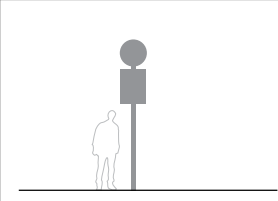
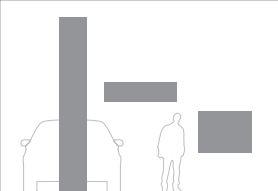
WAYFINDING SIGN TYPE HIERARCHY

Municipal Wayfinding

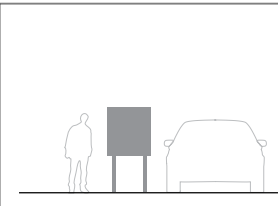
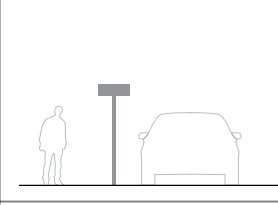
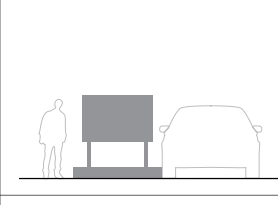
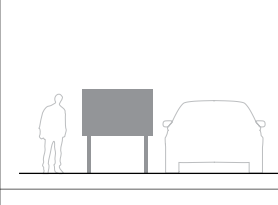
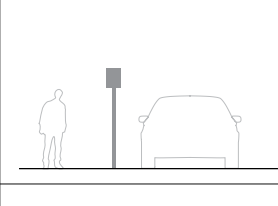
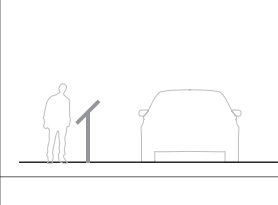
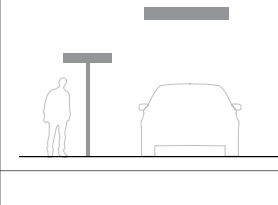
Where a regional program is not in effect, a municipal program is often implemented. Throughout Northern Ontario, cities use aspects of MTO and CTODS standards to direct visitors to destinations not included in those programs. In some cases, they're being modified to reflect the unique character or brand of a given place. They vary widely in design and implementation.



Municipal Wayfinding Signage (Vehicular)

Sign type	Sign type diagram	Budget cost	Sign type description
Gateway		\$5,000 – \$50,000	This sign type is used on the highway at entrance points to a municipality. This sign defines that point-of-entry and welcomes the visitor to the city or town. Often these are customized to reflect a cultural aspect of the municipality, thus the large range in cost.
Vehicular Guide (road speed above 50kph)		\$3,000 – \$6,000	This sign provides directions to top public destinations and non-profit attractions. Because of the speed of the roads on which these signs are placed, the sign face is limited to three listed destinations. A header element, unique to the town, is attached to the sign to display the community identity.
Vehicular Guide (road speed below 50kph)		\$2,500 – \$5,000	As above, this sign provides directions to top public destinations and non-profit attractions. It uses a smaller type size, appropriate for legibility on lower-speed roads.
Trailblazer (road speed below 50kph)		\$2,500 – \$5,000	This sign type is used on roads and highways to provide drivers with visual reinforcement when there are long distances between decision points.
Public Parking Guide		\$1,750 – \$2,750	Similar to a trailblazer, this is specifically used for directing to public parking. Because parking can be identified with an international symbol only, the message panel can be smaller in scale than the Trailblazer.
Tourism Route Guide		\$1,750 – \$2,750	Like a trailblazer, this sign is placed on roads and highways to provide drivers with directional information at decision points, and acts as confirmation that the driver is still on the tourism route.
Parking Identification		\$2,000 – \$3,500	This sign is located at the public parking venue entrance, incorporates the international Parking P symbol and provides parking lot information such as restrictions, hours or fees.
Local Information Centres		\$\$ – \$\$\$	Identification for these centres should use the international symbol for information and be highly visible along primary roadways. Many Centres already have existing signage that identifies the facility.

Municipal Wayfinding Signage (Pedestrian)

Sign type	Sign type diagram	Budget cost	Sign type description
Pedestrian Map Kiosk		\$3,000 – \$5,000	This one- or two-sided sign, with a unique header element representing the city, is used mainly in downtown areas to provide visitors with map and directory information. The second side of the sign can be used to post temporary information from civic groups, or to highlight points of interest.
Pedestrian Guide		\$2,000 – \$4,000	This sign type is used to direct pedestrians to nearby destinations and attractions. The sign can be different sizes to accommodate up to five destinations. A unique header element can also be attached to the sign to display the identity of the town, district or business improvement area (BIA).
Building/Facility Identification		\$1,500 – \$3,000	Public Destinations utilize larger identification to enhance visibility for vehicular and pedestrian traffic. This provides a sense of arrival to the visitor and ties the destination into the wayfinding system.
Park/Natural Area Identification		\$1,500 – \$3,000	Like buildings, parks and natural areas also benefit from large identification that ties into the wayfinding system. This sign, visible to vehicular and pedestrian traffic, confirms arrival for the visitor.
Walking Tour Guide		\$500 – \$1,000	This sign confirms for a pedestrian that they are still on the right path, when to make turns, and also provides distance information.
Interpretive Information		\$3,000 – \$5,000	To communicate information about historical, natural, or cultural resources, objects or sites, this sign uses photos, graphics and text to tell a story. Interpretive markers, also called historic plaques, help explain the importance of a site or destination.
Street Identification		\$1,000 – \$8,000	Street name signs provide clear identification at all major intersections. These signs can be internally illuminated when attached to stoplight mast arms, or reflective vinyl when on a pole at the corner of the intersection. When navigating by map or GPS, street identification is critical for confirmation.

Note that if FedNor funds are used as part of a wayfinding signage program, the agency requires equal accommodation for French and English language signage.

DESTINATION NAMING RECOMMENDATIONS

A wayfinding signage system is only as good as the information it contains. So carefully consider destination names that are included on wayfinding signage for consistency, clarity and fit.

We're providing a list of common, standardized names that should be used throughout Northern Ontario. For language not included in this document, ask the following questions to determine appropriate usage:

- Will the name fit on the sign?
- Is the name one that is commonly understood and used by the public?
- Is it concise and easily understood by visitors?
- If not, could it be better described using an international symbol?
- Is there a requirement for multiple languages to appear on one sign panel?
- If the name is long, can it be abbreviated without sacrificing comprehension?
- Will the name remain the same for a long time?

Criteria for inclusion on a wayfinding sign

Vehicular Signs

- Non-profit destinations
- Tourist attractions (arts, culture, history, etc)
- Municipal destinations (City Hall, Library, etc)
- Visitor Centres
- Sports facilities
- Parks and Recreation Areas
- Historic Districts, Heritage Routes
- Transportation

Pedestrian Signs

Same as Vehicular - with potential to lower threshold of criteria to allow smaller destinations such as campgrounds, hiking/biking routes, snowmobile trails, etc.

Pedestrian Kiosk with map

Same as Pedestrian - with opportunity to include local businesses, lodging and/or entertainment districts if updates are scheduled at regular intervals.

Common destination names

This list is only partial and can be amended as required. Use common abbreviations to shorten destinations if it's seen as necessary to fit the name on a line*.

Airport

Arena or _____ Arena or Sports Complex

(‘Sport Cplx’ if abbreviation is required)

Beach or Beach Access

Boat Cruises

Boat Launch

Campground

Community Centre

(‘Commun Ctr’ if abbreviation is required)

Downtown

Galleries

Marina

Museum or _____ Museum

(Abbreviate name if required. e.g. :

“Bushplane Heritage Ctr”)

Public Library or _____ Library

(Abbreviate name if required. e.g. :

“North Bay Lib” or use international symbol)

Public Park or _____ Park

(Abbreviate name if required. e.g. :

“Sleeping Giant Pk”)

Rail Trail

Sports Field

Theatre

Visitor Centre

** In order to maintain minimum letter heights to assure legibility for drivers on roadways, guide signs are limited to four (4) lines of copy. To maximize space on these signs, reduce each entry to occupy only one line of text, if possible. Generally this equates to 18-22 letters (including spaces), but this number depends on the final sign design.*

TOURISM STORIES



Fishing for Fun

Paul felt it was time to do some bonding with his two teenage kids. Nathan, 13 and Jessica, 15, were spending too much time inside, playing games and chatting online. Fishing was the one activity that all three agreed was a priority, and they'd been doing precious little of it lately. Soon summer would be over and the kids would be back in school.

Together, they planned to drive from their home in Winnipeg to the Dryden area to spend a week camping and fishing. They intentionally left their itinerary open-ended, in case the fish weren't biting on the first lake they chose. Jessica had done some preliminary research online, looking for campgrounds with boat launches and electric hookups. She printed out the ones they favored. Their mom, Judy, helped pack up the RV for a five-day trip. They got an early start on Saturday morning.

At 10am they crossed the border into Ontario, intending to stop at a Visitor Centre to take a closer look at the campgrounds they'd researched, and speak to a person about other options. They found that the OTIC Visitor's Centre was closed. Not wanting to go much further without information, they turned around and visited the Manitoba Visitor Information Centre. Friendly staff there apologized, but said that they had no information on Ontario camping or fishing. The group was advised to continue to Kenora (fortunately the staff explained that the Visitor Centre was actually called a "Discovery





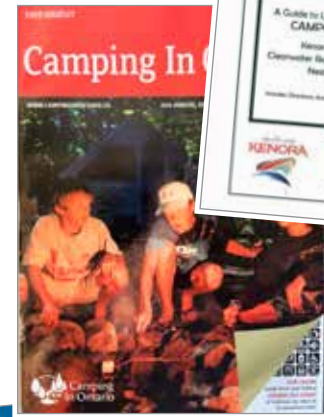
Centre,” otherwise they might have driven right past it thinking it was a museum).

This negative impression was compounded by a number of signs within the first few kilometers of entering Ontario: warnings about speeding, driving while tired, traffic fines and other offenses struck Paul as unnecessarily negative. Not only did they need to drive another 47km before speaking to a person, but it seemed as though they were mistrustful of people coming over the border.

They followed the MTO signage to the split west of Kenora, correctly determining that 17 was the route that would bring them to the Discovery Centre. Once there, they were relieved to find knowledgeable staff and a tremendous amount of available information. Regarding camping, they learned that the guide published by Camping In Ontario is incomplete, since only paid listings are included. The Discovery Centre staff had done their own research to produce a guide that included all potential campgrounds in the region. They found that there were many more choices than what Jessica had researched online.

Feeling confident that they’d been given good information, the group decided to stop for lunch in Kenora after a quick photo of Husky the Muskie. Because downtown was busy, and the signage somewhat confusing, they parked their rig in the Safeway lot and walked into town. It felt good to stretch their legs a bit and check in with Judy on the phone, but the lack of available trailer parking was inconvenient. Their server was friendly and recommended that they stop at the Visitor Centre in Dryden to finalize their camping plans.

As they came into Dryden, they found a dubious welcome: the sign itself was in disrepair, and information on Crime Stoppers was almost more noticeable. They followed signs toward the Visitor’s Centre, but made the mistake of turning toward downtown instead of staying on 17: there was no indication of the Visitor’s Centre on the GPS.



FISHING FOR FUN

Frustrated, they drove through city streets back to the highway, and stopped when they saw the sign outside the building. They found that the Visitor Centre was staffed by a well meaning, but busy gallery owner who had a number of customers asking questions. They waited a while to get her attention, but ultimately ended their visit by selecting more brochures and walking out.

They decided to find the Wabigoon Lake campground on their own, using a smartphone and hoping that the signal would follow them to their destination. Fortunately, the campground had put GPS coordinates on their Website and a printed flyer! Funny how, even though you hope to unplug for a week, you still ultimately rely on this technology to help you get where you're going.

They had a great week of camping, fishing and fun. As a Canadian resident, Paul was able to use his fishing license and Outdoors Card to fish in Ontario. They bought bait, gas and supplies on the way to the campground, selected a spot and still got some fishing in. When it rained on Wednesday, they went into Dryden for pizza and bowling based on a fellow camper's recommendation. They caught their limit of walleye, and cooked fresh fish over an open fire on more than one night. By Thursday morning they had a cooler full of fillets on ice to bring home.

Coming back, Paul decided to use 17a to bypass downtown Kenora in order to avoid downtown tourist traffic. They had plenty of gas in the tank and had picked up sandwiches to eat while underway. They wanted to be home before dark to unpack and clean the boat.

Despite a few glitches, their trip had been a big success – Judy got some needed rest, and Paul got to spend quality time on a beautiful lake with his two growing kids.

When did they get so big?



TOURISM STORIES



Flores Family Holiday

The Flores Family from Bay City, MI decided to take a vacation on their kids’ fall break from school. They’d often heard good things about the Algoma Central Railway from friends, and a trip to Ontario in early fall sounded like a perfect getaway.

Alex was comfortable doing all the research online. He ordered a printed version of the Algoma Travel Guide for their reference, and he and his wife Denise reviewed the Algoma Central Railway website to choose the proper tour. Especially helpful was the “U.S. Visitor” portion of the site, which outlined all of the requirements of the border crossing. The last time they were in Canada, they had no children and crossing the border was a very different experience!

They decided to take the “Tour of the Line,” hoping to see some early-season colour in the Canyon. They were glad to see a package offered through the Catalina Hotel in the Sault, and accommodations in Hearst as well. They decided to spend just one night in Hearst, since the southbound train wouldn’t be available again until the following week.



FLORES FAMILY HOLIDAY

The Flores have two children: Mandy, 11 and Travis, 6. Travis is a special needs child, requiring a specialized diet and a wheelchair when traveling. Mandy asked to be able to take her best friend Annie along for the trip, and Annie's parent's consented. Reservations made, they read about things to see and do in Algoma Country, both online and in the Travel Guide.

Denise, always the thorough planner, had done some more research about crossing the border. Because none of them have passports, she learned that she and Alex would need Enhanced Driver's Licenses, which were less expensive and faster to acquire. As minors, Mandy, Annie and Travis could cross as long as they brought birth certificates. She'd wondered whether taking another child would require additional documents, and she was right: the Website "Canada Border Services Agency" told them that a letter from Annie's parents would be needed.

They'd made a list of all the things they'd need, since the drive to the Sault was 250 miles – no turning back once they'd started out! They packed some food and Travis' medications in a cooler, brought their warm clothes and left early on Wednesday, October 8. After crossing the Mackinac Bridge, they stopped at the Michigan Welcome Center for a rest. They were surprised to find very little information on destinations in Ontario; the attendant suggested they check the Visitor Centre once they'd crossed the border. They stopped briefly at the Soo Locks, but decided to save the boat tour for the next trip.

Traffic was light over the bridge, and once in Canada they were asked by Border Patrol to park and come inside. Denise had all of the information they needed in a folder, including the kids' birth certificates, the letter from Annie's parents, reservations for the train and hotels in Sault Ste. Marie and in Hearst, and information on Travis' prescriptions. The border agent was both accommodating and efficient, asking to check their cooler to verify the medications and the food they'd brought in for him. All told, the crossing and interview took 15 minutes.



Alex had set the GPS to the hotel's address, but by this time they were all hungry and thinking about lunch. They stopped in the Visitor Information Centre and were told to follow the signs toward Downtown; on Queen Street or thereabouts, they'd find what they were looking for. It was a cloudy day, and an early season snow had fallen, giving them hope for lots of colour on the train. They exchanged some US dollars for Canadian, and then using the combination of GPS and Urban Spoon on Denise's smartphone, quickly found a place for lunch. Parking close by was easy to find and, surprisingly, free.



It didn't take them long to understand the lay of the land in the Sault. Signs were placed along most roadways pointing to various attractions and, while somewhat hard to read, they did recognize the Tour Train icon and knew they'd be able to find it the next morning. It was clear that there were several routes back to the USA from downtown as well. They checked into the Catalina Hotel, and took a short drive north on Highway 17 to see what they could see as darkness fell.



The morning of the tour they were up early, and wanted to be sure they'd have the right food for Travis, so they stocked up with food at the grocery next to the hotel. As they checked in, they learned that the passenger train doesn't actually leave from the station: they had to load everyone back into their vehicle and drive another seven minutes to the CN Rail Yard in order to board the train for this excursion. Not all of it was wheelchair accessible; even though the staff was helpful, this was a challenging and somewhat frustrating situation to manage.



Finally, they got comfortable in their passenger car and prepared to enjoy the journey. Mandy and Annie were up almost immediately to explore the train; Alex took a nap until they were several kilometers north of the Sault. As soon as the colour started, he got a coffee and tag-teamed with Denise taking photos. The trip to Hearst was everything they'd hoped for: beautiful colour, impressive canyons and dramatic vistas – made even better with the fog and intermittent rain.



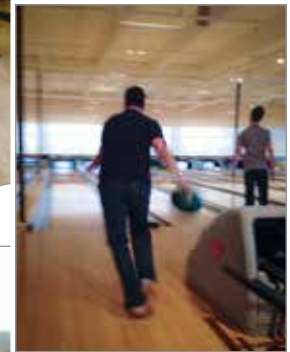
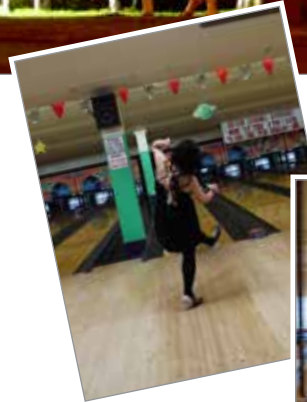
FLORES FAMILY HOLIDAY

Once in Hearst, they left the train and checked into the Companion Hotel. Having been told that this was a somewhat sleepy town, they were surprised to find the streets quite busy. The front desk attendant told them that this was the Canadian Thanksgiving weekend, and that many people would be on holiday. Despite all of the research and planning, no one had told them they were traveling on a national holiday!

This turned out to be an advantage, since there were many more people willing to help them find things to do: Denise and Travis took a nighttime stroll along the river, which had accessible pathways, while Alex and the girls went bowling at the local lanes. Annie and Mandy were even able to use a little of their middle school French, bashful as they were to try. Each time they did, it was very much appreciated.

The next morning, it was time to take the train back, a trip that everyone looked forward to. The weather was misty, and the train was much busier than it had been coming up. More beautiful photos, a nice lunch purchased in Hearst, and once they arrived back in the Sault, another night at the Catalina where they tried a new restaurant.

Coming back into the US, Alex showed his driver's license to the agent, told them that they'd been on the Algoma Railway with nothing to declare, and was waved right through. The kids slept much of the way home, while Denise edited the photos on their camera. It had been a great vacation, one to tell their neighbours about!



TOURISM STORIES



Riding Lake Superior

Recently retired from a lifetime behind a desk in a suburb of Toronto, Kevin was excited to take the tour of a lifetime. He'd long been a motorcycle enthusiast, touring throughout the North in the summer months with groups of friends and his first wife. But in all those years of marriage, they'd never taken the time to ride the entire Lake Superior loop.



Now, Kevin and his new wife Yang were ready to go. Since his kids were gone and the pets had gone with them, they were certain they had the time to fulfill Kevin's lifelong goal. New to riding, Yang was uncertain as to whether she really had the ability to make a trip like this on her own motorcycle. However in the two years they'd been together, she'd come a long way.



They left Markham on a beautiful June morning, stopping at several points throughout Parry Sound so that Kevin could show Yang the beauty of the North. As a naturalized Canadian citizen for some 30 years, Yang had not yet taken a trip this far north. She had always heard of the natural beauty of the region; now she had the leisure time to experience it firsthand. The next day, they rode the remainder of the way to Sault Ste. Marie, where they began their journey around the big lake.



RIDING LAKE SUPERIOR

Because they were intentionally taking their time, the couple had researched the trip extensively knowing that they would be encouraged to take detours on other touring routes. Using the Ride Lake Superior and Circle Tour Websites and resources provided by various tourism organizations along the way, they felt prepared enough to keep their schedule flexible. Traveling by motorcycle meant that they'd need to pack light, with sufficient foul and warm weather gear.

At this time of the year, they found that there were always groups of riders that were similarly fulfilling this "bucket list" dream. At every stop along the way, they came across friendly people who were willing to share ideas about lodging, the best places to eat and do laundry, and must-see vistas. They took advantage of this advice as frequently as they could, since real recommendations from fellow riders are always best.

Kevin had downloaded the GPS file from the Ride Lake Superior site, because they'd heard that some of the Circle Route signage in Northern Ontario had been removed. They were surprised to find that, in most cases, the signs in the States were more prevalent and better maintained, but since much of the route occurs on the Trans-Canada highway, this was ultimately not an issue for them.

Their first stop was the border crossing at the Sault. Yang had her Canadian passport and they'd thought to bring a copy of their marriage license, just to be certain they had proper documentation. They explained to the U.S. Border Patrol that they were riding across Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota, and that their itinerary would be flexible. Then they were off!

In Michigan, they stopped at Whitefish Point and the Tahquamenon Falls State Park to take in the sights. They found that the tourism signs in the States were quite different from those in Ontario: the brown signs direct to natural features and State Parks, while TODS signs point out destinations such as Wineries and localized routes of interest. They found these to be quite helpful.



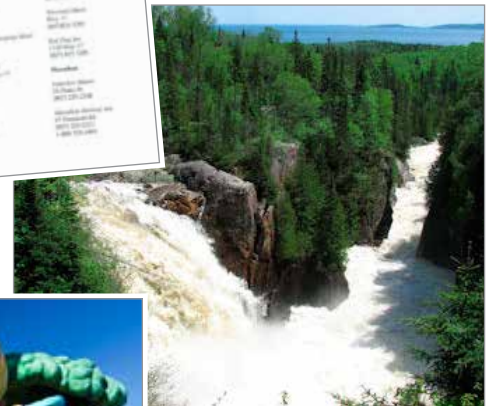
Over the course of the next several days, they stopped in a number of areas throughout Wisconsin and Minnesota. They were especially impressed with Bayfield's waterfront area and the fact that Duluth, MN was such a hopping place. They'd heard that Minnesotans were a pretty stoic bunch, but they were proved wrong again.

While in the States, Yang tried to research information on events in Thunder Bay using the Discover Ontario app. She found that the automated search feature wouldn't work until they were physically closer to the events listed. Still, she was able to get an idea of things they might do as they crossed the border.

It was a long and scenic ride between Duluth, MN and Thunder Bay, ON, but they were glad to be back in Canada after a week on U.S. highways. The border crossing into Canada was a snap, especially since they'd had nothing to declare except for some infamous beef jerky from Ryden's General Store and an SD card filled with digital images ...

As they continued their eastward trek across Ontario, they stopped in the Terry Fox Visitor Centre. Summer students, who were surprisingly knowledgeable about the area even though they hadn't grown up there, staffed this facility. Yang learned that they have an extensive education about the area prior to assisting visitors as part of their internship, and they create a lot of materials on their own while doing Web research for visitors with specific questions. In the few minutes they'd been chatting, people from all over the U.S., Europe and Canada had come by for directions, and to be inspired by Terry Fox.

Throughout Northern Ontario, they decided to spend more time in the towns and less on their motorcycle. They stopped to hike, kayak and fish in several locations, and always took picnic lunches to scenic overlooks. They'd been told that stops at Aguasabon Falls in Terrace Bay, Winnie the Pooh in White River and the famous Wawa Goose were a must.





The ride from Wawa back to the Soo proved to be one of the most scenic and emotional parts of their entire trip. For Yang it began to sink in that she had almost completed piloting her own motorcycle all the way around Lake Superior! This was something she never thought she'd do. Riding had by now become second nature, allowing her to enjoy all the sights and smells of a Northern Ontario summer. She was awestruck by the majestic shoreline on the final leg.



For Kevin, being this close to one of the most tragic shipwrecks in Canadian History (the Edmund Fitzgerald) touched his soul. His father had been a sailor on the Great Lakes, and as he rode he recalled the stories from his dad about how ferocious this lake could be. At several of the scenic overlooks they parked the bikes and stared quietly out into the vast water, each reflecting on their journey.








After twelve days on the road, they made the final push to Markham. Having conquered the Big Lake, they were now the experts and would be able to share their story and photos with their riding friends back home.



RECOMMENDED IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

So far in this document we've defined wayfinding and demonstrated how coordinating the various channels can improve the visitor experience in Northern Ontario. This grid lays out recommended priorities for funding and implementation of all wayfinding tools.

We've designed this to gain the most benefit for the lowest cost using existing wayfinding tools. As these move forward, planning can begin for the higher cost, but equally as critical, initiatives listed below.

Northern Ontario invests in:	Relative Costs	Tourism Operators can access:	
Graphic standards for visitor mapping with RTO 13 regional map as overall guideline, and a booklet of design standards, which include recommended information for mapping at all levels of the information hierarchy.	\$	Map standards to build local maps to include in various channels.	
Standards for the Northern Ontario "Seal of Approval" for all channels. Designed to help visitors identify communications that have the most helpful, most current and relevant information.	\$	Fewer, better tools for wayfinding	
	Training programs for Visitor Centre staff, built on best practices from OTIC Centres. Include a "point of purchase" display to present fewer, better printed tools to visitors. Include standard RTO 13 map for display as well.	\$\$	Simple guidelines for sharing information with Visitor Centre guests.
	Wayfinding signage design standards and guidelines would include a family of sign types for each part of the information hierarchy, developed into a bid-ready design intent package. To be used in conjunction with standards for CTODS and OBIAA signage, billboards and other tools.	\$\$	Complete information for approved wayfinding signage, including design/informational intent for each sign type, potential costs and guidelines for application.
	Wayfinding signage documentation & implementation for rural or urban areas. Could include regional touring routes as well. Begins with an analysis to determine circulation and destinations, application of sign standards, documentation of all sign messaging and locations, a phasing plan and implementation services.	\$-\$\$\$	Assistance with implementing signage standards in a defined geographic area. Cost based on scope and scale of wayfinding system.
	Printed guides for RTO 13 as a whole, and RTO 13c as one large Sub-Regional entity (see page 13 for more details).	\$\$-\$\$\$	More complete, comprehensive resources for sharing information.
	Mobile tools for wayfinding, including apps, GPS modules, and mobile-enabled Websites.	\$\$-\$\$\$	App development at a regional or municipal level to share costs and encourage partnerships.

FUNDING & PLANNING ASSISTANCE

There are multiple funding options available to Tourism Operators in the North. Further information is available online as noted below each description.

FedNor

FedNor is the economic development organization for Northern Ontario. Through its programs, services and financial support, FedNor works with businesses and community partners to build a stronger Northern Ontario.

Recognizing the unique challenges facing Northern Ontario communities, many of which are small, rural and remote, FedNor targets its support to help them create the conditions necessary for growth and development.

Eligible applicants: Not-for-profit organizations such as community economic development, industry and business associations, networks, or alliances, municipalities and First Nations in Northern Ontario.

Expected results:

- Increased ability to identify and prioritize viable economic opportunities;
- Strengthened community economic competitiveness by implementing these priorities; and
- Enhanced collaboration among stakeholders.

Note that if FedNor funds are used as part of a wayfinding signage program, the agency requires equal accommodation for French and English language signage.

More information: <http://fednor.gc.ca/>

Ontario Trillium Foundation

The Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF) is an agency of the Government of Ontario and Canada's leading grant-maker. Its mission is to build healthy and vibrant communities throughout Ontario by strengthening the capacity of the voluntary sector, through investments in community-based initiatives.

The Foundation makes grant investments of up to \$375,000 over five years. This can include up to \$75,000 per year for operating or project expenses and up to \$150,000 over one or more years for capital initiatives.

Eligible applicants: Registered charitable organizations, not-for-profits, First Nations, Aboriginal communities, or a collaborative of two or more organizations working together to achieve a common goal.

Sector priorities:

- Support initiatives that remove barriers and increase equitable access to participation in public life;
- Enable greater civic engagement, particularly for those who would not otherwise have access;
- Assure access to community activities; and
- Support projects that engage Ontarians in developing more resilient communities.

More information: <http://lotf.ca/>

Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation

NOHFC's Community Capacity-Building Program helps northern communities develop the capacity to promote, attract, and support economic growth in existing and emerging priority economic sectors. Depending on the identified project, NOHFC support will be the lesser of 50% or \$50,000 for community-based or regional training projects, or \$100,000 for regional partnership-based projects.

Eligible applicants: partnerships and alliances of municipalities, private sector businesses and organizations, educational institutions, the federal government, and other government-related agencies.

Guidelines:

- Align with community and regional economic development objectives, including community planning processes such as a strategic plan for economic development, business retention and expansion, etc.;
- Create economic impact: municipal, regional, provincial including jobs created and/or retained;
- Demonstrate adherence to guidelines; and
- Align with the NOHFC Growth Plan.

More information: <http://nohfc.ca/>

So what's next?

Throughout this document, we've recorded observations and recommendations that pertain to the tourist's experience in Northern Ontario. We've defined wayfinding and provided several examples to demonstrate how it works (or doesn't work) across all channels. And we've made recommendations for prioritized investments on the part of RTO 13 Stakeholders to move us all closer to the ideal: fewer, better tools for wayfinding which help visitors to tell better stories.

We've planted plenty of seeds. It's up to you to understand what you can do to help them grow.

What you may not know is that, while they've commissioned this study and participated fully in its realization, TNO does not have current jurisdiction to mandate the implementation of this information. Rather, they intend that this document be used as the baseline for understanding what *could* and *should* be done by groups throughout Northern Ontario to influence wayfinding policy, logic, design and implementation.

In that spirit, we summarize the steps identified in this document as potential future calls to action, encouraged and in some cases facilitated by TNO.

Logic, Language

- Understand and use the correct information hierarchy as you provide direction, to reinforce the subdivisions that have been created to attract, inform and connect visitors to Northern Ontario (see *the Wayfinding Information Hierarchy section*);
- Eliminate the use of defunct divisions, such as Rainbow Country; and
- Incorporate multiple languages as required by funding agencies and local demographics.

Visitor Centres

- Petition Ontario government agencies to:
 - Re-open and fully support OTIC Visitor Centres
 - Provide summer students as Visitor Centre staff



- Create standards for training Visitor Centre staff:
 - Based on current best practices
 - Summarize and share these with all Visitor Centres

Wayfinding Signage

- Make your voice heard by entities that regulate signage in RTO 13:
 - Petition MTO to change standards to better support tourism objectives;
 - Participate in discussions with CTODS as standards evolve;
 - Support the OBIAA initiative to direct travelers to downtown Business Improvement Areas;
 - Provide regular progress updates to fellow Northern Ontario Stakeholders via newsletters, social media.
- Develop a comprehensive wayfinding signage standards program for RTO 13.

So what's next?

Printed Materials

- Develop printed tools to promote and direct visitors to RTO 13, 13c (see page 13 for more information)
- Establish standards for printed materials that include placement of wayfinding information:
 - A central map that includes relevant, helpful information categories;
 - Authoritative and consistently located tourist information: border crossing, recreational licensing, technical connectivity challenges, etc.;
 - Complete listings of local businesses, with an opportunity for a Tourism Operator to enhance the listing at an additional cost; and
 - The Northern Ontario Seal of Approval.

Digital Tools

- Use best practices from existing Websites to establish consistent standards for all RTO sites:
 - Approved language and logic;
 - Online reservation system;
 - Links to border crossing, recreational licensing, technical connectivity information; and
 - The Northern Ontario Seal of Approval.
- Be sure that, as an Operator, you appear on existing mobile application(s) relative to your audience and market.
- Develop standards for mobile applications that can be easily purchased and implemented by Northern Ontario stakeholders.

Northern Ontario Seal of Approval

- Develop standards for all channels allowing them to qualify for this designation.

Operator Investment

- Build an online resource for Tourism Operators to understand and maximize their investment in Northern Ontario "Seal of Approval" channels.
 - Existing benefits: free business listing;
 - Available opportunities: enhanced listing;
 - Bundled packages: one price includes a listing in a printed directory, mobile app, pedestrian kiosk, etc.



Next Steps

TNO has identified the following key development projects that will provide tangible tools for wayfinding:

- Design a mapping standard for wayfinding that begins at the RTO 13 level and can be carried through to local municipalities;
- Develop standards for a Northern Ontario "Seal of Approval" across wayfinding channels;
- Design and specify a "Point of Purchase" information centre for various applications;
- Design a regional/municipal wayfinding signage standard for RTO 13 that begins where MTO and CTODS programs end:
 - Include information on the correct use and maintenance of Tourism Routes as part of the CTODS program;
 - Provide documentation and implementation support once signage standards are established;
 - Identify a pilot project for initial implementation.

With these tools in hand, Northern Ontario Stakeholders will be able to move wayfinding initiatives forward to help meet the original goals of the study: to increase visitors' length of stay, receipts and satisfaction, encouraging positive word of mouth and return visits.

Because Northern Ontario is only as good as the stories that are told about it.