



destinationnorthernontario.ca

2020-21

Annual Report

Ontario 



2020-21

Annual Report

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MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT



How could we have predicted a year like 2020-21? Just as we were rounding the corner of another great fiscal year at Destination Northern Ontario, COVID-19 hit the world like a freight train. Even more notably for our organization, activity in tourism and travel industries across the world came to a screeching halt. As reports of passengers diagnosed with the novel coronavirus 2019 on a California cruise trickled into headlines in early March of 2020, there was an indication that tourism and travel would never be the same.

And it's not. Looking back at the last year, I present, on behalf of our board and staff, this annual report through a lens of optimism and fortitude. If the last 12 months have taught us anything, it is that our industry is fiercely resilient, adaptative, and Northern Ontario, along with the rest of the province, is home to some of the most innovative and hardworking tourism operators and stakeholders in the world.

During the pandemic, Destination Northern Ontario changed gears to a new remote work environment while staying on track with an augmented business plan that reflected the new challenges and opportunities the year presented. We worked with partners like the Tourism Industry Association of Ontario, Nature and Outdoor Tourism Ontario, the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation, FedNor and our Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries to develop projects and programs that helped our operators on the ground. We released the Reopening the North Toolkit, secured funding for a large-scale employment program Tourism SkillsNet North, delivered over 20 workshops and webinars through the Adapt 2020: A Webinar Series for Tourism and invested over a million dollars in domestic marketing campaigns to ensure regional travellers were experiencing all Northern Ontario has to offer, when it was safe to do so.

Our work is not done, and we know looking forward is the best thing we can do for our organization and the stakeholders we serve. We will continue investing in best-bet and open markets while fostering growth and development in our traditional transborder markets. We will place emphasis on addressing the labour gap and doing our part to ensure our operators have access to trained employees. We will look to create continuity with our partners at the Ministry and Destination Ontario as new strategic plans hit our desktops over the coming months. Perhaps most importantly, we will continue to partner with organizations, operators, agencies, and other stakeholders in a meaningful way so we can carve out our new place in the tourism landscape, together.

Yours in tourism,

Marty Kalagian,
President.

Destination Northern Ontario Board of Directors & Staff

Destination Northern Ontario is governed by a pan-Northern Ontario Board of Directors who are recognized industry leaders and collectively provide vast knowledge, experience and insight as they set the strategic directions for the organization.

The Board of Directors regularly consults with and is counselled by an advisory group comprised of key government officials in tourism-related ministries and agencies. The advisory group provides critical support to the Board of Directors in their strategic planning and consultation processes. The advisory group representatives are from the Ontario Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries, the Ministry of Energy, Northern Development and Mines, the Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership Corporation, FedNor, Ontario Parks and Parks Canada while sub-regional Destination Marketing Organizations and industry stakeholders make up the Board.

2020-21 Board of Directors

NAME	POSITION	SECTOR
Marty Kalagian	President	Operator – Retired
Gerry Webber	Vice President	Public Service Sector – Retired
Betty McGie	Secretary-Treasurer	Watson's Algoma Vacations Ltd.
Ray Nadeau	Director	Victoria Inn
George Stivrins	Director	Big Sound Marina
Lori Branch	Director	Seine River Lodge
Tammy Frick	Director	Cinéfest
Guy LaMarche	Director	Public Service - Retired
Ian Wood	Director	City of Greater Sudbury
Heather Gropp	Secretary	Town of Sioux Narrows-Nestor Falls

Government Advisors

NAME	POSITION	SECTOR
Laurie Brownlee	Advisor	Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries
Isabelle Denault	Advisor	Ministry of Energy, Northern Development and Mines
Melanie Robert	Advisor	Destination Ontario
Nancy Rosset	Advisor	FedNor Canada
Shannon Lawr	Advisor	Ontario Parks
Michaela Campbell	Advisor	Parks Canada

Destination Northern Ontario Staff

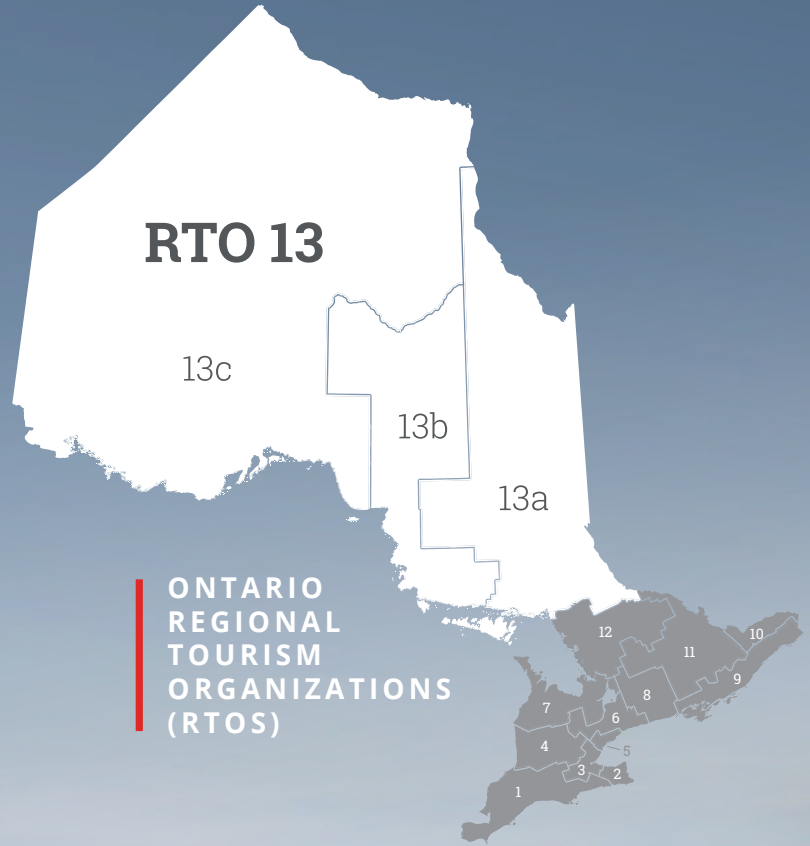
NAME	POSITION
David MacLachlan	Executive Director
Pat Forrest	Senior Coordinator, Partnerships and Initiatives
Stephanie Hopkin	Senior Coordinator, Marketing and Communications
Tiina Keranen	Visual Communications Designer
Sara Dekker	Coordinator, Industry Events and Communications (NOHFC Internship)
Nicki Schiewe	Senior Coordinator, Product Development
Gord Knowles	Senior Coordinator, Investment Attraction
Kathy Carlson	Senior Coordinator, Corporate Services
Karen Peacock	Senior Coordinator, Workforce Development and Industry Training
Gillian McCullough	Training Coordinator
Karen Poirier	Office Administrator



A COMMITMENT TO ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE,
PROFESSIONALISM AND QUALITY PROGRAM DELIVERY.

Overview

Geographically, Destination Northern Ontario (RTO13) is the largest tourism region in Ontario. The region spans from the French River in the south including Manitoulin Island, the Ottawa River in the east, west to the Manitoba border and north to the saltwater coast. The region is divided into three sub-regions: Northeastern Ontario (13A), Algoma-Sault Ste. Marie (13B) and Northwestern Ontario (13C). Destination Northern Ontario's role in the tourism industry is to strategically guide and champion growth in Northern Ontario through strong communication, collaboration, and partnerships with industry.



9.2
MILLION
VISITS



\$1.6
BILLION
TOURISM
RECEIPTS



+\$500
MILLION
GENERATED
IN TAX
REVENUES

ANNUAL STATISTICS FOR NORTHERN ONTARIO

Organizational Excellence

100% of planned initiatives completed on-time.

Destination Northern Ontario has exercised administrative diligence on both planning and adhering to reporting deadlines with **100% of planned initiatives** being completed on-time. Guided by a strategic implementation plan, a dedicated staff person is responsible for each of the four priority pillars with support staff as needed. Partnership projects also align with mandated pillars and each staff person works on partnerships related to their portfolio. Destination Northern Ontario continues to align with the Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries in both its programs and coordination of staff.

Developed as a tool to help the Destination Northern Ontario Board of Directors track the organization's performance each year, this annual report is aligned with the Ministry's Regional Tourism Organizations Guide which recognizes the following five pillar areas:

5 CORE PILLARS

01 Product Development

02 Investment Attraction

03 Workforce Development & Industry Training

04 Marketing & Communications

05 Partnerships

Vision

Northern Ontario will be a unique and distinctive tourism destination wherein high-quality products and experiences resonate with consumers, entrepreneurship is valued, and tourism provides local, regional and global connections for the entire region.

Mission Statement

Destination Northern Ontario will take a leadership role to strategically guide and champion growth in Northern Ontario's tourism industry, through strong communication, collaboration and partnerships with industry.

Values

Destination Northern Ontario's Board is committed to focusing on the vision in an "innovative, results-based, effective and fiscally responsible manner, with a foundation of strong governance and management leadership." Destination Northern Ontario's Board also recognizes the following values as important aspects of the strategic plan:

- Accountability
- Leadership
- Collaboration
- Integrity
- Transparency
- Innovation
- Teamwork



Business Development Goals

- > **Generate** industry research and monitor industry performance to continually improve products and experiences and evaluate the success of Destination Northern Ontario programs to ensure a “visitor first” approach..
- > **Implement** a strategic approach to bring high quality products and experiences to market through strong partnerships and workforce training.



Governance

- > **The Board of Directors** met 10 times this past fiscal. To keep attendance at acceptable levels, meetings via GoToMeetings enabled the Board to travel less, while still sharing resources and weighing in on decisions from their respective locations. Board attendance in 2020-21 was 72%. The Board monitors organizational performance through oversight of the various strategies in the business and marketing plans through the review of detailed performance reports.



Corporate Communications

- > **Communication efforts continued throughout the 2020-21 year by using three defined audience streams:** operators, communities and destinations and tourism advisors. Traditional communication tools were used including monthly newsletters, press releases and social media. In January 2020, a new Coordinator, Industry Events and Communications, was hired and communication activities were streamlined under this role. Destination Northern Ontario (DNO) website traffic met a new benchmark this year with approximately **20,000 visitors** to corporate sites combined. **Over 30** newsletters were sent out to industry focusing on DNO programming and success stories. DNO's social media following reached upwards of **15,000 followers**, up 3,000 followers from 2019-20.

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, Destination Northern Ontario also worked with partners across the North, including Nature and Outdoor Tourism Ontario to create a Reopening the North Toolkit (1.0 and 2.0) to help guide operators in the region through health and safety protocols, reopening guidelines, accessing funding and employment solutions and other helpful information through the pandemic.

COMMUNICATIONS STATS FOR 2020-21



15,000
FOLLOWERS
ON SOCIAL MEDIA



30+
INDUSTRY
NEWSLETTERS



20,000
VISITS
TO CORPORATE
WEBSITES

2020-21 marketing activities were markedly different than an average year due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

To effectively market when and where appropriately, Destination Northern Ontario invested in marketing programs by quarter. The ever-changing travel restrictions and protocols made it difficult to know what markets best bet six months or nine months out would be; the organization decided to make short-term investments so marketing activities could reflect travel trends as they evolved. In the first quarter of the fiscal year, DNO partnered with Destination Marketing Organizations across the North and invested in a Dream ON Campaign. The campaign focused on awareness marketing to ensure consumers were still dreaming of Northern Ontario while they were under public health orders. The campaign went exceptionally well. NorthernOntario.travel acted as a library for content and, along with traditional content, virtual marketplaces were developed so consumers could explore the region and “shop local” from their own homes.

**3 MILLION+
VISITS**



northernontario.travel

Marketing

Marketing

For the remaining three quarters, Destination Northern Ontario worked closely with partners to invest in markets that were open and ready for travel, as well as ensured Northern Ontario had a presence in traditional markets that would be returning to travel after a “return to normalcy” i.e., American angling and hunting market.

Destination Northern Ontario also worked in partnership with communities across the North in several domestic marketing activities. With help from Destination Canada and Destination Ontario, investments were made from east to west with campaigns running in Northern Ontario, the Greater Toronto Area, Quebec and Manitoba. A lot of these markets were new for partners and proved to be a case study for further developing the domestic market in years to come.

Although international marketing efforts were halted for a period during the 2020-21 fiscal year, work was still done on the several international and group tour products including student travel trade, group tour and RV touring. Set to return in 2022, Destination Northern Ontario will work with provincial partners to continue having a presence at Rendezvous Canada as well as arrange international fam tours and group travel trade opportunities as they arise.

Product Development

To assist with completion of planned initiatives, a combination of Destination Northern Ontario staff, the NOHFC intern and contracts with outside firms was implemented.

Research

Research and data play an integral role as Destination Northern Ontario develops and implements strategies across all pillar areas including product development.

In 2020-21 the following research initiatives were undertaken:

- ✓ Maintenance and continued enhancement of the Destination Northern Ontario operator database.
- ✓ Monthly and annualized industry performance tracking for both urban and rural fixed roof accommodations.
- ✓ Developed a *Path to Prosperity* document to guide Destination Northern Ontario through the pandemic.
- ✓ Monthly performance reports for trends in the Canadian hotel industry.

Destination Northern Ontario continued to support tourism product development with activities undertaken in the 2020-21 fiscal year maintaining the momentum for Northern Ontario's "experience" shift, by developing and enhancing "best bet" products and experiences.



Product Development

Northern Ontario's Priority Experiences

The 2020-21 Product Development Strategy exists in a draft state; however, as the strategy is an update on the previous strategy to link the various product/experience plans, product teams will identify new priorities as well as connect to DNO's other mandated pillars. Work has started in terms of monitoring performance on those plans. Ongoing research will continue next fiscal year to complete this strategy.

169 industry representatives continue to serve on **18 DNO product teams**, working groups and steering committees through identified product plans to develop and/or enhance Northern Ontario's priority experiences. LGBT+, angling & hunting, culture and heritage, gateway and destination communities, nature and adventure and touring. No product team meetings were held in the first six months of the year as a result of COVID-19. However, all teams were part of the consultations that led to the DNO response on a variety of ministerial panels throughout the summer and the creation of a *Path to Prosperity* document which will be utilized as a guide for DNO through the pandemic.

A total of 27 product team meetings were held in Q3 and Q4 with an average attendance of 10.6 participants. Again, with the support of these teams and working groups, the following specific identified initiatives continued to form the backbone of DNO's product development work:

- Experience Fishing
- Terms of Reference for the LGBT+ product team along with recruitment of product team members. An LGBT+ Product Strategy has been completed
- Indigenous Tourism Food Plan & Francophone Itinerary Building industry (i.e., Balado Project, Route de Champlain, SEO Database, Indigenous Culinary Tourism Strategy, etc.)
- Great Lakes Cruising, International Plow Match and Great Lakes Waterfront Trail Adventure
- Northern Ontario Trails Strategy and Lake Huron North Shore Waterfront Trail
- Northern Ontario RV touring, Lake Superior Auto/RV, Winnipeg to Thunder Bay touring route and World's Best Snowmobile Destination



Product Development

Wayfinding Signage, Terrace Bay Beach

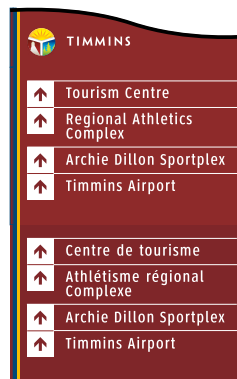


Wayfinding / Travel Information Centres

Destination Northern Ontario continued to invest in wayfinding and Northern Travel Information Centres.

Destination Northern Ontario applied to FedNor for funds in support of a Northern Ontario bilingual community wayfinding program. Approved and underway in June 2017, the partnership enabled Destination Northern Ontario to work with municipalities to provide 2/3rds of the costs associated with the development of bilingual signage strategies, manufacture, and installation of wayfinding signs. To date more than **\$1,275,000** has been made available to transform **19 communities** in Northern Ontario. The program was so successful it has been extended into the first six months of 2021-22.

Wayfinding Signage, Nipigon



Product Development



DNO continued to support Travel Information Centres (TICs) in 2020-21 by working with **22 TICs** to administer visitor surveys which resulted in **479 responses** received. Due to COVID-19 and travel restrictions, several TICs were not open, and it was more challenging this year to engage visitors to complete surveys. Information was consolidated and shared with industry and other relevant tourism organizations. DNO developed and delivered four online TIC Summer Student Training workshops supporting customer service provided to **36 partner TIC staff** and enrolled **21 TIC staff** in OTEC's Customer Service Excellence Program.



DNO provided resources to **19 TICs** required to operate safely during COVID-19 including **screens, masks, signage, bags, and cleaning supplies**. Brochure placement could not take place due to COVID-19.

Workforce Development & Industry Training



Under the Tourism Excellence North (TEN) banner, workforce development and industry training is overseen by the Senior Coordinator for Workforce Development and Industry Training with support from the Training Assistant.

In its second of its Five-Year Workforce Development & Industry Training Strategy, work continues by building upon current training solutions, addressing labour shortages and skills gaps and e-learning opportunities while looking through the lens of COVID-19 to assist with mitigation, recovery and rebuild phases.

Strategic action areas support workforce development and industry training from three perspectives:

- 01** **"Quality Shift"** aimed at increasing the overall visitor appeal of Northern Ontario's tourism products and experiences,
- 02** **"Experience Shift"** to increase the capacity of industry as it applies to priority tourism products and experiences; and
- 03** **"Culture shift"** focused on increasing overall excellence for tourism operators, employees and educators in Northern Ontario, and ultimately increasing a positive visitor experience in the region.

Workforce Development & Industry Training

In light of COVID-19, TEN moved some training solutions online and responded to Ontario's three phases of mitigation, recovery and rebuild. A highlight of this includes the launch of ADPAPT 2020: A Webinar Series for Tourism created in direct response to COVID-19 pandemic.



The webinar series provided participants with not only up to date COVID-19 information and resources, but also provided a sense of community, which was incredibly meaningful considering the pandemic-related stressors. While specifically designed for Northern Ontario tourism business owners and operators, communities, destinations and industry stakeholders, the series was open to all who wished to attend and was free of charge. Throughout 2020, there were **24 ADAPT 2020 webinars** hosted with **1,734 total participants**. Considering all the repeat participants, we know that the webinar series became a 'go-to' resource for those involved in tourism throughout Northern Ontario and broader Ontario. A Business Re-opening Toolkit was also developed and delivered to operators.



Destination Northern Ontario also introduced a virtual training week in lieu of our traditional Northern Ontario Tourism Summit, due to COVID, to engage with industry across the North. Highlights from the five-day training week included the SPARK finalist pitch session, 23 training sessions on a variety of industry topics along with closing remarks by Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries, Lisa MacLeod. This year, registration was free, and training ran from November 23rd – 27th and had **367 registered participants**. The training week was a success with a jam-packed agenda and greater than expected turnout. The audience was engaged with interactive content and excellent speakers and attendees responded with overwhelmingly positive feedback.

Workforce Development & Industry Training



TEN saw the successful delivery of its training solutions including:

- ✓ **Over 507 operators, communities and destinations** enrolled with TEN to make use of the Self-Assessments and Case Studies online tools. All TEN videos have been opened for viewing a total of **1,769** times. And an additional **13 online self-assessment learning tools** were developed and implemented.
- ✓ **30 operators** participated in the Fast Track to Success (FTS) personalized coaching program, totaling **122 operators** altogether who participated since TEN's launch. Of these, 10 were completed in the angling sector with relation to the Experience Fishing project. Unfortunately, due to COVID-19, several FTS had to be postponed; however, we took the opportunity to revamp FTS to offer virtual one-on-one coaching with tourism operators in Northern Ontario.
- ✓ Group workshop curriculum for operators and communities was also revised for online delivery and two group learning workshops (one for operators and one for communities) were facilitated online with live virtual experiences and **24 participants** in attendance.
- ✓ As part of the implementation food tourism strategies, a culinary module was developed in both English and French, in addition to a Food Tourism E-Commerce and Web Presence workshop delivered in both English and French. Developed and piloted was a World's Best Snowmobiling Destination (WBSD) workshop along with five video training tools (English & French) to be used prior to using the WBSD self-assessment tools. A total of **892 participants** used the tools. In collaboration and partnership with other organizations, **12 additional training sessions** were delivered with **159 participants**.
- ✓ **Six** workshops were developed and **eight** delivered online to **255 participants** including a Travel Information Centre online workshop; *Winter is Coming* with a focus on snowmobiling, outdoor recreation & adventure, and resorts & accommodations; Hyper-Local, Hyper-Fast, Experience Fishing and FrenchItUp!

Workforce Development & Industry Training



Continuing to work on the 5-year strategic plan, TEN is working to increase the effectiveness of training activities through the development of customized training tools to support Northern Ontario's tourism industry. This includes training delivery being expanded through on-line training tools in the following ways:

- ✓ Continued work to facilitate a blended learning environment, aggregation of data, track progress and interphase with Destination Northern Ontario website, all from a learner-first focus
- ✓ Maintained and delivered post-training resource guides to **1,953 training participants** through its ADAPT 2020: A Webinar Series for Tourism, "Winter is Coming"- focused workshops and Fast Track to Success program. Post-training resources were also made available on the TEN web portal to visitors, through links to upcoming educational sessions, COVID-19 resources and on TEN's Resources page.



Investment Attraction

Investment Attraction priorities were managed by the Executive Director with the support of staff (including NOHFC Intern) and outside contracts through the 2020-21 fiscal year. In January of 2021, a full-time Senior Coordinator for the pillar was hired. As part of the investment attraction strategy, Destination Northern Ontario continues to monitor the implementation of the Municipal Accommodation Tax and the effects COVID-19 has had on its effectiveness in tourism development.

Destination Northern Ontario continued to build its investment attraction resources such as the resource centre on destinationnorthernontario.ca and the inventory of funding sources. The **“Reopening Northern Ontario Toolkit”** was developed as a tool to help operators navigate their way through the pandemic including health and safety protocols and funding opportunities.



Support was provided through virtual methods to facilitate succession planning for tourism industry partners across Northern Ontario including webinars as a part of the Northern Ontario Tourism Training Week and the ADAPT 2020 series. The popular “Spark” program continued in 2020 at the Northern Ontario Tourism Training week with five mentorships and investments of \$3,000 awarded to individuals, entrepreneurs, small businesses and non-profits to develop their new innovative tourism ideas in Northern Ontario.

Destination Northern Ontario remains present and engaged with organizations such as the Tourism Industry Association of Ontario, the Northwestern Ontario Municipal Association, the Federation of Northern Ontario Municipalities, various ministries including Transportation and Energy, Northern Development and Mines and other important industry organizations to ensure collaboration on investment attraction initiatives is paramount.

Fulfilling its partnership mandate, Destination Northern Ontario reached out across the North to identify potential initiatives that aligned with its business plan and pillar strategies.

Northern Ontario implemented **ten** partnered initiatives working with **over 60 partners** and leveraging the province's investment three times over, resulting in **\$1.2 million** of partnered activity.



60+
INDUSTRY
PARTNERS

Partnerships



Success Stories



Working with Destination Northern Ontario's "Fast Track to Success" program has helped us not only get a bird's eye view of our operations, but their coaches have also helped us look at the finer details of our marketing program and offered us many great suggestions and goals to help our business succeed! Having just completed a video highlighting our history (as recommended by this program) we feel we are really starting to fill the gaps noted in the final reports from the DNO team. Thank you, Tourism Excellence North and Destination Northern Ontario! Cheers!

**— Rob Dokuchie, Director of Marketing, Lake of the Woods Brewing Co.
(Fast Track to Success and Co-op Marketing Program participant)**

Bear's Den Lodge would like to thank Destination Northern Ontario and the Ontario Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries for their support on this initiative, the FTS Co-op Marketing Program which allowed our business to improve the ranking, visibility and assist our business through the recovery from COVID-19. The success of the program will increase our bottom line, will allow room for growth and development, community involvement through purchases with other local businesses and has increased our hiring potential.

This has allowed not only us as a business to thrive but allowed our area a chance at economic recovery with the increased domestic travelers in Ontario. This program has encouraged locals and surrounding communities to travel and enjoy what the French River and Northern Ontario has to offer. We appreciate your help.



**— Art, Brenda and Joe Barefoot, Bear's Den Lodge
(Fast Track to Success and Co-op Marketing Program participant)**



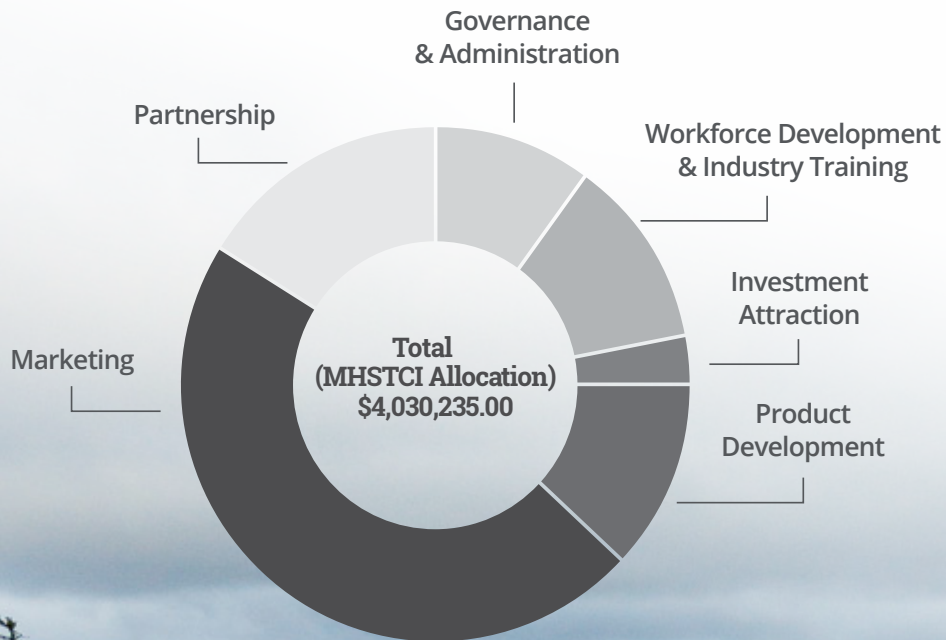
I suddenly had a spike in orders from Ontario, and I couldn't understand why! I saw from my Etsy stats that I was getting a lot of traffic from Northern Ontario Travel. Somebody mentioned your article, I asked for the link and then I finally saw why I had so much Ontario business! Thank you so much!

— Betsy, Northern Ontario Etsy Shop Owner (because of the Northern Ontario Dream ON Awareness Campaign)

Financial Plan 2020/21

Area of focus	Actual	Budget	%
Governance & Administration	\$ 399,603.00	\$ 415,235.00	10%
Product Development	\$ 448,293.00	\$ 475,000.00	12%
Investment Attraction	\$ 85,000.00	\$ 85,000.00	3%
Workforce Development & Industry Training	\$ 459,746.00	\$ 475,000.00	12%
Marketing	\$ 1,802,336.00	\$ 1,875,000.00	47%
Partnership	\$ 606,541.00	\$ 705,000.00	16%
Total (MHSTCI Allocation)	\$ 3,801,519.00	\$ 4,030,235.00	100%
Leveraged Contributions*	\$ 1,897,881.00	\$ 2,000,000.00	47%
Total \$	5,699,400.00	\$ 5,530,235.00	147%

*Impacted by COVID-19. Funds carried over to support COVID-related mitigation measures in the 2021-22 fiscal year.





Destination Northern Ontario / destinationnorthernontario.ca
Tourism Excellence North / tourismexcellencenorth.ca
Domestic Marketing / northernontario.travel
International Travel Trade / northernontarioitt.com



T: 705.575.9779
F: 705.575.9780
E: info@destinationnorthernontario.ca



THANK YOU



DESTINATION
**NORTHERN
ONTARIO**

111 Elgin Street, Suite 304, Sault Ste. Marie, ON, Canada P6A 6L6

T » 705.575.9779 | F » 705.575.9780 | E » info@destinationnorthernontario.ca | W » destinationnorthernontario.ca