



NORTHERN ONTARIO TOURISM MARKETING STRATEGY 2012-2017

**Northern Ontario Regional Tourism
Organization *Implementation Plan***



JANUARY 2012

A guidebook for how the Northern Ontario RTO will work with its industry partners to implement the 2012-2017 Northern Ontario Tourism Marketing Plan to increase tourism receipts across Northern Ontario.

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1. FOUNDATIONS FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

The strategy that guided tourism marketing activities across Northern Ontario for the last five years reaches the end of its planning cycle in March 2012. The Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership Corporation – Northern Partnerships (OTMPC Northern Partnerships) and the Northern Ontario Regional Tourism Organization (Northern Ontario RTO) partnered to complete a 'refresh and update' of the strategy for the next five years. "*Rediscovering Northern Ontario: Partnerships for a Strong Tourism Industry, Northern Ontario Tourism Marketing Strategy 2012 to 2017*" (Strategy) was completed in June 2011.

This document outlines how the Northern Ontario RTO will implement the Northern Ontario Tourism Marketing Strategy for 2012 – 2017 including approaches to partnerships, resource allocation and who, ideally, does what in this new operating environment to increase tourism receipts across Northern Ontario. This implementation plan focuses on how the 2012-2017 Tourism Marketing Strategy gets implemented rather than other initiatives and plans that the Northern Ontario RTO is undertaking.

The partnership and working relationship with OTMPC Northern Partnerships is a key one. This implementation plan is intended to complement the implementation plan prepared by OTMPC Northern Partnerships, who in turn provide the link to OTMPC Corporate priorities and principles. This approach ensures alignment and coordination of efforts, reduced duplication and ultimately, a stronger voice in a crowded market place.

A number of foundations support this Implementation Plan as detailed in the pages that follow.



MARKETING GROUNDED BY SOUND RESEARCH

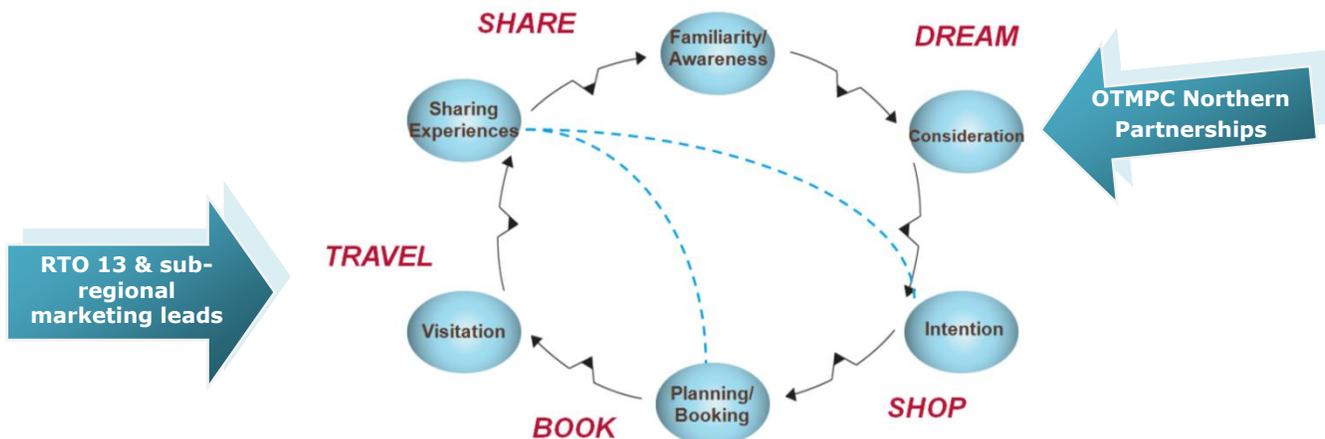
An effective marketing plan is grounded by current research that tells us what visitors are seeking, what great tourism experiences we have or are in development, what the competition is doing and how visitors perceive what is currently offered. Some of this information is readily available in existing research. And while Northern Ontario RTO has invested into provincial-wide research led by OTMPC, Northern Ontario RTO believes that additional research may be required to capture the unique market positioning of the region, both in terms of location and who the area traditionally appeals to and attracts. Northern Ontario RTO will develop a research plan to guide investments into custom market research which is anticipated to be conducted by contractors.

In addition to investment into research noted above, the marketing planning process will include the gathering of front-line intelligence from operators as a normal part of the marketing planning cycle. This front-line intelligence provides timely information that is often ahead of more formal research. We will explore, with our partners, the most effective means to more formally gather and interpret information of this nature from operators and destinations.

A FOCUS ON "CLOSING THE SALE"

The 2012 - 2017 Strategy recommends clarity around 'who does what'. As a result and to be more effective, OTMPC Northern Ontario Partnerships will focus its activities on building awareness of Northern Ontario in the 'sharing' and 'dreaming' stages of travel purchase cycle, leaving Northern Ontario RTO and its sub-regional marketing leads to move potential visitors further along this cycle to the 'shop', 'book' and 'travel' phases. This is a significant shift in direction and creates a new role for the Northern Ontario RTO and its sub-regional marketing leads that will have a direct impact on their marketing activities.

Travel Purchase Cycle



To be most effective at the 'shop', 'book' and 'travel' phases of the trip planning cycle, the Northern RTO and its sub-regional marketing leads must now focus energies on:

- including clear calls to action in all tactics;
- developing and showcasing 'buyable' products; and
- facilitating 'booking' to close the sale.

The desirability of establishing a region-wide on-line reservations system in future years will be reviewed as one element of the digital strategy that will be completed.

2011-2012 MARKETING PROCESS



PLANNING WITH MARKETING LEADS

Northern Ontario RTO will actively engage OTMPC Northern Partnerships and sub-regional marketing leads in the annual marketing planning process. This approach will act as a catalyst to leverage investments and eliminate duplication.

The process followed in 2011/12, illustrated to the left, was successful at engaging both marketing leads and the tourism industry at large as it provided the means for input from all levels of the industry to ensure the strategy reflects front line needs and realities. This planning process will be refined as required in the future to further strengthen tourism marketing planning that aligns and coordinates efforts across Northern Ontario.

BUILDING CAPACITY WITHIN THE SUB-REGIONS

Northern Ontario RTO will access and utilize the capacity that exists in the sub-regions by engaging skilled and able marketing leads to deliver marketing tactics on behalf of the Northern Ontario RTO. This investment into existing sub-regional organizations enhances their operational sustainability and builds on and expands existing expertise which ultimately enhances marketing for the industry at large.

PARTNERING WITH OTMPC NORTHERN PARTNERSHIPS

The Strategy notes areas that it makes sense to partner with OTMPC Northern Ontario Partnerships on strategic initiatives that benefit the region as a whole. Five strategic initiatives have been identified by OTMPC Northern Partnerships for 2012/13 that Northern Ontario RTO and its marketing leads may invest together in that include:

- building awareness and demand from international markets by positioning Northern cities with direct air access as gateways to Canada's Great Outdoors;
- presenting a coordinated effort to showcase Northern Ontario's winter experiences;



- working with air carriers and Northern cities with air capacity to build packaged experiences targeting southern Ontario with air travel as an option for a Northern Ontario vacation;
- developing a partnered investment targeting New Canadians in Southern Ontario; and
- developing a partnered program to build demand from the Winnipeg market to vacation in western Ontario.

A DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY WILL GUIDE LONG TERM EFFORTS

Northern Ontario RTO is investing in professional services to complete a Destination Development Strategy for Northern Ontario. Slated for completion in 2012/13 this plan will assess product development, workforce and industry training and investment attraction needs for the industry across the region. Wherever possible Northern Ontario RTO will engage and work with such partners as the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport (MTCS) and its Investment and Development Office, FedNor, NOHFC, Economic Development Corporations and Community Development Corporations in the development of this Destination Development Strategy and to deliver and implement resulting recommendations.

When complete, marketing efforts may be re-evaluated and adjusted as and if required in order to support the directions identified in the Destination Development Strategy.

INTEGRATING THE DIGITAL & INTERACTIVE STRATEGY

An engaging digital and interactive strategy is a core feature of Northern Ontario's Tourism Strategy for the next five years. The goal for an engaging and responsive digital presence is to make it as easy as possible for the consumer to find information, make a decision and to buy a Northern Ontario tourism experience.

To support the digital plan for Northern Ontario, Northern Ontario RTO will:

- Cost-share operations and maintenance of the Northern Portal with OTMPC Northern Partnerships.
- Invest, in partnership with Northern Ontario Partnerships, in the development of a Digital Strategy with completion anticipated in the first quarter of 2012. The Digital Strategy will provide guidance and direction for the evolution of the portal as well as operational and social media strategies. This investment will provide continuity and stability for a digital presence across Northern Ontario.
- Utilize and engage OTMPC web site (ontariotravel.net) presence for Northern Ontario RTO and its sub-regions,



ensuring that content is managed appropriately and digital and social channel opportunities are maximized.

- Evolve Northern Ontario RTO's digital presence through its sub-regions to reflect the most up to date tools and tactics.
- Contract with marketing leads to develop regional content for the Northern Portal, guided by and in alignment with the Digital Strategy. Regional content will include events, festivals, touring, and outdoor experiences. OTMPC Northern Partnerships will continue to develop content for the avid experiential area and coordinate sub-region and provincial efforts in these areas.
- Facilitate the provision of content for Ontariotravel.net social media channels by the sub-regions.

Highlights from Northern Digital Strategy RFP

November 2011

Guiding Principles:

- ♦ build a strategy that brings to life the digital recommendations of the new Northern Strategy and Northern Ontario RTO response to the Strategy.
- ♦ develop an adaptable best path strategy for Northern Ontario to follow, a process for monitoring progress and providing guidance over the five years of the strategy.
- ♦ provide content development, acquisition and management strategy.
- ♦ provide tools and recommendations to assist RTO 13 to grow the capacity of the industry.
- ♦ provide a 'digital play book' that will provide all stakeholders with a clear indication of who does what, how the consumer is engaged and what the end goal is.



LEVERAGE INVESTMENT

There is an opportunity for Northern Ontario to leverage investments with a range of partners to build an even larger marketing strategy. Northern Ontario RTO will nurture relationships with government funding organizations and agencies at all levels to expand marketing capacity and reach.

CLARITY ON ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Northern Ontario RTO manages the business planning, administration and allocation of related Transfer Payment Agreements (TPA) and leaves the development and implementation of tactical plans to its partners.

Northern Ontario RTO sub-regional marketing leads will develop and manage destination-based sub-regional marketing efforts. These leads will consult with industry, develop, manage and report on sub-regional marketing plans and engage Northern Ontario's tourism industry to participate in the marketing programs and tactics.

Management of partnerships by Northern Ontario RTO will include soliciting and engaging marketing leads in each sub-region through Request for Expressions of Interest (RFEI). Additional details on RFEI and other processes are outlined in Section 3.

In addition to the above roles, there is clarity around the role of OTMPC Northern Partnerships and Northern Ontario RTO as follows:

- *OTMPC provides the foundation for marketing partnerships in Northern Ontario:* OTMPC Northern Partnerships will plan and partner with Northern Ontario RTO, its sub-regions and Northern Ontario's tourism industry to maximize opportunities for coordination, alignment and working in partnership, based on the direction in the Northern Ontario Tourism strategy. It will leverage OTMPC corporate programs whenever possible.
- *Branding:* OTMPC Northern Partnerships will continue to lead and promote Northern Ontario's "best opportunity products" through its pan-Ontario experiential marketing verticals under the umbrella of "Canada's Great Outdoors" for U.S. and overseas markets.

A summary of who does what identified in this section follows.



SUMMARY OF WHO DOES WHAT			
	OTMPC NORTHERN PARTNERSHIPS	COLLABORATION (between OTMPC Northern Partnerships and Northern Ontario RTO)	NORTHERN ONTARIO RTO AND/OR SUB-REGIONAL MARKETING LEADS
FUND DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY		✓	
FUND DIGITAL STRATEGY		✓	
SHARED STRATEGIC INITIATIVES (WINTER/AIR ACCESS OPPORTUNITIES/WINNIPEG/NEW CANADIANS)		✓	
OWNERSHIP OF NORTHERN PORTAL			✓
OPERATIONS AND MAINTENANCE OF NORTHERN PORTAL		✓	
REGIONAL WEB CONTENT			✓
EXPERIENTIAL/AVID WEB CONTENT	✓		
FEEDING SOCIAL MEDIA		✓	
LURE/BUILDING DEMAND IN NEW MARKETS	✓		
MEDIA RELATIONS/FAMS		✓	
FULFILLMENT (VISITOR GUIDES, WEBSITES, CALL TO ACTION)			✓
PACKAGE/EXPERIENCE DEVELOPMENT		✓	
FUND ANNUAL RESEARCH PLAN		✓	



2. MARKET PRIORITIES AND GOALS FOR NORTHERN ONTARIO RTO

ALIGNMENT WITH OTMPC PRIORITIES

Marketing priorities for Northern Ontario RTO have been established by the new Northern Ontario Tourism Marketing Strategy which in turn aligns with corporate priorities of OTMPC. The table below outlines how the Implementation Plan for Northern Ontario RTO will address these priorities to ensure alignment starting with Corporate priorities in the first column, related direction from the Strategy in the second column and Northern Ontario RTO's approach to align and support in the final column.

Connecting the Northern Tourism Marketing Strategy to Corporate Priorities		
OTMPC Corporate 2012-2013 Marketing Priorities	Northern Ontario Tourism Marketing Strategy	Implementation Plan for Northern Ontario RTO
Bring the unique value proposition of Ontario as a tourism destination to life across all global markets with Signature Experiences and positioning strategy and always lead with authentic and unique experiences.	Northern Ontario's products, Best Opportunity destinations, signature landscapes, natural wonders and touring routes are the brand of Northern Ontario.	Marketing leads will showcase the full range of Best Opportunity offers, leading with authentic and unique experiences
Extend market reach by tapping into New Canadians as a key influencer of VFR across Canada and in overseas markets.	Focus on 'Best Opportunity' markets which include new Canadians who reside in Southern Ontario and VFR market.	Northern Ontario RTO will coordinate efforts of the sub-regions as they work in partnership with OTMPC Northern Partnerships to develop new demand from Southern Ontario markets and new Canadians in GTA, with a focus on generating stays at commercial properties.
Increase reach and frequency to grow Quebec market and overcome barriers in purchase cycle.	Quebec will remain an identified market for Northern Ontario with specific relevance to the North East.	Quebec is an 'Opportunity' market for RTO 13A.
Continue to build on long term investments in developing U.S. market.	Continue to focus on US markets where Canada's Great Outdoors brand resonates.	Northern Ontario RTO will coordinate sub-regional plans for near-border US markets to align with corporate priorities.
Gradual shift of incremental investments in mature and emerging overseas markets as RTOs develop greater capacity and marketing expertise.	Better penetration of existing markets while at the same time pursuing new opportunities and emerging markets.	Northern Ontario RTO and marketing leads will work closely with OTMPC Northern Partnerships to increase penetration in existing markets.



A COLLECTION OF SUCCESSFUL BRANDS

Northern Ontario RTO believes that Northern Ontario is best represented by building on the success of existing brands in the sub-regions rather than trying to establish a new pan-Northern brand and/or new sub-regional brands. Northern Ontario RTO will rely on sub-regional planning to build upon successfully established brands or when no brand is applicable, develop a new brand position. The Northern Ontario logo will be used as Northern Ontario RTO's corporate logo.

ACTIVITY-BASED DESTINATION MARKETING BY THE SUB-REGIONS

In order to have better penetration in existing markets, emerging markets and to pursue new opportunities, sub-regional marketing will focus on connecting "best bet markets" to the "best bet activity-based products" in their sub-region.

The products can be combined with other destination products, such as connecting outdoor/rural products with urban experiences, to create unique experiences that will attract higher-yield consumers.

Each sub-region will target specific geographic markets based on travel distance, transportation and geography as related to the sub-region. Focus will be placed on maintaining and growing visitation from these markets, and incorporating partnerships with OTMPC, where appropriate.

Best Bet Activity-based Products within Northeastern Ontario (13a)	Best Bet Activity-based Products within North Central Ontario (13b)	Best Bet Activity-based Products within North Western Ontario (13c)
Avid Fishing & Hunting	Avid Fishing & Hunting	Avid Fishing & Hunting
Broad Outdoors	Broad Outdoors	Broad Outdoors
Touring: Motorsports (ATV, motorcycle, boating); Automobile; Rail	Touring: Motorsports (ATV, motorcycle, boating); Automobile, Rail	Touring: Motorsports (ATV, motorcycle, boating); Automobile; Rail
3 Gateway Cities	1 Gateway City	1 Gateway City
Festivals and Events	Festivals and Events	Festivals and Events
Attractions (Urban and Rural)	Attractions (Urban and Rural)	Attractions (Urban and Rural)
Georgian Bay Coastal Route	Winter Tourism	Great Lakes Cruising
Meetings, Conventions, Sport Tourism	Meetings, Conventions, Sport Tourism	Meetings, Conventions, Sport Tourism
Best Bet Geographic Markets within Northeastern Ontario (13a)	Best Bet Geographic Markets within North Central Ontario (13b)	Best Bet Geographic Markets North Western Ontario (13c)
Southern Ontario & GTA (including new Canadians)	Southern Ontario & GTA (including new Canadians)	Near U.S. Border States (e.g. Minnesota, Wisconsin & Illinois)
Quebec	Near U.S. Border States (e.g. Michigan)	Inter-regional markets (i.e. urban centres within the sub-region/adjacent sub-region)
Inter-regional markets (i.e. urban centres within the sub-region/adjacent sub-region)	Inter-regional markets (i.e. urban centres within the sub-region/adjacent sub-region)	Southern Ontario & GTA (including new Canadians)

Best Bet = Best Opportunity



PAN-ONTARIO EXPERIENTIAL MARKETING BY OTMPC NORTHERN PARTNERSHIPS

OTMPC will continue to lead and promote Northern Ontario's "best opportunity products" of Recreational Motorsports, Nature and Adventure, Fishing and Hunting, through its pan-Ontario experiential marketing verticals to consumers that are heavily engaged in these sports or interests (i.e. avids). OTMPC may use the crossover from families and/or soft recreation to grow/move people from passive interest to avid consumers of Northern Ontario's best bet tourism experiences where appropriate.

Pan-Ontario Experiential Marketing Verticals Featuring Best Bet Products within Northern Ontario
Recreational Motorsports (www.ontariotravel.net/goride)
Nature and Adventure (www.ontariotravel.net/outdoor)
Fishing (www.ontariotravel.net/gofish)
Hunting (www.ontariotravel.net/hunting)
Best Bet Geographic Markets for Pan-Ontario Experiential Marketing Verticals
Domestic Market: New consumers in GTA, Central and Southern Ontario & GTA (including new Canadians).
U.S. Markets: Existing U.S. markets plus where "Canada's Great Outdoors" resonates & in high yield markets for avid outdoor products.
Overseas: Northern Office will work cooperatively with OTMPC International Travel Trade to connect with best bet overseas markets for Northern Ontario.

CITIES AS GATEWAYS

With the development of international markets through Northern cities with air access, there is an opportunity for urban partners to integrate the cities and their attractions as key elements of the Northern Ontario outdoor experiences at both the start and end of trips.



3. PLANNING AND APPROVAL PROCESSES

Planning and approval processes followed by Northern Ontario RTO will meet all requirements as set out by the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport. Timing of planning and approvals will settle into an optimum cycle as the organization matures and operations are stabilized.

MANAGING RELATIONSHIPS WITH SUB-REGIONAL LEADS

Sub-regional leads will be identified through RFEIs for a five year term (2012-2017), following established procurement policies. Selected proponents will be expected to:

- sign annual Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) for each year of the five year term;
- submit annual marketing plans that support directions as identified in the 2012-2017 Marketing Strategy;
- submit interim progress reports as well as annual reports with performance measures as set out by Northern Ontario RTO; and
- complete and submit reports for a two-year review in Year 2 (2013/2014) and Year 4 (2015/2016) of the five year term.

Northern Ontario RTO will develop on-line templates for use by marketing leads for strategy development, reporting and monitoring purposes to facilitate timely and consistent reporting across the region. Templates will be developed in close consultation with current proponents that build on those used to date to ensure they are user-friendly.

THE MARKETING PLANNING CYCLE

The marketing planning cycle that Northern Ontario RTO will manage and follow, mirrors that of OTMPC Northern Partnerships and OTMPC Corporate to ensure alignment and coordination. Milestone dates for the first two years are outlined below. As noted previously and highlighted to the left, the process includes strong consultation with the industry from the ground up.



Milestone Dates	2012/13	2013/14
Request for Expressions of Interest (RFEI)	By December 21, 2011	
Sub-regional Draft Plans, at high level of detail	January 27, 2012	November 1, 2012
Northern Ontario RTO Plan to MTCS	February 2, 2012 to access funds by April 1, 2012	December 15, 2012
In market	April	April



4. MONITORING AND MEASURING INVESTMENTS

'Success' in tourism marketing is the measure of how well programs resonate with consumers in targeted markets, and the degree to which their travel decisions have been influenced.

Northern Ontario RTO will closely monitor and measure return on investment of marketing efforts which in turn will be used to shape and influence future investments. Tactics getting results will be strengthened, while tactics that are not performing as anticipated will be evaluated and refined as required.

Four steps to monitoring and measuring investments that Northern Ontario RTO will undertake are outlined below, primarily in partnership with OTMPC Northern Partnerships and sub-regional marketing leads. Northern Ontario RTO will consolidate and submit any Northern Ontario RTO-specific research to MTCS on time and in a format required as part of the ongoing TPA process.

ESTABLISH BENCHMARKS

The first step in sound monitoring of marketing efforts is to identify a baseline. Northern Ontario RTO will, with its marketing leads, identify benchmarks from 2011 that then act as the baseline for future years.

INVEST IN ANNUAL TRACKING RESEARCH

Northern Ontario RTO will invest, with OTMPC Northern Partnerships, in annual tracking research to measure awareness and returns on investment.

FOCUS ON PERFORMANCE AND PRODUCTIVITY MEASURES

As noted previously, standardized measures will be identified that will be used in tracking all tactics. These measures will focus on performance and productivity measures, rather than activity based measures and build on those identified in current marketing planning templates.

APPLY RESULTS AND IMPLICATIONS

Once research results have indicated what is performing to expectation and what is not, Northern Ontario RTO and its marketing leads will adjust activities and tactics in response to both the research and current market conditions.



5. ENGAGING THE INDUSTRY

An active and engaged tourism sector that invests with Northern Ontario RTO and OTMPC Northern Partnerships in marketing tactics is one indicator of success. Staying connected to the industry is a priority for Northern Ontario RTO – firstly, to gather new insights from them and secondly to keep them informed about strategy, opportunities and results. Northern Ontario RTO will actively engage the industry with a number of initiatives as outlined below.

ANNUAL NORTHERN ONTARIO TOURISM MARKETING SUMMIT

Northern Ontario RTO will host an annual tourism marketing summit for our lead marketing partners across Northern Ontario.

The first summit will be held in February 2012 with subsequent summits held in late August/September annually, providing the venue for marketing partners to share lessons learned, front-line intelligence from operators and to hear about current research and its implications for future marketing efforts. This summit also provides the opportunity for face-to-face meeting time to coordinate and consolidate sub-regional and activity-based marketing plans to eliminate duplication and build synergies.

Potential topics to be discussed at the 2012 marketing summit include:

- status report on the Digital Strategy;
- discuss Destination Development Strategy;
- draft marketing process documents for review and refinements;
- review and discussion of implications of research specific to Northern Ontario RTO and its sub-regions; and
- identification of possible training opportunities.

Each individual partner benefits from a marketing summit of this nature as it contributes to the building of capacity of all participants.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Northern Ontario RTO will use the annual general meeting (AGM) as an occasion to expand the primary role of the meeting to invite stakeholders and industry partners to hear about successes to date and plans for the future. AGMs, as with Board meetings, will take place in various locations throughout Northern Ontario as another means to provide the opportunity for stakeholders, operators and partners to attend. Northern Ontario RTO will also provide the opportunity to be involved in AGMs on a virtual basis whenever feasible.



6. PRIORITIES FOR 2012/13

Northern Ontario RTO continues to invest in the foundations for the organization as it continues to guide and manage tourism marketing. Priorities for the next fiscal year are outlined below, supported by the financial plan that follows.

INITIATIVES TO UNDERTAKE

This Implementation Plan identifies a number of initiatives to be undertaken in 2012/2013. Some have been completed or initiated as noted below.

	2011/12	2012/13			
	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Secure five year marketing leads	Complete				
Complete a Digital Strategy	The MAKC.com Communications awarded contract	To be completed			
Host first Northern Ontario Tourism Marketing Summit					
Develop and launch on-line planning and reporting templates for use by marketing partners.					
Develop annual Research Plan					
Hold Annual General Meeting					

Specific initiatives and plans for subsequent years will be developed annually and in response to organizational, market and financial resources available.

FIVE YEAR MARKETING LEADS

SUNSET COUNTRY TRAVEL ASSOCIATION: 13C Rural/Regional Product

TOURISM THUNDER BAY: 13C Urban Product

ALGOMA COUNTRY: 13B Rural/Regional Product

TOURISM SAULT STE. MARIE: 13B Urban Product

13A TRANSITION TEAM: 13A Rural/Regional/Urban Product



FINANCIAL PLAN

Northern Ontario RTO will invest resources committed to marketing strategically and with clear focus. Budgets for 2012/13 have not been fully developed at this time; however allocations for 2011/2012 provide a foundation for future years.

	Actual	General Direction	
	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Administration (including support for Northern Portal, content acquisition, research and Marketing Summit)	10%	Stable or declining	Stable or declining
Destination Development	15%	15%	15%
Sub-regional Marketing	75%	Stable or increasing	Stable or increasing

Northern Ontario RTO is eager to continue to work closely with its marketing leads and other stakeholders to advance the marketing of Northern Ontario tourism products and experiences. Northern Ontario RTO strongly believes that by investing with and into our partners, the industry as a whole will benefit.

